

Establish Novelty with Four Rhetorical Moves

Researchers use four moves to show how their work is important, relevant and new.

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| 1) Explain the Significance | Explain why someone would care about this research—your audience for this 1st move should be broader than your primary target audience (if possible, why the general public would care). In humanities research, the significance may just be the currency of the issue: the fact that people are talking about it. |
| 2) Describe the “Status Quo” | Describe current or conventional practices that are being used by researchers within the defined/limited scope of your field (e.g., reviewing current practices, literature or state of affairs). |
| 3) Identify A “Gap” | <p>Show that the current practices or state of research (i.e. “status quo”) in your field are incomplete, unsatisfactory or inconclusive and demonstrate a need for this gap to be filled.</p> <p>A common way to signal a gap is the word “however.”</p> |
| 4) Fill That Gap With Your Present Research | <p>Show how your current research or research proposal is a timely, necessary, or innovative solution to effectively fill the existing gap.</p> <p>If you’re not sure how your research is “filling a gap,” it could be novel in one or more of these ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A new theory or hypothesis: explain a shortcoming in the existing theory to set up a new hypothesis• New solution: propose a solution to an existing problem or unresolved controversy; you must explain the problem and why your solution is better than other solutions• New methodology: critique methodology of previous studies and suggest improved methodology• New domain: investigate a previously unstudied population, site, material, or other phenomenon |

Note: try to avoid utilizing words like “neglected,” “failed,” or “ignored” when critiquing researchers in your field. Instead, frame your contribution in positive terms: “While X pioneered the field of Y, my work contributes/supplements X...”

While these moves do represent the overall trajectory of an introduction to a research article, they are not necessarily linear. A writer can backtrack at any point and move from discussing a gap in the research (move 2) to again summarizing previous research (move 1). However, excessive movement back and forth between moves can confuse readers.¹

¹Adapted from Swales, John. *Genre Analysis: English in Academic and Research Settings*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990. Although Swales’ research is focused on scientific writing, these “Swales moves” are found in almost all academic disciplines as well as in technology development scenarios.

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- 1) Explain the Significance territory
- 2) Describe the Status Quo
- 3) Create a “Gap”
- 4) Fill that gap with the present research

EXAMPLE 1:

Peptic ulcer disease is a chronic disease characterized by frequent recurrences.	<i>Significance</i>
Recent studies have suggested that the eradication of <i>Helicobacter pylori</i> infection affects the natural history of duodenal ulcer disease such that the rate of recurrence decreases markedly (1-6).	<i>Status Quo</i>
However , the interpretation of these results has been complicated by the fact that several of the larger studies did not use control groups or any form of blinding (3, 5, 6). In addition, studies of the effect of <i>H. pylori</i> eradication in patients with gastric ulcer have not been done.	<i>Create a Gap</i>
We report the results of a randomized, controlled trial in which we evaluated the effect of therapy designed to eradicate <i>H. pylori</i> on the pattern of ulcer recurrence in patients with duodenal or gastric ulcer.	<i>Fill the Gap</i>

EXAMPLE 2:

Although plastic has revolutionized modern life, the environmental impact of traditional petroleum plastics is staggering.	<i>Significance</i>
Bioplastics may provide a sustainable alternative to petroleum plastics because they use fewer fossil fuels in production and reduce greenhouse gas emissions as they biodegrade. One particularly promising bioplastic is polylactic acid (PLA). PLA resembles traditional plastic and can be processed on equipment already used for petroleum plastics.	<i>Status Quo</i>
However , the commercial viability of PLA is currently limited because it is only compostable in industrial facilities and cannot be mixed with other recyclable materials [1, 2].	<i>Create a Gap</i>
To make PLA more commercially viable, we propose a device that composts PLA and other bioplastics within a home composting environment [3]. Such a device, we argue, would encourage the production of more sustainable and economic bioplastics.	<i>Fill the Gap</i>

EXAMPLE 3:

Research on the British colonial state has been thriving due to its modern day implications.	<i>Significance</i>
Scholars have been assiduous in suggesting theories of its nature and relationship to the legal and political structures of Western imperial modernity. ² However, historians have generally have limited their inquiries to the “fiscal-military state,” as John Brewer famously dubbed it.	<i>Broad Status Quo & Gap</i>
Scholars generally agree that this imperial state helped forge some of the unique capacities of modern statehood and contributed to British domination in the eighteenth-century war for trade and empire. Yet the striking cultural intimations and practices of state-building have still somehow escaped sustained attention.	<i>Narrow Status Quo & Gap</i>
This project helps revivify a cultural perspective on the arts and strategies of colonial state-making in the eighteenth century by examining the practices of governance in three British empire frontiers—Fort Marlborough (Sumatra), St. Helena, and Jamaica.	<i>Fill the Gap</i>