

Ten Steps to Writing an Effective Introduction

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The purpose of the Introduction is to stimulate the reader's interest and to provide pertinent background information necessary to understand the rest of the paper. You must summarize the problem to be addressed, give background on the subject, discuss previous research on the topic, and explain *exactly* what the paper will address, why, and how. Besides motivating a reader to read your manuscript and to care about your results, the Introduction is useful also to the journal's reviewers and editors in judging the importance of your manuscript.

An Introduction is usually 300 to 500 words, but may be more, depending on the journal and the topic. Therefore, the Introduction needs to be very concise, well structured, and inclusive of all the information needed to follow the development of your findings.

Some people recommend that the Introduction be the first section written when writing a manuscript. If you need help beginning, please read our article *Twelve Steps in Developing an Effective First Draft* at <http://www.sfcedit.net/newsletters.htm>.

Below are the steps in developing an effective Introduction. However, since every journal is different, it is important that you look at papers in your targeted journal to determine whether they use all of these steps. For example, some journals do not include conclusions in the Introduction.

1. Begin the Introduction by providing a concise *background* account of the problem studied.
2. State the *objective* of the investigation. Your research objective is the most important part of the introduction.
3. Establish the *significance* of your work: Why was there a need to conduct the study?
4. Introduce the reader to the pertinent *literature*. Do not give a full history of the topic. Only quote previous work having direct bearing on the present problem.
5. Clearly state your *hypothesis*, the variables investigated, and concisely summarize the methods used.
6. *Define* any abbreviations or specialized terms.



7. Provide a concise *discussion* of the results and findings of other studies so the reader understands the big picture.
8. Describe some of the major *findings* presented in your manuscript and explain how they contribute to the larger field of research.
9. State the principal *conclusions* derived from your results.
10. Identify any *questions* left unanswered and any new questions generated by your study.

Other points to consider when writing your Introduction:

1. Be aware of who will be reading your manuscript and make sure the Introduction is directed to that audience.
2. Move from general to specific: from the problem in the real world to the literature to your research.
3. Write in the present tense except for what you did or found, which should be in the past tense.
4. Be concise.

For more detailed information regarding writing a manuscript for publication, please review some of our other articles at <http://www.sffedit.net/newsletters.htm>. These articles approach such subjects as Writing the First Draft, Writing Effective Results, Methods and Materials, Discussions, Selecting a Journal, Responding to Reviewers, etc.

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