CHAPTER 11
Write the Introduction

Picture in your mind's eye the entrance to a home—one similar to the entrance pictured here. Outside the front door, there is a welcome mat, and perhaps a seasonal wreath. The door itself is handsome, maybe painted a bold red or a vivid black—pleasant but eye-catching. Just inside the home, in the entryway, a small shelf for catching keys and wallets sits off to the side. Beside the shelf and next to the door stands a coatrack, ready for jackets and hats, and a mirror hangs on the opposite wall. A cheery chandelier lights the area, and the entire entryway is set off a bit from the rest of the home. Can you envision such a space? Does it feel familiar?

Now let's paint another picture, the front of a very different (but nonetheless real!) home. The front of the house has two identical doors, each with a short set of steps leading up to them. There is no welcome mat nor inviting wreath on either, so a visitor is not sure which door is the official "front door." If the guest approaches the door on the right, he is thrust into the center of the living room, directly in front of the couch. There is no place to set down odds and ends or to hang a coat, and whatever might be happening in the living room, the guest is now right in the middle of it. If the guest happens to choose the door on the left, the situation is even worse. The door opens into the bathroom, and the first sight is of a commode and sink.

The difference between the first and the second home highlights an important point: Entryways matter. We may not think about them much, but we intuitively know that the first impression of a home should be welcoming and hospitable, as if a guest is being invited into a well-ordered space designed with visitors in mind. In fact, it is probably safe to say that the way a guest enters a home is likely to affect their entire visit.

The same goes for your senior thesis. How you open your thesis is going to determine much about the success of the entire presentation, or, as the old adage would have it, "Well begun is half done." Remember, you are not depositing a message into the heads of your audience members so much as you are asking them to enter into your argument, to come in out of the elements, so to speak, and to experience a well-ordered space designed specifically for them. In the same way that an entryway provides a place for visitors to take off their coats before entering the life of the home, so does the thesis opening give the audience a moment of pause before entering the life of the argument.
Two Functions of an Exordium

In the ancient rhetorical tradition, the opener is called the exordium. The job of the exordium is two-fold: (1) arrest the audience’s attention, and (2) introduce the topic. It is the inviting front porch and entryway to your thesis. Your exordium should pique the interest of your audience, inviting them to hear more.

It goes without saying that you are interested in your subject matter; that’s why you chose your topic. The problem is that your audience might not be. In fact, you should assume that your audience—excluding Grandma, who is in the front row—is more than a little tempted to check their texts and emails right in the middle of your talk. This is reality: Your audience will be full of people who may not be particularly interested in what you have to say.

Your job is to turn all of that upside down. Your job is to open your thesis in such a way that they forget all about their cell phone pings, their stomach grumbles, and their afternoon doldrums. And you need to do that within the first three sentences of your speech.

The second function of the exordium is to introduce the topic. Again, just as a foyer to a home provides that welcoming introduction to visitors, so should your introduction give the audience a sense of what to expect without throwing them into the heart of the matter unexpectedly. Obviously, your introduction should be related to your issue; simply catching the audience’s attention with a joke or story that is totally unrelated won’t do. Rather, you’ll need to devise a welcome that serves as an entryway into your particular issue. Think of it this way: The entryway to a home can set the tone for what to expect throughout the rest of the house. Is the foyer full of ball caps, or does it have a fine vase sitting on a pedestal? The difference tells you what to expect in the rest of the house.
WORKSHOP: 
Eight Introductions

We are going to write eight different introductions—yes, eight!—and at the end, you will choose your favorite. But until then, you should concentrate on each introduction, one at a time. How can you do that? Don't peek ahead! You'll do a much better job at all of them if you settle into each individually.

The most important rule is that you attempt each one. Not all of them will be marvelous, but the more openings you attempt, the greater the chances are that one or two will be marvelous. So give yourself over to this writing exercise for the next hour.

An example of each is given to get your juices flowing. The examples provided are possible *exordiums* for a thesis on automation and whether people should reconsider the value of work.

1. **Story**: Use an anecdote to introduce the topic.

   It was the season of life Douglas Sutherland had been looking forward to for years: retirement. He had spent three decades as a Delta pilot, picking up extra flights to save up so that he could retire early. His friends said he was lucky: no schedule to keep, no job to race off to, and plenty of time for being with his wife and grandchildren. But three years after retiring, he was not so sure. His wife now complained that he was irritable and apathetic, even when they were vacationing. He missed the hustle and bustle of activity, he missed his uniform, he missed the ways that the crowds would part when he walked through the airport terminal. In a word, he missed the sense of purpose.

Now you try it!
Half a story: Begin with half of your story. Come back to that story at the end of your thesis and finish it or supply some of the missing information. This introduction/conclusion combination can be especially compelling when the story contains some sort of a surprise.

The computer-aided drafting software was amazing—new, fast, and easy. When it came out, Colorado architect E.J. Heade’s firm eagerly adopted it. What once had taken great amounts of time and effort could now be completed with a few keystrokes (Carr 229).

Laura Murray is a wedding photographer. She started her career in 2008 with a digital camera. In fact, traditional film seemed “old, outdated, and . . . inferior.” Who needs an expensive darkroom, and who wants to pay one or two dollars per click with film? She swore she would never shoot film (Murray).

[skip to end of thesis]

Today, the firm of Colorado architect E.J. Heade no longer starts off with computer-aided drafting software right away. Instead, the architects begin with sketchbooks and tracing paper, even using 3-D models with foam and cardboard. They found that the technology, as exciting as it seemed at first, was hampering their creativity; the rush and convenience was tempting, but the quality of design—at least in those early moments in which creativity and aesthetics matter so much—meant returning to an older technology that was better suited to the occasion: pencil and paper (Carr 229).

Laura Murray, the wedding photographer, recently exchanged her digital camera for a film camera. She has this to say: “I am utterly head over heels in love with the process of shooting film. I love not being able to see the photo when I take it. This makes me more aware. . . . Each and every frame I shoot, I strive to make even better than the last. . . . With digital it becomes too easy to overshoot and not look for the best shots.” And Laura is not alone. Photography has experienced what is being called “The Great Film Renaissance of 2017,” in which professional photographers have been flocking back to film because of the creative control it offers and how it enables the photographers to do what they do best: attend to the moment and be surprised by the quality of art that can result from that careful attention.

Now you try it!
"Imagine . . .": Ask the audience to place themselves in an imagined scenario.

Imagine yourself in your senior year of rhetoric school. You are sitting at the kitchen table in a college shirt—the college you are planning on attending. You think back through the different careers you have considered over the years. Your parents say that as a toddler you were wild about trucks and cars and had high hopes of growing up to be a truck driver. When you were five, you wanted to be a railroad engineer. At age seven, it was all about airplanes; you dreamed of being a pilot for a commercial airline. When you were ten, the new obsession was the military; you planned on being a soldier, but not just any soldier—one who defused bombs. Ages twelve to sixteen are a blur, but careers of banker, musician, and teacher felt like real possibilities. By the time you were a junior in high school, the plan was to be a doctor or lawyer—something that would be both interesting and lucrative.

But now you are eighteen, and you are confused. Every job that you have dreamed of may not exist when you graduate college—or it will be well on the way to extinction. Even seemingly “safe” jobs like doctor or lawyer are quickly being replaced by software. You see, automation is growing at such a high rate—an exponential rate—that about half of the jobs that currently exist are likely to be automated within your lifetime. The future of jobs is not a future with humans doing the work.

Now you try it!
“Imagine . . .” (reverse): Ask the audience to place themselves in an imagined scenario that opposes your argument, and then switch sides and question that perspective. Warning: This is a mature opening and requires some finesse; done well, however, it can be one of the best possible hooks because it is so counterintuitive.

Imagine the world of the future. It is a world in which the number of car accidents, which now kill about 40,000 Americans each year ("General"), is down almost to zero because cars safely drive themselves. Difficult and grueling jobs, like those in steel factories and coal mines, are done by robots, rendering job accident and mortality rates almost negligible, too. But that is not all; other jobs, such as those in medicine and law, are also taken care of by technology. No one is forced to work a forty-hour week, and leisure is available to all. Blue-collar and white-collar jobs are done by hardware and software, by robots and smart gadgets. It is a world without work—everyone’s dream.

But sometimes dreams can turn into nightmares. A world without work—a world in which automation becomes the new working class—may not be the heaven everyone expects.

Now you try it!

Series of questions: Involve the audience by beginning with a chain of questions for them to answer silently.

When people try to improve their work experience, what changes come to mind? Shorter work hours, less physical or mental exertion, safer or more comfortable conditions, a shorter commute? But there are other questions, too—questions that have to do with purpose or condition. What counts as satisfying work? Is a certain kind of work essential to human happiness? Do people think of work as a good aspect of the human condition, or do they think of it as a necessary evil that should, to whatever extent is possible, be avoided?

1. Consider the type of questions you wish to use. Here are some examples: rhetorical questions, troubling or puzzling questions, and ethical questions, as well as questions of morality, truth, or expedience.
These questions concerning work have always mattered, but they matter even more today, when automation is poised to take over many, if not most, of tomorrow’s jobs.

Now you try it!

Paint a scene: Begin with a series of images (not sentences) that creates a colorful, concrete picture in the minds of your audience.

Rows and rows of robots producing dumplings twenty-four hours a day. A robot that plants, grows, and tends a hobby garden in someone’s backyard. Robots that can deactivate an IED for soldiers. A robot pharmacist, a robot bartender, robot farmers, robot vacuumers... even robot journalists—these are just some of the ways that automation is already replacing human workers.

Now you try it!
Statistics: Begin with figures or data that surprise your audience.

In the 1980s, a group of social scientists conducted an interesting experiment. Throughout the day, participants would receive a pager call at random moments in the day, and they would then pause to answer a few questions—questions meant to ascertain how they felt at that particular moment. The experiment was meant to prove that people would be happiest during their leisure hours—after work while they were relaxing and doing as they wished—and less happy during their shifts at work. At least, that was the hypothesis.

But the study came to the exact opposite conclusion. It turned out that, no matter how much people looked forward to 5:00 p.m. on their watches, and even though they claimed that they desired to be off work, their reports of positive feelings—feelings of happiness—were higher when they were at work (Csikszentmihalyi). The researchers are not certain why this is—it may be that the small goals that are set and met within a workday bring satisfaction that a constant state of relaxation does not, or that people end up wasting their "off" time in ways they wish they did not, or that people secretly enjoy work and simply do not admit it. Whatever the reason, the experiment pointed out a surprising conclusion: work is far more important to human happiness than people would like to admit.

In 2013, Doctors Frey and Osborne conducted a different kind of study. They calculated the percentage of occupations that could reasonably be automated in the near future. They divided 702 modern American jobs into three categories based upon their methodology: a high, medium, and low risk of automation. They found that 47 percent of total U.S. employment is in the high-risk category—that is, at some point in the next ten to twenty years, these jobs are very likely to become within reach of automation technology (Frey 44).

What happens, then, when humans need work, but work no longer needs humans?

Now you try it! What surprising numbers have you run across in your research? Weave them into an opening that draws in the audience.
Great text connection: Find a great text that you have studied, and excerpt a few relevant lines or paragraphs to serve as your opening.

"[Calyxos], the queenly nymph, when she had been given the message from Zeus, set out searching after great-hearted Odysseus, and found him sitting on the seashore, and his eyes were never wiped dry of tears, and the sweet lifetime was draining out of him." (V:149-152). In Homer’s The Odyssey, Odysseus is stranded on Calypso’s island, and he is living the life that so many would imagine to be a paradise: a life of utter ease, divine food, perfect climate, conflict-free romance, and perpetual youth—and all of this achieved by midlife. In other words, he is living what many aspire to: an early retirement with an abundance of good things and ease. For readers, the obvious question is why Odysseus is weeping; why does he find this life so unsatisfying? Odysseus’s story needs to be remembered in an age that is quickly, by way of technology and specifically of automation, freeing people from many of the hardships that they have known: pain, discomfort, even death itself are being held at bay, as the workplace is easier and safer.

Now you try it!