

## Sample Writing: Introductions, Synthesis

(Instructor-generated Fake Student Writing with central claims in yellow.)

### Sample 1. introduction (also transition and synthesis of ideas) using 2010 Placement Assignment:

Viewing our culture through the eyes of media and advertisement, it might be easy to think we are too obsessed with possessions and image. Laura Miller, social critic and writer at Salon.com, worries about the possibility that we are creating, not just expressing, our identity through our purchases. In her article, “We are What We Buy,” she quotes Rob Walker who says it’s too easy for consumers to buy products “not to reflect who they are, but to construct who they are.” In other words, rather than using our personalities and identities as the basis for our product choice, we may be choosing products in order to construct an identity we don’t have. This fear of vulnerable consumers mindlessly trying to build a socially acceptable image is echoed by Damien Cave in “On Sale at Old Navy: Cool Clothes for Identical Zombies!” Since most people shop at discount or off-price retailers, this culturally sanctioned identity is similar to that of most others at the same income level. The result of this media-driven behavior is that insecure consumers continually buy in order to pass the test of acceptance by other media-driven consumers who have bought in to an ever-changing fashion template.

Cave and Miller are right to call our attention to this issue. Objects, including changing fashion trends, are all part of a person’s culture, and since we are social beings, we are members of and influenced by the culture that surrounds us. However, these critics may be buying in to the very idea they fear and warn against. They are defining us by the objects we wear and use rather than looking at other deeper, less obvious criteria. Culture and cultural artifacts do not completely define or limit a person. When we think of who we are, most of us do not immediately think of our shoes. We think of the people who influenced us, the formative moments in our lives, and the lessons we have learned that have built our identity. I am the child of these parents, who came from this place, who grew up in a certain area, who thinks these thoughts, who has had these experiences. I am not the clothes I wear, even though I realize that my fashion choices send culturally-based signals to people who know me on a merely superficial level. The people I need be more concerned about are those who see past my clothes. Therefore, for me and I suspect for most people, Miller and Cave have nothing to fear.

### Sample 2. Introduction starting with a quotation

In the late 1960s The Rolling Stones sang “You can’t always get what you want, but if you try some time, you just might find, you get what you need.” American culture has had forty years to try and figure out the difference between what we want and what we need, and according to Rob Walker, we still haven’t learned that lesson. Too many people think they need everything they want, especially young people, and worse yet, they base their concept of who they are on their possessions. These items like clothes, shoes, and other material objects are signs to their friends that they belong to the socially acceptable group, and signs to potential friends that they are like-minded and worth knowing. There is nothing wrong with using objects to say something about ourselves; people have been doing it for

centuries. Using these same objects to tell ourselves who we are is more problematic. As long as we have a clear sense of our own identity, using objects to advertise who we are cannot hurt us.

### Sample 3. Introduction starting with an example

Alexis deTocqueville, the 18<sup>th</sup> century French philosopher, observed that Americans love both equality and elitism; we take pride in wanting to be the same as everyone else, but at the same time we also want to be better. The way we show these things is through objects that reflect both our conformity and our superiority. For people who know how to interpret the secret messages we send by our clothes, a ripped pair of jeans and faded flannel shirt (untucked, of course) can signal who we are and whether or not we might fit in with their group's lifestyle. We can be the same as them but better than everyone else not in their group. We don't have to bother finding out about potential new friends as long as we can interpret what they have on, which saves a lot of time. Clothes and possessions become a way to sort out and categorize people, not in a bad way, just a time-saving way. Because of this, objects do make us, at least in other people's eyes.

### Sample 4: Scene-setting introduction with unclear claim.

All week I looked forward to Friday night, when my friends and I would meet at Bridgewater Commons. We'd spend the whole time walking around, talking, but mostly looking at other people and commenting on what they looked like, usually criticizing them in some way. "Can you believe what that woman has on?" "Look at that guy." "I wouldn't be caught dead in that." We'd ride the escalators and watch the people below, feeling great as we smoothly rose above the fake palm trees and echoing fountains, the noisy kids running around being ignored by their bored fathers on cellphones or their stressed-out mothers with lists they'd never complete by the end of the night. On the way back down, we'd descend from Hollister and Express on high, again with a bird's eye view to comment and snicker. We never thought about whether or not this was a good way to spend our time, and I'm still not sure if it was. It was fun and recreational, but did any good come out of it? What did we learning about other people or ourselves, or our world? Since that's what we cared most about, did Bridgewater Commons really represent our culture? Deciding this would help me answer the question of whether or not objects make us.

Claim?