



FROM AWARENESS TO RHETORICAL CONTROL: STUDENT WRITERS' HOOKS AND READER ENGAGEMENT IN ARGUMENTATIVE INTRODUCTIONS

Rahmadila Eka Putri¹, Reni Juitama², Chelsea Aisyah Nadine³

^{1,2,3} Politeknik Negeri Sriwijaya, Indonesia

Email: rahmadilaekaputri@polsri.ac.id

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Abstract

This study investigates students' strategic use of hooks and their perceptions of hooks as rhetorical strategies for enhancing reader engagement, highlighting the gap between conceptual understanding and rhetorical execution. Employing a descriptive quantitative design combined with text-based rhetorical analysis, this study examined the argumentative introductions of 20 applied undergraduate students alongside questionnaire data covering five metacognitive dimensions. The analysis showed an uneven distribution of hook types, dominated by question hooks (45%), followed by scenario (25%) and statistical hooks (15%), while general (10%) and provoking statements (5%) were minimally used, indicating a restricted and formulaic repertoire. Questionnaire results revealed consistently high mean scores, namely awareness ($M = 2.78$), selection strategy ($M = 2.70$), reader engagement ($M = 2.73$), reader orientation ($M = 2.76$), and writing reflection ($M = 2.74$), suggesting strong perceived awareness. However, item-level findings exposed key gaps where only 45% reported using varied hooks, 65% considered audience and purpose, and just 20% expressed confidence in writing introductions. These results indicated that students' awareness remained largely declarative and procedural rather than strategic and flexible. Despite demonstrating relatively high rhetorical awareness, students still exhibited limited rhetorical control, constrained variation, partial audience orientation, and low confidence in constructing introductions. This finding emphasizes the necessity of explicit modeling, strategic variation, audience-oriented practice, and iterative feedback. Overall, the findings positioned student writers within a transitional phase from awareness toward rhetorical control, where metacognitive understanding had not yet fully transformed into effective rhetorical performance.

Keywords: argumentative introductions; argumentative writing; reader engagement; rhetorical awareness; rhetorical hooks

INTRODUCTION

Within argumentative writing, the introduction functions as a strategic rhetorical space in which writers shape readers' initial perceptions and engagement by introducing the topic, establishing relevance, framing the issue, and guiding readers toward the central argument. [Dang et al. \(2020\)](#); [Nenotek et al. \(2022\)](#); [Sari & Agustina \(2022\)](#) emphasized that the introduction presents the issue, introduces the topic, and provides general

background, but many students incorrectly include the main content or omit the thesis statement. In this respect, introductions are expected to strategically provide contextual background that enables readers to grasp the significance of the research problem (Mar'atassolihah & Widhiyanto, 2026; Mubarak & Rudianto, 2022; Tavakol & O'Brien, 2023). In this context, the hook serves as an important rhetorical device that captures attention and encourages readers to engage with the argument. A hook sentence operates as an initial engagement mechanism whose effectiveness can influence readers' willingness to continue reading (Rahman, 2020; Nasihah & Elfiyanto, 2022; Mubarak & Rudianto, 2021). Hooks may be realized through various forms such as interrogatives, statistical claims, hypothetical scenarios, quotations, or evaluative statements, each serving distinct rhetorical purposes in orienting the reader.

From a reader-oriented and sociocognitive perspective, hooks are not merely ornamental features but integral rhetorical devices that mediate the relationship between writer intention and audience reception. The effectiveness of an introduction is contingent upon its capacity to anticipate and align with readers' expectations, thereby positioning the hook as a strategic bridge between meaning construction and engagement. Intercultural variation further complicates this process, as differences in linguacultural conventions, discourse communities, and publication contexts shape the selection and frequency of engagement markers (Dontcheva-Navrátilová, 2021; Jarunthawatchai et al., 2025; Lingard, 2022). Readers' expectations for early placement of the main idea, alongside appropriate adjustments in tone, lexical choice, and syntactic organization, emphasize the necessity of rhetorical adaptability. However, despite this theoretical centrality, student writers frequently demonstrate a limited ability to operationalize hooks as purposeful rhetorical strategies, often defaulting to generic or expository openings that fail to generate meaningful engagement. This discrepancy suggests a developmental gap in which rhetorical awareness does not yet translate into rhetorical control.

Empirical evidence reinforces this tension between awareness and performance. While students are generally able to establish a research territory, they often struggle to articulate a clear niche or research gap, resulting in introductions that lack argumentative sharpness and persuasive force (Aminah et al., 2025; Gerald & Mukuka, 2025; Mar'atassolihah & Widhiyanto, 2026; Riphasa, 2024). Although prior studies have extensively examined macro-level features such as writing structure, thesis statements, and argument development, relatively little attention has been directed toward the micro-level rhetorical strategies that shape introductory openings. Existing studies indicate that students employ moves such as centrality claims, literature references, gap identification, and purpose statements, yet they often exhibit limited metarhetorical awareness of the linguistic and strategic resources underpinning these moves (Halum, 2024; Rustipa et al., 2023). Moreover, the predominance of text-based analyses has led to an underexploration of students' own perceptions of hooks as engagement strategies, thereby obscuring the relationship between what students know and what they enact in writing. Addressing this gap, the present study aims to (1) analyze the types and distribution of hooks used in student argumentative introductions and (2) investigate students' perceptions of hooks as rhetorical strategies for enhancing reader engagement, thereby advancing an understanding of how student writers move from awareness to more refined rhetorical control.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Hooks as Rhetorical Devices for Reader Engagement in Argumentative Introductions

Hooks as rhetorical devices play a central role in constructing reader engagement within argumentative introductions, which function as a persuasive space for framing issues and guiding interpretation. [Ghanbari & Salari \(2022\)](#) argued that argumentative writing is a crucial genre that undergraduates must master to fulfil their academic requirements. In this genre, the introduction performs several rhetorical moves, including attracting readers' attention, providing background information, emphasising the issue's significance, acknowledging counterarguments, and presenting the central thesis ([Mallahi, 2024](#)). Within this structured progression, hooks operate as strategic entry points that activate reader interest while simultaneously shaping interpretive expectations. Rather than functioning as superficial attention-getting devices, hooks should be understood as audience-orientated rhetorical moves that mediate between the writer's communicative intention and the reader's cognitive and affective engagement, thereby establishing the initial conditions for persuasion.

The effectiveness of hooks, however, is contingent upon their rhetorical appropriateness, coherence with the developing argument, and sensitivity to audience expectations. Effective hooks such as questions, statistics, quotations, or assertive claims perform a dual function. They capture attention while situating the argument within a meaningful and credible context. Hook sentences are essential for engaging readers, but crafting effective ones is challenging since writers must align them with the reader's perspective ([Mubarak & Rudianto, 2020](#); [Rahman, 2020](#)). From a reader-orientated perspective, engagement is not achieved solely through attention-grabbing techniques but through the establishment of relevance, credibility, and logical orientation at the outset. By adopting rhetorically appropriate strategies, students can more effectively capture readers' attention while reinforcing coherence and persuasive force ([Gerald & Mukuka, 2025](#)). Consequently, the strategic deployment of hooks reflects a writer's capacity to anticipate audience needs, manage discourse expectations, and adapt to varying linguacultural and academic conventions, marking an important dimension of emerging rhetorical control in student writing.

Students face strategic limitations and perceptual gaps when using hooks.

Despite their recognised rhetorical importance, hooks remain underutilised or ineffectively implemented in student writing, indicating a persistent gap between theoretical expectations and actual practice. [Rahman \(2020\)](#) believed that mapping hook preferences can contribute to the field by providing a practical and pedagogical framework that helps students and writers produce effective, engaging, and appropriate hook sentences based on identifiable patterns. However, in practice, students frequently rely on generalised or purely informational openings that introduce the topic without functioning as persuasive entry points. This tendency suggests that hooks are often treated as procedural or formal requirements rather than as strategic rhetorical choices, resulting in introductions that lack audience engagement, rhetorical positioning, and argumentative direction. Consequently, the introductory section, despite its potential as a site of persuasion, often becomes informational rather than interactional, limiting its effectiveness in shaping reader response.

A central issue underlying this pattern is the misalignment between students' rhetorical awareness and their actual writing performance. While some students demonstrate a conceptual understanding of introductory components, this awareness does

not consistently translate into effective rhetorical execution. This discrepancy can be attributed to several interrelated factors, including limited exposure to diverse rhetorical models, insufficient emphasis on audience-orientated writing practices, and an instructional focus that prioritises structural correctness over rhetorical effectiveness. Furthermore, existing research has predominantly emphasised textual analysis, offering limited insight into how students themselves conceptualise the function of hooks. Integrating students' perceptions with textual evidence reveals critical gaps between knowledge, intention, and performance, emphasising the necessity of a more holistic analytical approach. Investigating students' perceptions is essential for evaluating teaching methods, as their interpretations of learning experiences influence the acceptance and effectiveness of an approach (Dewi, 2021; Rofiqoh & Chakim, 2020). Addressing these perceptual and strategic gaps is therefore crucial for advancing pedagogical practices that foster not only formal accuracy but also the development of rhetorical competence, particularly in deploying hooks as purposeful strategies for enhancing reader engagement.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a descriptive quantitative design combined with text-based rhetorical analysis to examine student writers' strategic use of hooks in argumentative writing introductions and their perceptions of reader engagement. The design combined quantitative questionnaire data with qualitative rhetorical text analysis to obtain a full picture of both how students actually write and how aware they are of the rhetorical strategies they use. The participants consisted of 20 students from an applied undergraduate program enrolled in a single class selected through total sampling. The researcher directly taught this class, ensuring consistent instructional exposure and access to students' writing outputs. To minimize potential bias arising from the researcher's dual role as instructor, standardized assessment criteria, anonymous questionnaire responses, and independent inter-rater analysis were employed to enhance objectivity and reliability. Additionally, selecting one intact class ensured homogeneity in instructional input, assignment design, and assessment criteria, thereby increasing the internal consistency of the data while minimizing extraneous variability in writing performance.

Two instruments were used in this study. The first consisted of students' argumentative writing, specifically the introductory paragraphs, which were analyzed to identify the types and frequency of hooks used, including question hooks, scenario hooks, statistical hooks, general statement hooks, and provoking statement hooks. The coding procedure was conducted using predetermined rhetorical categories adapted from previous studies on hook strategies. Each introduction was coded based on the dominant opening strategy used in the first sentence or opening segment of the paragraph. To enhance reliability, a second independent rater analyzed 30% of the data sample using the same coding framework. The coding results were then compared, and disagreements were discussed until consensus was reached. The second instrument was a 25-item questionnaire examining five dimensions: awareness of hook types, hook selection strategy, reader engagement, reader-oriented perspective, and writing reflection, measured using a three-point Likert scale (Agree, Neutral, Disagree). Content validity was established through expert judgment, with revisions made to enhance clarity and relevance. Data collection was conducted in two stages. First, students' writings were collected and analyzed for hook usage. Second, the questionnaire was administered to the same participants. The data were analyzed descriptively using frequencies, percentages,

and mean scores to identify patterns in hook usage and students' perceptions of reader engagement. Item-level analysis was also conducted to examine variations across metacognitive dimensions.

DISCUSSION

Hook Types in Student Argumentative Introductions

The first aim of this study was to identify the types and frequency of hooks used by student writers in argumentative introductions. The students' introductory paragraphs were analysed to identify the hook types used to open the texts. The distribution of hook types identified in the students' introductions is presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Distribution of Hook Types in Student Argumentative Introductions

Hook Type	Frequency	Percentage
Question Hook	9	45%
Scenario Hook	5	25%
Statistic Hook	3	15%
General Statement Hook	2	10%
Provoking Statement Hook	1	5%
Total	20	100%

The findings reveal a clear pattern in students' strategic choices of hooks in argumentative introductions, with question hooks emerging as the dominant type (45%), followed by scenario hooks (25%), statistical hooks (15%), general statement hooks (10%), and provoking statement hooks (5%). The predominance of question hooks suggests that students tend to rely on interrogative forms as an accessible and direct means of engaging readers. [Rahman \(2020\)](#) explained that a question hook functions by stimulating curiosity and inviting readers to reflect on the issue, thereby positioning them as active participants in meaning-making. From a rhetorical standpoint, this indicates an emerging awareness of reader engagement as a central component of effective introductions. However, the overreliance on this strategy also points to a limited repertoire, as frequent use of generalized or loosely connected questions may result in formulaic openings that lack depth and argumentative direction. In contrast, the use of scenario hooks by 25% of students reflects a more context-oriented approach, where writers attempt to situate the issue within relatable or illustrative situations. This strategy can enhance rhetorical effectiveness by grounding abstract arguments in concrete contexts; however, its moderate frequency suggests that not all students are equally capable of employing contextualization as a persuasive resource.

Further variation is observed in the use of statistical hooks (15%), which introduce factual or numerical data to establish relevance and credibility at the outset. While such hooks have the potential to strengthen the logical appeal of an argument, their limited use may indicate students' difficulties in accessing, interpreting, or integrating data effectively into their writing ([Rahman, 2020](#)). Similarly, the relatively low occurrence of general statement hooks (10%) and provoking statement hooks (5%) highlights a tendency among students to avoid more assertive or conceptually driven openings. In particular, the minimal use of provoking statements suggests a lack of confidence in advancing bold claims that require strong evidentiary support, possibly due to concerns

about maintaining academic objectivity. Overall, these findings point to a pattern of partial rhetorical awareness without full strategic control: while students recognize the need to engage readers, their execution remains constrained by limited variation and depth in rhetorical choices. This calls for more explicit pedagogical intervention that introduces diverse hook strategies and develops students' ability to align these strategies with argumentative purposes, audience expectations, and disciplinary conventions.

Students' Perceptions of Hooks for Reader Engagement

The findings suggest that student writers report a consistently high level of perceived awareness and strategic orientation in using hooks in argumentative introductions. All five aspects, namely awareness of hook types ($M = 2.78$), selection strategy ($M = 2.70$), reader engagement ($M = 2.73$), reader orientation ($M = 2.76$), and writing reflection ($M = 2.74$), fall within the "high" category. Although these scores indicate a strong conceptual understanding of the rhetorical role of hooks, item-level analysis reveals a more nuanced pattern. Students' awareness remains uneven across rhetorical control, strategic flexibility, and self-evaluative competence. This suggests not fully developed competence, but rather a form of perceived competence that is not yet consistently realized in practice.

Table 2
Questionnaire Results by Item

Statement (Short Version)	Total					
	Agree		Neutral		Disagree	
	(f)	(%)	(f)	(%)	(f)	(%)
Awareness of hook types	19	95	1	5	0	0
Understand hook differences	16	80	4	20	0	0
Hook affects first impression	20	100	0	0	0	0
Consider topic before hook	15	75	5	25	0	0
Know strengths & limitations	17	85	3	15	0	0
Choose hook consciously	13	65	7	35	0	0
Adjust hook to purpose	15	75	5	25	0	0
Choose hook for attention	20	100	0	0	0	0
Use different hooks	9	45	10	50	1	5
Revise hook if needed	15	75	4	20	1	5
Hook captures attention	20	100	0	0	0	0
Hook encourages reading	19	95	1	5	0	0
Consider reader response	13	65	7	35	0	0
Relatable hook increases engagement	16	80	4	20	0	0
Hook affects understanding	15	75	4	20	1	5
Think about audience	13	65	7	35	0	0
Choose appealing hook	20	100	0	0	0	0

Adjust to academic context	13	65	6	30	1	5
Writing oriented to readers	15	75	5	25	0	0
Reader-oriented improves quality	16	80	4	20	0	0
Confident in writing intro	4	20	14	70	2	10
Evaluate hook effectiveness	16	80	3	15	1	5
Open to feedback	18	90	2	10	0	0
Want to improve	20	100	0	0	0	0
Hook is essential component	19	95	1	5	0	0

Table 3
Summary by Aspect

Aspect	Items	Mean	Category
Awareness of Hook Types	1–5	2.78	High
Hook Selection Strategy	6–10	2.70	High
Reader Engagement	11–15	2.73	High
Reader-Oriented Perspective	16–20	2.76	High
Writing Reflection	21–25	2.74	High

The mean score categories were determined using the class interval formula for a three-point Likert scale. Since the scale ranged from 1 to 3, the interval width was calculated by subtracting the lowest score from the highest score and dividing the result by the number of categories:

$$\frac{3 - 1}{3} = 0.67$$

Based on this calculation, the mean score categories were established as follows: 1.00–1.66 = Low, 1.67–2.33 = Moderate, and 2.34–3.00 = High. This categorization was used to interpret students' levels of awareness, strategy use, reader orientation, and writing reflection.

Table 4
Mean Score Categories

Mean Range	Category
2.34 – 3.00	High
1.67 – 2.33	Moderate
1.00 – 1.66	Low

Dominant Awareness of Hooks as Attention-Getting Devices

Students demonstrate a strong and highly consistent awareness of hooks as attention-getting devices, as reflected in unanimous agreement that hooks shape first impressions, attract attention, and capture reader interest (Items 3, 8, and 11). This

convergence indicates a relatively well-established conceptual understanding of hooks at the level of initial engagement, aligning with early-stage rhetorical awareness, where effectiveness is primarily equated with the immediacy of reader attraction. Perception is the process by which individuals assess, view, and interpret an object, reflecting their personal understanding or perspective of it (Yunita & Maisarah, 2020). This conclusion is further reinforced by high agreement that hooks are essential components of introductions (95%, Item 25) and that relatable hooks enhance engagement (80%, Item 14). However, this dominant orientation also suggests a functional reduction of the hook's role, as students tend to frame it primarily as a performative opening rather than as a multifunctional rhetorical device that also establishes context, frames stance, and guides argumentative development. This limitation becomes more evident in items requiring deeper strategic and audience-oriented considerations. Only 65% of students report consciously selecting hooks (Item 6), considering audience response (Item 13), or thinking about their audience (Item 16), indicating a notable decline from the near-universal agreement on attention-focused aspects. Similarly, the relatively low diversity in hook usage (45% agreement, Item 9) points to a restricted strategic repertoire, with students likely relying on familiar or formulaic patterns rather than adapting to different rhetorical contexts. Collectively, these findings highlight a gap between declarative knowledge and procedural rhetorical competence: while students understand that hooks attract attention, they demonstrate a less developed ability to deploy them strategically in relation to audience, purpose, and context.

Strategic Awareness Exists but Remains Procedurally Limited

The findings indicate that students demonstrate a measurable level of strategic awareness in constructing introductory hooks, as reflected in their consideration of topic relevance (75%, Item 4), alignment with communicative purpose (75%, Item 7), engagement in revision (75%, Item 10), and conscious selection of hooks (65%, Item 6), corresponding with a high mean score for hook selection strategy ($M = 2.70$). At a surface level, these responses suggest that students are not merely applying hooks mechanically but are beginning to align their choices with contextual demands. However, this strategic awareness remains largely procedural rather than rhetorically sophisticated. A closer look at the use of varied hook types reveals a critical limitation: only 45% report employing diverse strategies (Item 9), while 50% remain neutral and 5% disagree, indicating uncertainty or limited metacognitive awareness regarding variation. This pattern suggests that students tend to rely on a narrow and familiar repertoire, likely favoring cognitively accessible forms such as general statements or rhetorical questions, rather than adapting their strategies to different argumentative contexts. Metacognitive knowledge, embedded in Indonesia's curriculum, functions as both a driver and regulator of learning, with success largely determined by individuals' ability to recognize what they know and do not know, encompassing declarative, procedural, and conditional knowledge (Eriyani, 2020). However, despite its recognized importance, metacognition remains insufficiently integrated into many educational contexts (Parba & Jajalla, 2026). This discrepancy highlights a structural gap between strategic intention and effective execution. While students conceptually acknowledge the need to tailor hooks to their audience, purpose, and context, only 65% report considering audience (Item 16) and reader response (Item

13), indicating that audience awareness remains only partially internalized. Consequently, hook construction often becomes formulaic and insufficiently responsive to rhetorical demands. This limitation is further compounded by low confidence levels, with only 20% of students expressing confidence in writing introductions and 70% remaining neutral (Item 21), suggesting that strategic actions such as revision may be driven more by uncertainty than by controlled rhetorical decision-making. Overall, students appear to occupy an intermediate developmental stage characterized by emerging strategic awareness but constrained by limited repertoire, partial audience orientation, and low rhetorical confidence. Without targeted pedagogical support, particularly in expanding exposure to diverse hook strategies and strengthening metacognitive reflection, this pattern is likely to produce predictable and less persuasive argumentative introductions..

Developing but Incomplete Reader-Oriented Perspective

The data indicate that students' reader-oriented perspective, while statistically categorized as "high" ($M = 2.76$), remains unevenly developed and only partially internalized in practice. Although 65–80% of students report considering reader response (Item 13: 65%), thinking about their audience (Item 16: 65%), and acknowledging the value of reader-oriented writing (Item 20: 80%), these figures fall below the near-consensus levels observed in awareness-driven items (e.g., Items 3, 8, 11, and 17 at 100%). This discrepancy highlights a gap between declarative awareness and procedural enactment: students recognize the importance of audience orientation at a conceptual level, yet it has not become a consistently embedded principle guiding their writing decisions. Item-level variation further reveals that this "high" category masks internal inconsistencies, suggesting that audience awareness remains fragile and situational rather than stable and systematic.

This partial internalization is reinforced by evidence that only 65% of students consciously select hooks (Item 6), indicating that a substantial proportion still rely on intuition or habitual patterns rather than deliberate rhetorical reasoning. Similarly, moderate engagement with adaptive practices such as adjusting hooks to academic contexts (Item 18: 65%) and consistently orienting writing toward readers (Item 19: 75%) points to limited transferability of audience awareness across contexts. As a result, students' understanding of audience remains fragmented, lacking the flexibility required for genre-sensitive and rhetorically effective writing. Overall, students appear to be at an intermediate developmental stage, where awareness has emerged but has not yet evolved into strategic, audience-driven control. This underscores the need for pedagogical approaches that move beyond emphasizing audience importance toward explicitly scaffolding its application through modelling, guided practice, and reflective activities that help students transform implicit awareness into deliberate rhetorical action.

Discrepancy Between Knowledge and Confidence

A key finding of this study is the pronounced discrepancy between students' high cognitive awareness of argumentative introduction strategies and their relatively low self-perceived writing confidence. Although all five dimensions register high mean scores particularly Awareness of Hook Types (2.78), Reader-Oriented Perspective (2.76), and Writing Reflection (2.74). Item 21 reveals a notable anomaly which only 20% of students report confidence in writing effective introductions, while 70% remain neutral and 10% express low confidence. This divergence underscores a critical distinction between declarative knowledge and procedural competence. Students demonstrate strong meta-

awareness of the functions of hooks evidenced by near-universal agreement that hooks shape first impressions, capture attention, and sustain reader interest yet this understanding does not consistently translate into effective rhetorical execution. In other words, students appear to “know” what constitutes an effective introduction but have not yet developed the ability to enact this knowledge with confidence and control.

This gap is further reflected in inconsistencies within the “Hook Selection Strategy” dimension, where relatively high awareness of conscious selection (65%) and purpose alignment (75%) contrasts with limited variation in practice (only 45% report using diverse hook types, with 50% neutral). Such patterns suggest strategic stagnation, likely driven by reliance on familiar forms, limited exposure to varied rhetorical models, or insufficient guided practice. The prevalence of neutral responses across performance-oriented items including confidence, variation, and audience consideration points to fragile self-efficacy rather than a lack of knowledge. Students occupy a transitional stage in which expectations are understood but not yet internalized into confident performance. This condition reflects limited rhetorical control, where writers possess partial knowledge but lack flexibility in applying it across contexts. Pedagogically, the findings suggest that instruction may overemphasize conceptual understanding at the expense of practice, feedback, and iterative refinement. Students face additional challenges such as limited vocabulary (Febriani, 2022), yet their high openness to feedback (90%) and strong desire to improve (100%) indicate that the issue is not motivational but instructional. Therefore, bridging the gap between knowledge and confidence requires pedagogical approaches that prioritize sustained practice, scaffolding, and reflective feedback to transform awareness into confident, context-sensitive writing performance.

Strong Reflective Orientation and Learning Readiness

The data reveal a strong reflective orientation among students, particularly in their readiness to engage in improvement-oriented learning. All respondents (100%) express a desire to improve their hook-writing skills (Item 24), and a substantial majority (90%) indicate openness to feedback (Item 23), suggesting a highly positive learning disposition. However, this readiness must be interpreted alongside their relatively low confidence in actual writing performance, in which only 20% report confidence in writing introductions (Item 21), while 70% remain neutral and 10% express low confidence. This contrast highlights a critical tension between affective readiness and procedural competence. Students are willing to improve and receptive to feedback, yet their perceived ability to execute effective introductions remains underdeveloped, indicating that motivation alone is insufficient without corresponding skill development.

From a pedagogical perspective, this condition reflects what can be conceptualized as a productive learning zone, where awareness of limitations coexists with a strong willingness to improve. The Productive Learning Zone (PLZ) integrates cognitive, relational, and motivational dimensions, linking learning processes with transformation and development (Klein et al., 2026; Lillejord & Dysthe, 2008). The high mean score in Writing Reflection (2.74) further supports the view that students are actively engaged in evaluating their writing, although this reflective capacity remains emergent rather than fully operationalized. As Berger, Moe, & Schweidel (2023) and Mubarak & Rudianto (2022) noted, while hooks function as attention-grabbing openings that encourage continued reading, their effective construction requires deliberate practice and rhetorical sensitivity. Thus, although students understand the communicative role of hooks and view writing as audience-oriented, their limited strategic variation and

uncertainty in application indicate that reflective awareness has not yet translated into consistent rhetorical performance.

Taken together, the findings suggest that students are highly teachable but not yet rhetorically mature. While they recognize the importance of hooks for reader engagement, their actual use remains concentrated within a narrow range of strategies, and some continue to experience uncertainty in applying different approaches effectively. This results in a pattern of strategic awareness without full rhetorical control, where hooks are primarily treated as attention-getting devices rather than as integrated components of argument development. Pedagogically, this underscores the need to move beyond technique-based instruction toward a more process-oriented approach that integrates explicit modeling, guided practice, and iterative feedback. By aligning students' strong motivation and reflective readiness with structured opportunities for practice and experimentation, instruction can help bridge the gap between awareness and execution, enabling students to develop more flexible, confident, and rhetorically effective argumentative introductions.

The findings reveal a clear tendency among student writers to rely on question hooks as the dominant strategy in argumentative introductions, indicating a preference for interrogative openings as an accessible means of engaging readers. While such hooks effectively invite reflection and create an immediate connection with the audience, their predominance also signals a limited diversity of rhetorical strategies. Although other types such as scenarios, statistics, general statements, and provoking statements are present, their comparatively low frequency suggests that students' rhetorical repertoire remains restricted to familiar and cognitively manageable forms. Questionnaire data indicate that students possess a general awareness of hooks as engagement devices and report consciously considering their use. However, when juxtaposed with textual evidence, a clear discrepancy emerges: students' conceptual understanding of rhetorical options does not translate into varied or strategic implementation in practice.

This gap can be attributed to several interrelated factors, including limited exposure to diverse models of rhetorical openings and instructional practices that prioritize structural correctness over rhetorical effectiveness. Putri et al. (2025) further argued that writing instruction should move beyond merely introducing rhetorical forms toward helping students understand how and why rhetorical choices shape meaning and reader engagement. As a result, students may default to conventional patterns without fully exploring alternative strategies that could enhance persuasive impact. These findings carry important pedagogical implications, emphasizing the need to move beyond teaching writing structure toward fostering rhetorical flexibility and audience awareness. Instruction should explicitly model different hook types, provide opportunities for analysis and guided practice, and encourage experimentation with varied introductory strategies. In addition, revision should not be viewed merely as technical correction but as a strategic process of enhancing meaning, coherence, and rhetorical impact (Tiwery et al., 2026). Through iterative revision and reflection, students may gradually develop greater rhetorical flexibility and audience awareness in argumentative introductions. Overall, while students show a basic understanding of the function of hooks, their strategic application is still lacking, which calls for pedagogical interventions that connect knowledge and rhetorical performance to improve the effectiveness of argumentative writing.

CONCLUSION

This study examined student writers' strategic use of hooks in argumentative introductions alongside their perceptions of hooks as rhetorical tools for enhancing reader engagement. The findings revealed that question hooks were overwhelmingly dominant, followed by scenario and statistical hooks, indicating students' preference for cognitively accessible and reader-inviting strategies. However, the limited use of other forms such as provoking and general statement hooks suggests that students' repertoire of introductory strategies remains constrained, reflecting partial rhetorical development rather than flexible, context-sensitive rhetorical control. Although questionnaire results demonstrated relatively high levels of awareness regarding the rhetorical role of hooks, including their function in attracting attention and framing arguments, a consistent gap emerged between conceptual understanding and actual writing performance, as evidenced by the limited variation and strategic deployment observed in students' texts. These findings indicate that students remain in a transitional stage between rhetorical awareness and rhetorical control. Overall, the study emphasizes the need to move beyond surface-level awareness toward deeper rhetorical competence through explicit modeling of diverse hook strategies, audience-oriented instruction, and structured opportunities for guided practice, reflection, and feedback. Nevertheless, this study was limited by its relatively small sample drawn from a single class within one applied undergraduate program, which may restrict the broader generalizability of the findings. In addition, the study focused primarily on introductory hook strategies and students' self-reported perceptions without examining the long-term impact of instructional interventions on writing development. Therefore, future research is recommended to involve larger and more diverse participant groups across institutions and disciplines, as well as employ longitudinal or mixed-method approaches to further investigate how rhetorical awareness develops into more flexible and effective rhetorical control through sustained pedagogical practices.

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