

Refining Introductions

Peer-review heuristics

Getting Started

Exchange your draft introduction with a partner. Don't read each other's introductions at the same time; instead, take turns focusing on one another's work by following the steps below.

Step 1

Read through your partner's introduction briskly, without making any notes (mentally, or on the draft itself) about specific areas for improvement. Focus instead on the introduction as a stand-alone argument, asking yourself the following question after you've finished: *Is this a persuasive piece of writing?*

If the answer is "no," or "not really," discuss this with your partner before moving forward.

If the answer is "yes," or "mostly persuasive," tell your partner why this is the case.

For those whose work is being read, make notes about what was lacking or particularly persuasive. This information will help you revise your intro, to be sure, but it will also help you improve your focus in other sections of your final paper.

Step 2

Read through your partner's introduction again, but slowly and deliberately this time, focusing on the following analytic criteria:

- *Interest* — does the writer generate interest early in the introduction? Does the writer make the subject matter seem compelling? Do they use vivid details or arresting imagery to generate interest in the topic?
- *Exigence* — is the exigence for the project clearly stated? In other words, does the writer make plain the need for the investigation?
- *Research* — is the writer's work grounded in foundational or influential scholarship?
- *Argument* — is the writer's own argument clearly stated? Is the problem/issue/phenomenon under scrutiny clear? Is the writer's contribution to the research on that problem/issue/phenomenon clearly stated?
- *Roadmap* — is the structure of the paper, laid out in the final paragraph of the introduction, clear and logical? Does the writer guide the reader appropriately?

Discuss your take on these areas with your partner. If an area needs improvement, simply begin by noting the deficiency, but add suggestions as well—how might your partner improve in any given area?

Step 3

Return to the introduction a final time and discuss the prose itself with your partner, paragraph by paragraph.

- Are sentences written clearly?
- Did the writer use active language?
- Did the writer eliminate casual language and idiomatic expressions?
- Are citations formatted properly?
- Are there any awkward phrases or strange word choices?
- Is the prose free of unnecessary jargon?
- Is there too much exposition?
- Are there any grammatical or mechanical errors?
- Can [noun strings](#) be eliminated?
- Are phrases and/or sentences [parallel](#)?
- Are there any tense changes?
- Is the writing concise and vigorous? Does every word tell? (see Strunk & White, p. 15–33)

Step 4

Repeat the process above, with your partner leading discussion of your own introduction.