

1.08 Introduction

Introduce the problem. The body of a paper opens with an introduction that presents the specific problem under study and describes the research strategy. Because the introduction is clearly identified by its position in the article, it is not labeled. Before writing the introduction, consider

- Why is this problem important?
- How do the hypothesis and the experimental design relate to the problem?
- What are the theoretical implications of the study, and how does the study relate to previous work in the area?
- What theoretical propositions are tested, and how were they derived?

A good introduction answers these questions in a paragraph or two and, by summarizing the relevant arguments and the data, gives the reader a firm sense of what was done and why.

Develop the background. Discuss the literature, but do not include an exhaustive historical review. Assume that the reader is knowledgeable about the field for which you are writing and does not require a complete digest. A scholarly review of earlier work provides an appropriate history and recognizes the priority of the work of others. Citation of and specific credit to relevant earlier works are part of the author's scientific and scholarly responsibility and are essential for the growth of a cumulative science. At the same time, cite and reference only works pertinent to the specific issue and not works of only tangential or general significance. If you summarize earlier works, avoid nonessential details; instead, emphasize pertinent findings, relevant methodological issues, and major conclusions. Refer the reader to general surveys or reviews of the topic if they are available.

Demonstrate the logical continuity between previous and present work. Develop the problem with enough breadth and clarity to make it generally understood by as wide a professional audience as possible. Do not let the goal of brevity mislead you into writing a statement intelligible only to the specialist.

Controversial issues, when relevant, should be treated fairly. A simple statement that certain studies support one conclusion and others support another conclusion is better than an extensive and inconclusive discussion. Whatever your personal opinion, avoid animosity and ad hominem arguments in presenting the controversy. Do not support your position or justify your research by citing established authorities out of context.

State the purpose and rationale. After you have introduced the problem and developed the background material, you are in a position to explain your approach to solving the problem. Make this statement in the closing paragraphs of the introduction. At this point, a definition of the variables and a formal statement of your hypotheses give clarity to the paper. Bear in mind the following questions in closing the introduction: What variables did I plan to manipulate? What results did I expect, and why did I expect them? The logic behind "Why did I expect them?" should be made explicit. Clearly develop the rationale for each hypothesis.