Research Introductions

This handout presents a flexible set of guidelines for writing research introductions. While these guidelines might apply to many kinds of writing, they apply best to thesis-driven or hypothesis-driven research papers (or reports) in the humanities or the applied, hard, and social sciences. We recommend that you fit these guidelines to your particular topic, genre, and writing style.

# Preliminary Questions

**What is the motivation for your research?**

Research papers typically seek to answer questions and/or solve problems. Ask yourself: What question are you trying to answer? What problem are you trying to solve? Are you explaining why this topic is important? If you aren’t trying to answer a question or solve a problem, you may be trying to explore a topic or make an argument, so our [general introduction handout](https://uwc.utexas.edu/wp-content/uploads/Introductions_revised2020.docx) may be more applicable.

**Who are your audiences?**

Introductions often provide background information that contextualizes the problem or question and establishes its importance. Ask yourself: Ideally, who is likely to read your report? How much background will they need *before* they read the rest of the report? Remember you can elaborate on these on topics more in the body.

# Structuring the Introduction

**Hook**

A hook is an optional, flexible tool to introduce your writing concisely. When writers include a hook in their paper, their goal is typically to catch their reader’s attention, encapsulate their problem or question, assign stakes or importance to their research, or accomplish some combination of these goals. Many writers grab attention by merely introducing the problem or question in a concrete or striking way. For instance, you may start with a familiar example or eye-catching statistic.

**Problem Statement**Research papers typically seek to solve a problem or answer a question. Here are some examples:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Practical** | | |  |  | **Conceptual** | | |
|  | | A practical problem to be solved | An existing solution to be improved | | New knowledge to be confirmed | | Missing knowledge to be discovered |
| e.g. | | Finding a vaccine | Improving an existing vaccine | | Validating current research on a virus | | Determining how a new virus infects someone |

What are the problem’s or question’s real-world impacts or costs? Some problems might have very immediate and clear-cut costs, such as chronic diseases. Some problems might have less tangible costs, such as missing information about Shakespeare. Describing the tangibility of your question or problem's costs can help your reader understand why your research is important.

**Current Solutions and Their Evaluations**

Next, introductions often establish and briefly evaluate current solutions to the problem or answers to the question. Remember, you can elaborate more on these topics in the body:

* What are the current solutions or answers?
* How are current solutions or answers being improved?
* If your problem or question is more conceptual, what research has been done?
* What are the limitations, downsides, or areas for improvement to your solution or answer?
* What evidence are you citing to show the effectiveness of solutions or answers?

**New Solution and Its Evaluation**

This portion of your introduction gives you the chance to show your plan for solving the problem or answering the question in a new way. When addressing your plan, consider what *methods* you’re using to test or design your solution. Additionally, you should be able to show why your solution is *reasonable* and *feasible* with substantial evidence.

Finally, if there are any other parts of your document that you haven’t previewed or summarized in your introduction, you should consider mapping them after describing your solution. A mapping of your document can create a clear organization and guide your reader toward helpful information. This mapping becomes more important as your document becomes longer and more complex.

# Additional Notes

**Avoiding Unfamiliar Terms**

Your reader might not be an expert in your topic. If you can’t avoid an unfamiliar term, try to define it, or use familiar examples to explain it. Unexplained terms can often alienate and confuse your readers. Consider how much background information your audience needs to understand your work.

**Length**

An introduction should be shorter than most sections since you can elaborate on your research in other sections. Your main goal of the introduction is usually to show the importance of the problem or question and provide a basic level of context for your audience to understand the topic.

**Citing Evidence and Relevant Literature**

Your introduction should not only inform your readers of your work but also convince them of its importance. Convincing a reader, in any case, requires citations of credible evidence. Sometimes researchers will provide a literature review section after their introduction, so you should understand what your genre usually allows. See the UWC guides to [primary and secondary sources](https://uwc.utexas.edu/wp-content/uploads/PrimaryandSecondary_2020.docx), [using and framing direct quotations](https://uwc.utexas.edu/wp-content/uploads/Direct-Quotations_2015.docx), and [paraphrasing](https://uwc.utexas.edu/wp-content/uploads/Paraphrasing_MLA8_2020.docx) for more information on this topic.