

Rhetorical Strategies for Research Article Introductions

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Context – Problem -- Response

Think of your introduction as having three essential aspects, parts, or moves (Booth, Colomb, Williams, *Craft of Research*, pp. 222-240):

- Context
- Problem
- Response

Think of this as the “deep structure” of your introduction.

As you write a first draft of your introduction, don’t necessarily start with the context. Start with the problem statement (it is the crucial “pivot point” for any introduction).

- Focus first on defining and articulating the *problem*.
- Then, working backwards, provide only enough context before your problem statement so that the nature, relevance, and significance of your problem becomes apparent (this strategy will help prevent you from being tempted to tell everything you know about the topic).
- Then, after your problem statement, explain what claim you are making about the problem, or what response to the problem your research demonstrates. Here, you can offer a “roadmap” to help your reader navigate through the remainder of your research article.

Create a Research Space

Another productive way to approach the introduction to your research paper is to think of the introduction as “creating a research space.”

John Swales (applied linguist, U of Michigan) has identified a model describing how researchers “create a research space” in the introductions to their scientific papers. Swales calls this model the CARS model. It has three essential moves, and several possible steps within each move:

ESTABLISHING A TERRITORY

- Claiming centrality
- Making topic generalizations
- Reviewing items of previous research

ESTABLISHING A NICHE

- Counter-claiming
- Indicating a gap or problem
- Question-raising
- Continuing a tradition, or noting new applications

OCCUPYING THE NICHE

- Outlining purposes and/or announcing present research
- Announcing principle findings
- Indicating Research Article structure

In longer research introductions, you may not want to have your reader wait for several pages before understanding your purpose. In such situations, preface the CARS model with a brief overview, and then dive into the details.

Broad Application of Introduction Strategies

Both the “context/problem/response” model and the “create a research space” model have broad application to other communication opportunities:

Abstract: A simplified rendering of the models (in 2-3 sentences) can be helpful for the early portions of an abstract.

Oral Presentations: Audiences expect some version of this model when they listen to the opening portions of your talk.

Poster Sessions: Posters and a poster session talk require you to briefly situation your work in a larger context. These two models can serve as useful tools.

“Elevator Talk”: A brief 60-90 second statement about your work can draw on these models.