

Framing Your Research in an Introduction

How you frame your research in the introduction section of a manuscript can fundamentally impact the focus, scope, and aims of your writing. A well-crafted introduction can help your reader understand how you are positioning your research amid on-going conversations and, furthermore, what you are accomplishing by undertaking specific critical examinations. Conversely, a poorly-written introduction can make it difficult to identify your central argument or specific intervention within a given discipline. Hence, the introduction of an article, essay, or book chapter is one of the most important parts of any manuscript.

The questions on this worksheet will help you draft an introduction for a journal article, academic essay, or book chapter. To clarify, this worksheet is not an "instruction set" that will help you write a perfect introduction every time. Rather, the questions below are designed to foster a critical awareness of how you plan to contextualize the relevance and impact of your research. Being aware of the underlying rationale you are using to frame your research will make it easier to plan, draft, and revise an introduction. Lastly, please be as specific as possible when answering the following questions. The more specific you are, the easier it will be to write and revise.

Question to Consider:

1. What specific topic, trend, or research-emphasis are you interested in?

Your response to this question can be straightforward but please avoid using over-generalizations or over-simplifications when explaining your disciplinary focus.

2. What are two or three keystone authors, texts, and/or ideas that are representative of how researchers have discussed the topic, trend, or emphasis you identified in Question One?

For EACH of these authors, texts, or ideas, please write three-to-four sentences that summarizes their main claims or defines these ideas in a straightforward manner. For example, if there is a book or journal article that is influential within your given field-of-study, you would write several sentences that summarizes the most important claims or concepts from this book/article.

3. What specific problem do you want to identify within (and respond to) the research you identified in Question Two?

For example, are you responding to potential biases or limitations in previous research? Are you attempting to negotiate an obstacle that other researchers have been struggling with? Or, are you trying to build a bridge between two fields-of-research or scholarly conversations?

4. What is the most important cause underlying this problem (if known)?

If you are discussing biases or limitations in previous research, explain why these biases or limitations emerge (i.e., issues with research methodology, issues with available data, etc.).

However, if the causes of this problem are not known or have not been discussed by researchers, you can identify a moment in previous research that shows this problem most explicitly. For example, if you are trying to build a bridge between two different fields-of-study, you could identify a moment within a specific publication (such as a book or journal article) that shows how different fields share common concerns but do not actively interact with one another.

5. What is the most important consequence of this problem?

That is to say, what are the risks of overlooking or not acknowledging this problem? Remember, advanced research is often discipline-specific, so you should frame a potential consequence in terms of how it can directly impact the efficacy of current/future scholarship.

6. What is your specific research question? How does this question respond to the problem you identified earlier?

When answering this question, it would be useful to think about the goals of your research question. More specifically, what do you want to accomplish by posing your particular research question? Do you want to overcome limitations in prior scholarship? Do you want to prevent negative consequences from arising in the future? Do you want to provide enough resources so that other scholars can easily navigate obstacles when gathering or analyzing data?

Clarifying the goals of your own personal research question can make it easier to explain how your question directly responds to an on-going problem in current scholarship.

7. Lastly, who can benefit most from your research? In other words, what can researchers gain from exploring the questions that are guiding your own investigations?

Remember, you want to avoid claiming that your research can benefit "everyone" or be applicable to "any" situation. Instead, don't hesitate to identify the specific scholarly communities that may benefit from building upon your own research findings.