

INTRODUCTION ANALYSIS

Stable Context – The author opens by offering what seems to be the most obvious reading of William Wordsworth’s “Nutting”: the poem as an allegory “for man’s ‘rape’ of nature.” She does not simply state *that* this is the most obvious reading, but shows her reader *why* it is by providing a wealth of sexual language from the poem as evidence. However, the author does not use this initial reading as the main claim of her essay; she uses it to highlight how her argument does *not* pursue the most obvious avenue of investigation, choosing instead to read “Nutting” as “Wordsworth’s reinterpretation of the Fall of Man.” By using her opening sentences to suggest an approach that she quickly undermines, the author puts herself in a position to convey why her position is not obvious, thereby sparking the reader’s interest.

Destabilizing Condition – After establishing the seemingly stable position that “Nutting” is “an elaborate sexual metaphor for man’s ‘rape’ of nature,” the author immediately complicates this claim by providing evidence—“Wordsworth’s spiritual treatment of nature in his other works”—that Wordsworth’s depiction of nature transcends the merely sexual. In essence, she argues that to read “Nutting” in this way is severely limiting, as Wordsworth presents man’s relationship to nature in a “more ambitious” spiritual context. By offering two competing readings of the poem—one sexual, the other spiritual—the author has illustrated the problem of interpretation that her argument will respond to. By presenting plausible formulations of each reading, the author demonstrates how her essay engages a genuine question and that her answer pushes beyond the obvious as a result.

Consequence or Motive – The author does not merely present the problem of two competing interpretations, she justifies her essay’s engagement with that problem by clarifying what is at stake in its resolution. She suggests that if we accept her reading of the poem, then “Nutting” takes on a more profound spiritual significance that places it on the same level as noted epics like Wordsworth’s “Prelude” and John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*.

Main Claim or Thesis – Though her stance has emerged steadily as the paragraph has progressed, the author concludes her introduction with a clear statement of her position that “Nutting” traces the fall of man in relation to nature. Her main claim goes beyond simply affirming her stance *that* man falls by taking a position on *how* he does: by abandoning his initial humility before nature and taking its wealth for granted. Looking forward, this claim previews the argument that will unfold in the body of her essay, but it also responds directly to the problem of interpretation that the author established at the outset. She engages with the competing interpretations of Wordsworth’s poem—spiritual vs. sexual—by settling on one. However, the author does not reject the sexual reading outright; she simply suggests that her spiritual interpretation is both more elusive and more weighty.

At first blush, William Wordsworth’s “Nutting” appears to be an elaborate sexual metaphor for man’s “rape” of nature. The poem is littered with the sexual language of rape: the “virgin scene” of hazels rising “tall and erect” is “tempting” to the boy who finally “[rises] up” to “ravage” the trees in the bower he has visited. Yet in light of Wordsworth’s spiritual treatment of nature in his other works, nature’s “tempting” man cannot be merely sexual; he may have had a more ambitious agenda when writing “Nutting.” Just as his “Prelude” is often perceived to be a rewriting of Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, “Nutting,” too, can be read as Wordsworth’s reinterpretation of the Fall of Man. But rather than merely presenting man’s fall from God’s grace, Wordsworth traces the protagonist’s transformation from humility before Nature to a narcissistic sense of entitlement to its riches, the psychological process that brings about the boy’s sin against Nature and subsequent Fall.

WRITING SUCCESSFUL INTRODUCTORY PARAGRAPHS

In the most abstract sense, the function of an introductory paragraph is to move your reader from the world of daily life into the textual and analytical space of an essay. In a more concrete sense, an introduction performs three essential functions: 1) it articulates the question or **problem** that you will address in your essay; 2) it **motivates** that problem by suggesting why it is consequential or interesting; and 3) it states, clearly and directly, your position on this topic or question (i.e. your **main claim**).

Conceptual Components

Ethos – While reading your introduction, your audience will begin to make assumptions about you as an author. Be sure to present yourself as a thoughtful, knowledgeable, and nonbiased writer capable of dealing effectively with the complexities and nuances of your topic. Your introduction should set the tone that will remain consistent throughout your essay. In addition to emphasizing the uniqueness of your approach to your subject matter, you should seek to draw your reader into your essay with the gracefulness of your prose and the rational demeanor you project as a writer.

Problem – A *question* becomes a *problem* when your reader feels a stake in resolving it. Your introduction should convey not simply that your essay will provide an answer that your reader may not have considered, but that he or she will benefit from this answer with practical knowledge or increased understanding. Writing problems are typically generated by establishing a seemingly stable position (“At first blush...”) and then calling that initial position into question by presenting complicating or conflicting evidence (“Yet in light of...”).

Structural Components

Stable Context – In addition to grabbing the reader’s attention, the opening sentence of an essay sets up the structure of the introductory paragraph. Because the larger goal of an introduction is to demonstrate what the reader might learn from an essay, argumentative essays typically open by establishing a seemingly stable position that is then complicated or destabilized soon afterward, thereby exposing a gap in understanding for the essay to address.

Destabilizing Condition – After establishing a plausible understanding of an essay’s subject, the author then invokes a condition—an alternative explanation, an unassimilable fact—that destabilizes that initial position. This destabilizing condition works in tandem with the stable context to establish a *problem* that needs resolved, thereby establishing the topic of the essay.

Consequence or Motive – The mere existence of a problem is not enough to justify an investigation if the audience doesn’t see anything at stake in its resolution. As a result, an author must be certain not only to establish a genuine problem, but to outline its stakes. What is gained by a clearer understanding of this problem? What additional areas might it allow us to investigate?

Main Claim or Thesis – The main claim of an essay should not simply state the topic of investigation; it should articulate a clear stance on that topic. As a claim, it must take a position that resolves the problem generated when the initially stable context becomes destabilized. The strongest thesis statements are as specific as possible, typically highlighting some of the evidence to be used in the body of the essay and, in some cases, previewing the structure of its longer argument.