In what follows, you'll read 3 samples of opening paragraphs. The last example is a whole paper (on a topic totally different from ours), and it is a bit more sophisticated than what you are required to do. However, take a look at the structure and language: how concise and exact everything is. All of these samples are grade A material (the very last one is an A+). They all follow the basic structure I talked about.

The difference between an introduction like the one I was recommending not to write and this type of opening paragraph should be clear. If you want to call the opening paragraph an introduction, that's fine with me: all I want to stress is that you need to get right to the point, stating the thesis of your essay, the side you'll be taking (agree or disagree with the thesis) and the reasons why you're taking that side. After each sample below, I'll provide a short commentary of why I think that's a good opening / paper.

• **Sample 1**

  **Socrates on the Moral Authority of the State**

  In the *Crito*, Socrates makes some surprisingly strong claims about the moral authority of the state, which might even seem to be inconsistent both with another fundamental claim he makes in the *Crito* and with certain claims he makes in the *Apology*. I shall argue that although these claims seem to be in some tension with each other, the crucial claims about the authority of the state in the *Crito* can plausibly be interpreted in such a way as to remove any real inconsistency with the other claims.

  **Commentary:** The opening paragraph is very concise, but very nicely written. The problem is plainly stated, and then I explain clearly what I'm going to do in the paper--all in just two sentences. There's no rambling introduction with sentences starting with "Since the beginning of time, mankind has pondered the mysteries of etc."

  The style is straightforward, striving for clarity rather than literary flair. Jargon is avoided as far as possible.

  However, the sentences are a bit too long for my taste. Try to avoid wordy sentences.

• **Sample 2**

  **Changing the Laws of Physics**

  Peter Van Inwagen ambitiously sets out to prove once and for all that we must choose between free will and determinism, because both cannot hold for this world. In "Determinism", he defines both determinism and free will, and gives a deductive argument for how these two ways of the world cannot coexist. His argument nearly succeeds, but for one error. In this paper, I will show how his conception of determinism fails simply because the "laws of physics" he envisions are problematic. In order for his "laws of physics" to work in the argument, they must be independent rules for understanding our world, but Van Inwagen does not give sufficient reason to interpret them as such.
Van Inwagen defines determinism as the conjunction of two principles: Of particular interest to my argument is his claim that "...if A and B are any propositions that express the state of the world at some instants, the conjunction of A with the laws of physics entails B." What Van Inwagen seems to have in mind here is that in either direction of time, any event that occurs necessarily can be predicted and known from any other state of the world along with his "laws of physics." This is so far unproblematic and in fact, highly intuitive in some sense. If we have a falling body, and freeze-frame the world there, and given our understanding of falling bodies, we may accurately predict the outcome: that the body will reach the ground. We take advantage of laws like this all of the time to confidently remain safe and in control of our environment.

However, it is my contention in this paper that Van Inwagen does not describe the right kind of laws which would make this argument work....

**Commentary:** The thesis is clearly and precisely stated in the introduction. The writer does not say something vague or general about the paper. She says that she will show that Van Inwagen's "conception of determinism fails" and states the reason why: "because the 'laws of physics' he envisions are problematic". She then gives the reader an idea of what exactly the problem is with how Van Inwagen envisions these laws. The reader then has a clear idea what the paper is about, what problem the writer is focusing on.

In the next paragraph, the writer explains in a very clear and concise manner Van Inwagen's view. She does not spend time discussing the details of the deductive argument because this is not necessary or relevant to her thesis. So, being very explicit about the thesis of her paper has allowed her identify the most important part (for her purposes) of Van Inwagen's view.

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**Sample 3**

**The Internal Irrationality of Reactive Attitudes**

In this paper, I will investigate the rational justification for reactive attitudes in Peter Strawson's article "Freedom and Resentment." My conclusion is that no justification exists for such attitudes. Strawson, in arguing that we cannot question the rationality of his system as a whole, does not achieve his final goal of bridging the gap between moral responsibility and determinism. I will show that the internal elements of his system of morality and reactive attitudes are contradictory and thus the system as a whole cannot be rationally justified.

Strawson introduces his argument by describing human inter-personal relationships and the various attitudes associated with them. He focuses on what he terms "reactive attitudes," or attitudes and emotions that we experience when we are involved in a relationship with another individual; resentment, indignation, forgiveness, etc. are all included within this sphere of reactive attitudes. We can direct "reactive attitudes" towards specific individuals, towards ourselves in the form of self-evaluation, and towards others in a vicarious sense (in experiencing moral disgust). These attitudes, Strawson believes, will appear in a spectrum according to the type of relationship in which we are involved and the intensity of the emotional and psychological contact between the participants. There exist two occasions where we often withhold reactive attitudes: when the agent acts out of ignorance or when she is deficient or handicapped in some way. The first instance requires a temporary suspension of reaction while the second implies that certain reactions (such as judgment or resentment) are never appropriate. Nonetheless, Strawson emphasizes that we place great importance upon such reactive
attitudes, for they give meaning to our personal relationships.

Although Strawson's explanation of "reactive attitudes" can adequately describe human relationships, the thesis is explicitly stated. The writer says that there is no justification for reactive attitudes and explains briefly where she thinks the problem lies. The writer then goes on to outline Strawson's view. Note how she captures all of the important features of the view in a single paragraph. Often you will need to spend more than one paragraph explaining someone's position (e.g., Frankfurt's), but you see how the absence of irrelevant or superfluous information helps the writer to be so succinct. The language used is very clear and exact and the syntax is quite simple. There are no long, rambling and convoluted sentences. This aids clarity and precision and is much more pleasant to read. Can these attitudes, if we assume the truth of determinism, be rationally justified? They cannot, and....

Commentary: Again, the thesis is explicitly stated. The writer says that there is no justification for reactive attitudes and explains briefly where she thinks the problem lies. The writer then goes on to outline Strawson's view. Note how she captures all of the important features of the view in a single paragraph. Often you will need to spend more than one paragraph explaining someone's position (e.g., Frankfurt's), but you see how the absence of irrelevant or superfluous information helps the writer to be so succinct. The language used is very clear and exact and the syntax is quite simple. There are no long, rambling and convoluted sentences. This aids clarity and precision and is much more pleasant to read.

The second paragraph already outlines Strawson's view – the view that will be discussed in the paper. This is very good, as the core of your essay is supposed to be talking about objections and replies to a view – so the view has to be briefly presented.

• Sample 4: A Philosophy Paper in Whole

The Insufficiency of Free Will

In this paper, I will consider Harry Frankfurt's arguments for the compatibilism of determinism and freedom of will, as presented in "Freedom of Will and the Concept of Person" and some problems that arise with his reasoning. I will claim that those problems do not come from any propositions central to Frankfurt's argument, but rather from his neglect of the issue of the relationship between freedom of will and moral responsibility. I will argue, that Frankfurt makes an invalid implicit assumption that the connection between freedom and responsibility is biconditional. I will also claim that if this mistake is corrected, Frankfurt's argument can be made immune to some criticisms commonly presented in response to it.

Frankfurt begins with several crucial definitions. First, he defines "first-order desires" as desires to act, and "second-order desires" as desires to want. He then defines an agent's "will" (or a "first-order volition") as a first-order desire upon which the agent eventually acts, and an agent's "second-order volition" as a desire that some first-order desire become the agent's will. Frankfurt defines a "person" as an agent who has second-order volitions, as opposed to a "wanton" - an agent (possibly rational) which has no second-order volitions.

Frankfurt defines "freedom of will" as an ability to bring one's will into correspondence with one's second-order volitions. He then proceeds to show that freedom of will, defined in this way, is in no way related to determinism and is therefore compatible with it. The argument is rather straightforward and I
will not discuss it here.

I will also avoid, for the purposes of this paper, the general issue of whether it is valid to argue for the compatibilism of freedom of will and determinism by defining freedom in such a way as to make the two concepts compatible. I will only state that there is a constraint on the possible definitions of freedom, and this constraint comes from the fact that the proposed definition must account for our practice of holding each other responsible in some cases but not in others.

Frankfurt's argument suggests that his definitions of freedom of will is indeed capable of accounting for moral responsibility. He suggests that by forming a second-order volition, a person endorses a particular set of first-order desires and thus owns them in a special way. It is then reasonable to expect that the degree of responsibility for an agent's actions is dependent on whether she really owned the desires that lead her to this action. Such an analysis of responsibility seems to correspond with our conventional concept of moral responsibility. On the other hand, it can be deduced from Frankfurt's definitions. Thus, to this extent, Frankfurt's definition of freedom of will is justified and his argument for compatibilism of freedom of will and determinism must be accepted as valid.

Two problems arise, however. First, Frankfurt's definitions allow the existence of human wantons and his argument seems to exempt them from moral responsibility: wantons cannot own desires, and hence do not have free will. This exemption from responsibility, however, seems rather counter-intuitive, since we would never exempt an agent from responsibility simply because she did not care about her desires. Thus, Frankfurt's definition fails to account for some of our practices, which brings its plausibility into question.

Another problem is that Frankfurt fails to address the source of second-order volitions and thus leaves a host of unanswered questions: If second-order volitions determine an agent's will, then what determines the agent's second-order volitions? Third-order volitions? If we keep increasing the order, we get into a problem of infinite regression. On the other hand, limiting the analysis to two orders seems rather arbitrary.

Those two problems may on the first glance appear quite different, yet they arise from the common source. The root of both problems is Frankfurt's implicit assumption that the relation between freedom of will and moral responsibility is biconditional, i.e., that the agent is responsible for doing X if and only if the agent was free in doing X.

To see this implicit assumption we have to look at Frankfurt's definition of freedom of will. This definition would be reasonable if the following dichotomy was true: either an agent's will is in accordance with her second-order volition, or an agent's will is not in accordance with her second-order volition. However, there is clearly a third alternative: the agent might lack second-order volitions all together. Frankfurt seems to imply that in this case the agent vacuously lacks freedom, she lacks it simply because the definition that could have endowed her with freedom just does not apply to her. Frankfurt apparently feels compelled to provide this interpretation of the undefined case, because he observes that many infra-human beings fall into this latter category and he wants to account for the fact that we do not hold such agents morally responsible for their actions. Unfortunately, however, this interpretation leads to the suggestion that human wantons cannot be subject to moral responsibility, which, I have claimed above, contradicts our practices.

The fact that Frankfurt structures his definition in such a way as to deny freedom of will to animals and rational wantons reveals his assumption that an agent must always be held responsible for acts performed in accordance with her free will. To put it differently, Frankfurt assumes that freedom of will is a necessary and sufficient condition of moral responsibility.

The assumption of sufficiency of freedom of will, however, seems unreasonable upon examination. It is
easy to construct multiple examples where the agents may be exercising their free wills and yet not be considered responsible for their actions. For example, the agent can lack freedom of action (as in the case of physical coercion), or be excused on the grounds of ignorance or inability to foresee the outcome of her actions. It is specifically on those grounds, I believe, that we do not hold children morally responsible for their actions. For it would be, in fact, absurd to claim that children are any less "free" in their mischief than adults. The actions of animals also qualify for the ignorance exemption, and thus no discussion of freedom of will is needed to account for the fact that we do not hold them morally responsible.

Thus we can say that freedom of will is only a necessary condition for moral responsibility. This clarification has an important consequence: distinct lack of freedom exempts the agent from responsibility, the presence of freedom of will by itself tells us nothing about the responsibility of the agent, since other exemptions may apply. Thus, we can see that the cases where agents have free will in Frankfurt's definition, and the cases where agents do not have second-order volitions at all are essentially similar, since in both of them we cannot decide whether the agent would be responsible and have to rely on some other considerations. The case of an agent who will contrary to his second-order volition, however, clearly stands apart from the first two. In this case we immediately know that the agent should be at least partially exempt from responsibility.

In accordance with the logic of such a dichotomy, it would seem reasonable that agents who lack second-order volitions should be, by default, considered free. In case such a definition of freedom appear somewhat over-stretched, it might be better to give up the idea of strictly defining freedom itself altogether and instead define lack of it: a condition that we could term "obstructed will." With this modification, Frankfurt's definition would give us the following: "obstruction of will is the inability of an agent to bring his will in accordance with his second-order volition."

Just as in case the case with Frankfurt's original definition of freedom of will, our new definition of obstruction of will can be shown to be independent from determinism. For the consideration of limited space, I will omit the details of the argument here.

Having so modified Frankfurt's definition, we have in fact solved the problem whit his argument. Our new theory makes wantons eligible for moral amenability since they cannot qualify for an exemption on the grounds of obstructed will. I will now proceed to show that we only need to make one more step to also resolve the second problem - the one of infinite regression with respect to orders of volitions.

The solution in fact follows immediately. We can simply generalize our definition as follows: "the obstructed will is the inability to bring some of one's volitions (of unspecified order) into correspondence with a direct super-ordinate volition." By a volition directly super-ordinate to desire Y, I here mean a volition of the form "I want Y to become my volition" or, "I want Y not to become my volition." Since the agent can have at most a finite number of desires at any particular time, she can have at most a finite number of orders of desires and volitions. Thus the discrepancy between volitions of different orders can arise in only finitely many points in the hierarchy and we do not face the problem of infinite regression.

We thus see, that the two main problems with Frankfurt's argument for compatibilism of freedom of will and determinism are not inherent in his argument, but rather arise from an implicit assumption about the relation between freedom of will and moral responsibility, and can be easily corrected. In its amended form, Frankfurt's argument is a valid demonstration of the independence of freedom and determinism.

Commentary: Like the other two writers, this writer is very clear and explicit about her thesis. She
says that there is a problem with the relation between free will and moral responsibility for Frankfurt's account. The problem stems from an assumption Frankfurt makes regarding this relation. However, the writer thinks that this problem can be solved in a way that actually strengthens Frankfurt's overall position.

Note how in the next two paragraphs Frankfurt's view is very clearly but briefly explained. There is no repetition and there are absolutely no superfluous comments or details here. The writer gets straight to the point and states it precisely. She does not discuss arguments that she sees as irrelevant for the purposes of the paper and explains, where appropriate, why such issues need not be dealt with.

The language in this paper is extremely terse and is used with great economy. This allows the writer to pack in a lot and so enables her to really develop her position.

The objection (note: the paper is focused on a single objection) is very nicely developed in the subsequent paragraphs. Having convinced the reader that there is indeed a serious problem, the writer then introduces what she considers to be a friendly amendment to Frankfurt's view. We have reached another "landmark": In her introduction the writer had told us that the problem she was presenting could be solved and now she argues for that claim.

What makes the argument in this paper convincing is that the writer gives herself a difficult task and then proceeds to accomplish it. She is neither dismissive nor toadying in her attitude towards Frankfurt and she avoids sweeping or extreme judgments. She presents a very serious problem for a particular view and argues convincingly for it, but (despite these difficulties) she attempts to defend the view in question. In other words, the writer presents the strongest case for her opponent yet offers good reasons for rejecting her opponent's view.

If you are uncharitable to your opponent (e.g., by interpreting her view in a way that makes it seems highly suspect to begin with) you will not convince anyone. If you don't read the text properly and miss the author's response to your criticism, then you have failed to present a convincing case. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to read carefully and understand the article(s) in question. Relying on notes taken in class or a quick glance at the article(s) will not do.

Disclaimer: I have used the following 2 websites for inspiration: http://www.stanford.edu/~lmaguire/phil10/samples.htm
http://www.phil.vt.edu/Fitzpatrick/sample.htm