

Writing Research Paper Introductions

Purpose of Research Paper Introduction: The introduction leads the reader from a general research issue or problem to your specific area of research. It puts your research question in context by explaining the significance of the research being conducted. This is usually done by summarizing current understanding (research to date) and background information about the topic. This is followed by a statement of the purpose of your research issue or problem. This is sometimes followed by a hypothesis or a set of questions you attempt to answer in your research. You may also explain your methodology (how you will research this issue) and explain what your study can reveal. It also may contain a summary of the structure of the rest of the paper.

Questions Answered in the Research Paper Introduction: Think of the introduction as a mental road map that answers these four questions:

1. What am I studying?
2. Why is this topic important to investigate?
3. What do we already know about this topic or what have other experts discovered about the topic?
4. How will my research advance new knowledge or new ways of understanding?

Components of the Research Paper Introduction:

Component #1: Establish the problem or issue you want to research:

- Highlight the importance of the problem/issue, and/or
- Make general statements about the problem/issue, and/or
- Present an overview on current research on the issue or problem.

Component #2: Provide an overview of existing thinking about and/or research into your research problem.

Component #3: Identify a gap, problems or unresolved issues in the existing knowledge/research that your research can fill or identify a research focus that will be useful:

- “The previous research has mistakenly assumed that....” or “Although most experts in the field believe, they have overlooked ...”
- “None of the previous research has examined
- “Despite prior observations of voter behavior in local elections in urban Detroit, it remains unclear why do some single mothers choose to avoid....” and/or

- “Consequently, these factors need to be examined in more detail....” or “Evidence suggests an interesting correlation, therefore, it is desirable to survey different respondents....”

Component #4: State your research question, your hypothesis and your knowledge claim, making sure to place your research within the gap in existing knowledge.

- State the intent of your study, including the research question and your hypothesis,
- Outline the key characteristics of your study,
- Describe important results that you have found or hope to find

Strategies for Positioning Your Knowledge Claim/Thesis:

The best introductions are likely to make the knowledge claim stand out in some way. Here are several ways in which writers position their knowledge claims so that they stand out:

Inquisitive Thesis – shows that the subject in question is “important, curious, or otherwise interesting.”

“The previous research suggests an interesting correlation between A & B; therefore, my research will....”

Paradoxical Thesis – focuses on the way in which your research will go against what is commonly believed in the field. This form of introduction searches for unlikely perspectives on the subject.

“Although most experts in the field believe, they have overlooked My research will”

Corrective Thesis – shows that the subject has been neglected, misunderstood, or misrepresented by others. This approach addresses the pre-conceptions of readers that the subject is trite or hackneyed.

“Despite the intense focus on X, few researchers have examined Problem YMy research will ...”

Component #5: Stress the value and relevance of your research. Why is your research relevant? What will it contribute to the field (and beyond)? Why should we care about your research?

SOURCES:

Hirano, Eliana. “Research Article Introductions in English for Specific Purposes: A Comparison between Brazilian, Portuguese, and English.” *English for Specific Purposes* 28 (October 2009): 240-250.

Introductions. The Writing Center. University of North Carolina.

Samraj, B. “Introductions in Research Articles: Variations across Disciplines.” *English for Specific Purposes* 21 (2002): 1–17.

Swales, John and Christine B. Feak. *Academic Writing for Graduate Students: Essential Skills and Tasks*. 2nd edition. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2004.

USC Libraries. (2016, Sept. 20). *Organizing Your Social Sciences Research Paper: 4. The Introduction*. <http://libguides.usc.edu/writingguide/introduction>.

“Writing Introductions.” In *Good Essay Writing: A Social Sciences Guide*. Peter Redman. 4th edition. (London: Sage, 2011), pp. 63-70.