

Facilitator Notes

# Writing the Introduction

These notes accompany the PowerPoint presentation of the same title by Barbara Gastel.

This module normally would accompany modules on writing other parts of a journal article.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Module Title | Writing the Introduction |
| Course title (or analogous information) | This module typically would be part of a workshop or course largely on writing and publishing journal articles on research. It is part of a set of four modules, each on writing one of the four main parts of a journal article in the IMRAD structure (Introduction, Methods, Results, and Discussion).These modules may be presented in different orders, depending on the facilitator’s preference. One option is to present the modules in the order in which the sections appear in an article (Introduction, Methods, Results, Discussion). Another option, especially if each participant will write or revise an article during the workshop or course, is to present the modules in an order that authors often write articles (for example, Methods, Results, Discussion, Introduction). |
| Unit Title | Not applicable |
| No. of Unit | Not applicable |
| Session Day/Time | Not applicable |
| Length of Session | This module typically would run about 45 to 60 minutes if participants have not brought drafts to revise. If they have brought drafts, it typically would run 60 to 90 minutes. If the module is in a workshop or course where participants write journal articles, it can be advisable to (1) have the course participants draft their introductions after this session and (2) have participants meet in small groups on a later date to read and provide feedback on each other’s drafts of the section. |
| Aim | This module is intended mainly to increase participants’ ability to write suitable introductions to journal articles. |
| Learning Outcomes | By the end of this module, participants will be able to state (1) the purposes of the introduction and (2) the usual organization of an introduction. |
| Facilitator Profile | Ideally, this workshop would be facilitated by someone who has experience with research writing (for example, as an author of journal articles or as an editor), because such an individual can enrich the content with examples from his or her experience. However, a less experienced facilitator also can present the module, as the combination of PowerPoint slides and facilitator notes provides sufficient information to do so. Also, the module can be presented jointly by a facilitator and a co-facilitator who provides additional commentary. |
| Participant Profile | This module is primarily for early-career researchers who are starting to publish their work. It also may be useful to mid-career researchers who wish to improve their writing or increase their ability to mentor others in research writing. In addition, it may be helpful to some editors and writing instructors. |
| Pre-workshop Activities | (1) If possible, each participant should bring a set of instructions to authors. Ideally, the instructions should be for a journal in which the participant hopes to publish. If at least some participants will not or might not bring instructions to authors, the facilitator should, if possible, bring some instructions to authors or links thereto.(2) If possible, each participant should bring a journal article reporting research in his or her field. Ideally, it should report research related to the participant’s research and should be in a journal in which the participant hopes to publish. If at least some participants will not or might not bring articles, the facilitator should, if possible, bring some articles or some links to articles.(3) If the participants have drafted journal articles, they should bring drafts of their articles. |
| Room Layout | Ideally, this module will be presented in a room layout facilitating interaction—for example, with several small tables, with tables in a U configuration, or with a conference table. However, this module also can be presented in a traditional classroom or a lecture hall. |
| Number of Participants | For optimum discussion, the number of participants should be limited to about 10–15. However, the module also can reasonably delivered to about 25 participants.  |
| Files and Materials | PowerPoint file: 11\_Writing the IntroductionExamples of Introductions: If possible, the facilitator should show one or more examples of introductions. Ideally, the introductions should be from journals in research fields from which some of the participants come.[Note: Another resource to consider using with these four modules is the annotated journal article at <http://www.authoraid.info/en/resources/details/648/>. Facilitators may, for example, do one or more of the following: (1) use this resource as a source of background information, (2) show the respective sections of this resource when discussing the corresponding sections of a journal article, (3) have participants look at this resource as a review after the set of four modules on sections of an article, or (4) as a course assignment, have participants read this resource and then annotate an article from their own field.] |
| Visual Aids and Resources | Computer with PowerPoint; projector for PowerPoint presentation; Internet connection if possible |
| Potential Embellishments of the PowerPoint | To keep the file small, the presentation consists almost solely of text. Images can be added to make it more visually appealing. For example, decorative images can be inserted between sections to signal a change of subtopic and provide visual relief. Also, relevant images can be added to selected slides if desired. If desired, the facilitator can divide the material on a given slide into more than one slide or can format some slides for progressive disclosure, in which items on a slide are revealed one by one.The facilitator may add slides showing relevant excerpts from journal articles. Another option is to link to journal articles to show. |
| Learning methods and activities | The following notes may help facilitators to (1) elaborate on the content of some slides and (2) elicit group participation at suitable times. In the PowerPoint presentation, similar notes appear in the notes sections below the respective slides.* (Slide 1 is a title slide.)
* Slide 2 (“Overview”)
	+ Note the topics that the module will address.
	+ Note the module’s overall aim, which is stated earlier in this facilitator’s guide. (Feel free, of course, to frame it in the way that the group is likely to find most relevant.)
* Slide 3 (“Purposes of the Introduction”)
	+ Note that although the importance of the research may be obvious to the author, it might not be obvious to readers—and that therefore an introduction needs to provide context.
	+ Emphasize the importance of making clear by the end of the introduction what the researchers were trying to find out.
* Slide 4 (“Length of Introduction”)
	+ Perhaps mention that articles in the social sciences often have relatively long introductions.
	+ Ask participants whether introductions to articles in their research fields tend to have short or long introductions. One option is to informally survey the group in this regard. Another option is to have the participants discuss the question in pairs or small groups.
* Slide 5 (“Gearing the Introduction to the Audience”)
	+ Now is a good time to re-emphasize choosing one’s target journal before starting to write. Knowing one’s target journal helps in identifying the audience and thus in gearing the introduction appropriately.
	+ Perhaps note that keeping the audience in mind may be especially important in reporting interdisciplinary research. The introduction may need to be geared quite differently depending on whether the research is being reported in a journal in one of the fields, a journal in another of the fields, or a journal that spans the fields and perhaps some other fields too.
* Slide 6 (“Structure of the Introduction”)
	+ Note the structure indicated on the slide.
	+ If possible, show one or more examples of introductions that have this structure.
	+ Mention that sometimes variants of this structure are used. Perhaps show an introduction in a variant of this structure.
	+ Emphasize the importance of making clear in the introduction what knowledge gap the current research is intended to fill.
	+ Note that in some journals but not others, the main findings are stated at the end of the introduction. Perhaps ask participants what seems to be the norm in that regard in their fields.
	+ Note that the introduction typically cites references, both in presenting background information and in discussing previous research.
* Slide 7 (“Overall Structure of a Paper: Like an Hourglass”)
	+ The top part of the hourglass is the introduction, which, as noted, is funnel-shaped: beginning broad (with general context), then narrowing down somewhat (to research related to the current research), and then focusing narrowly on the current research.
	+ The narrow middle of the hourglass consists of the methods and results sections, both of which focus narrowly on the current research.
	+ The lower part of the hourglass is the discussion, which generally is like an inverted funnel, starting narrow (by focusing on the current research), then broadening somewhat (by relating the current research to previous research), and ending broadly (for example, by noting overall implications of the research).
* Slide 8 (“When to Write the Introduction”)
	+ Reinforce the point that the sections of a journal article can be drafted in any order.
	+ Emphasize the need for revision, both to ensure the quality of each section and to ensure that the paper as a whole is cohesive.
* Slide 9 (“Exercise”)
	+ Have the participants do this exercise in small groups.
	+ Then bring the full group together for discussion.
* Slide 10 (“Another Exercise”)
	+ If most or all of the participants have brought drafts of their introductions, do this exercise.
	+ Another option is to have participants draft their introductions after this module and then do this exercise at a later session.
	+ This exercise is well suited for groups of about three or four members.
	+ If feasible, have the full group come together for discussion at the end of this exercise. One option is to proceed as follows: (1) Have participants note some strengths that they observed in other group members’ introductions (example: “She made very clear what gap this research was intended to fill”). (2) Have participants wishing to do so identify some helpful guidance that they received during the exercise (example: “I now realize that, given my target audience, I should define more of the terms in my introduction.”). (3) Answer any questions, either along the way or at the end.
	+ If this session will be the first one in which participants provide feedback on each other’s drafts, perhaps precede this exercise with some discussion of giving feedback. Suggestions for giving feedback appear at <http://www.authoraid.info/en/news/details/1058/>, <http://www.authoraid.info/en/news/details/649/>, and <http://www.authoraid.info/en/news/details/302/>. Also, suggestions for receiving feedback appear at <http://www.authoraid.info/en/news/details/1059/>. Of course, some facilitators might need to adapt the advice on giving feedback to the cultural context.
* Slide 12 (“In Conclusion”)
	+ If time permits, include a question-and-answer session before ending.
	+ Perhaps do one or both of the following:
		- Have participants note points to remember.
		- Summarize the session.
	+ If the workshop or course will include later modules, note the topic of the next module. Perhaps also note more generally what will follow.
	+ Perhaps encourage group members to share points from this session with others.
 |