A good introduction shows understanding of the implications of the question and familiarity with and understanding of the texts being considered. You can do this by addressing the key words in the question without simply repeating the question. If the title of an essay is, 'Discuss the importance of time in *The Child in Time*' the following sentence would NOT make a good opening statement: 'In this essay I will be discussing the importance of time in *The Child in Time.*' This sentence does not show any evidence that the student has understood the question or the text and it is neither original nor interesting.

You should also avoid the temptation to summarise the text(s) you are writing about in your introduction. It is much better to begin by answering the question or introducing your main arguments in response to the title.

Here are three different introductions to the following question: 'What is the importance of the past, memory and the supernatural in *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Beloved*? How are these ideas connected?' Read through them several times and then discuss:

- In what ways each of the introductions is successful
- In what ways each of the introductions could be improved (you should consider technical accuracy and structure as well as content).

1

The two novels are both written about at different times and are not connected with each other in any way. *Beloved* is about a mother of four children who escapes from slavery a few years after the Civil War. Later in the novel a character called Beloved enters Sethe and her daughter, Denver, lives. Later on the reader finds out the character is the ghost of the daughter that Sethe killed. Wide Sargasso Sea is also about slavery, the story is centred on a character called Antoinette who is a young Creole woman who has to live a life of torment and misery. In the novel we learn how she escapes a bad period in her life after the Emancipation Act only to have to face more hardship from her own mother and husband.

2

Beloved by Toni Morrison and *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys are both books about the effects that slavery has on different people, in *Beloved* it is the effects on the slaves themselves and in *Wide Sargasso Sea* it is the effects that slavery has on the slave owners. As both novels are set in the past it is clear that the past is of importance, it has a clear impact on the lives of the characters. In *Beloved* the impact of the past is physical as well as psychological, something that is not shared in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. The characters slavery leads to physical damage for example the killing of Sethe's baby, the abuse from the slave owners and families being split up.

3

Within both novels the themes of the past, memory and the supernatural continuously interlink and overlap each aiding the effect and the development of the other. In *Beloved*, the past has many dimensions that range from its detrimental effects on the present to its links with the history of slavery. In *Wide Sargasso Sea* it is also possible to link the past with these ideas, Rhys does this sometimes using a similar and sometimes using a contrasting style to that of Morrison. Memory in both novels is very much a part of the theme of the past and the pain of the suppression of the past that later haunts the present, psychologically in both novels and more literally in *Beloved*. The theme of the supernatural is presented in various forms in both novels for example the haunting of the present mentioned before, but also it can be found not only in the characters' cultures and beliefs but also in their superstitions, storytelling and gossip. In *Beloved* the supernatural is openly discussed for example people easily accept that there is a ghostly presence at 124 thereby they avoid it, whereas by contrast in *Wide Sargasso Sea* it is suppressed from public acknowledgement despite many characters being aware of its existence. Morrison uses a non-linear structure and divides the narrative up between the main characters with Sethe being the main voice. Rhys however uses a more chronological structure and a narrative that is shared almost equally between Antoinette and Rochester. However their different techniques are both equally effective in complementing the themes and the messages in both novels. For example by using a non-linear structure Morrison is really able to create a past, a history for Sethe and the other characters thus helping her to emphasise the theme of slavery, as a history.