

Opening Paragraphs: Moving from Problems to Theses

Sample Opening Paragraph:

In its reflections on childhood innocence, W. H. Auden’s short poem “Schoolchildren” offers a succinct, yet disturbing, portrayal of the nature of human evil. While the poem describes the activities of children at play, it associates these activities with the acts of prisoners, or what it calls the early signs of “tyranny.” The meaning of “tyranny” for Auden, however, relies on the ambiguous idea that childhood sins can be considered equivalent to sins against mankind. Auden’s poem encourages that equation by associating, often forcefully, images of childhood play with political metaphors over the development of the poem.

Sidebar: *Weak vs. Strong Theses*

Weak

In this paper, I will discuss Hamlet’s use of the word “heart” and how it relates to his ideas of confession.

Stronger

In this paper, I will show that Hamlet’s use of the word “heart” reveals his relative discomfort with the act of confession.

Even Stronger

In observing Claudius’s struggle to soften his heart in Act Three, Hamlet reveals that his own ideas of confession rest on an impossible set of expectations.

Dodson, Joel M. 10/4/11 12:19 PM

Comment [1]: Opening sentence accomplishes two things: (a) it introduces the text and author, and (b) introduces the *topic* – the portrayal of human evil and childhood innocence in Auden’s “Schoolchildren.”

Dodson, Joel M. 10/4/11 12:18 PM

Comment [2]: This sentence focuses the paper on a specific *problem*, or *issue*, at stake in understanding the relationship between human evil and childhood innocence in Auden’s poem: viz., what does Auden’s poem mean by “tyranny.”

Dodson, Joel M. 10/4/11 12:21 PM

Comment [3]: This sentence advances a strong *thesis*, and specific thesis about *how* the poem works. The reader now knows what the writer needs to show in the paper: that Auden’s poem – in its structure, development, and use of language – ties childhood metaphors to political ones.