



Writing the Literature Review: Mapping the Scholarly Conversation

These writing exercises draw on the Create a Research Space (CARS) heuristic for research article Introductions in English (Swales, 1990). The CARS model maps out 3 “moves” researchers make in order to engage with readers in ways typical of this type of academic text and of writing practices in their discipline, while leaving space for authorial linguistic choice and a distinctive authorial voice. This versatile, malleable, and dynamic model helps solve the problem of *what* a research article Introduction achieves and *how*. For more on the CARS Model and the 3 moves, see the accompanying writing guide [Research Article Introductions](#).

In this guide, the writing exercises begin with CARS Move 2 where researchers establish a niche in a territory. Swales (1990) uses the metaphor *territory* to visualize how researchers carve out an original research space—the niche. This guide uses two additional metaphors—*story* and *conversation*—to map the 3 moves in a research article Introduction.

As you work through the writing exercises, use full citation practices according to disciplinary conventions. In academic writing, citation is not epiphenomenal (not an add-on); rather, it’s an important grammatical structure and a feature of the sentence with an array of complex purposes.

Establishing a Niche (CARS Move 2)

Identifying the Research Space: Listening for the Silence

Think of the niche as an uninhabited research space or a story yet to be told. As you listen to the stories of others (the background context and literature review), you begin to hear the silences underneath the voices. One of those silences becomes the space you inhabit to tell your research story (Move 3).

Writing Exercise 1

Write 2 sentences that explicitly identify the uninhabited research space. You may want to borrow one of the following terms to describe the research space: *gap*, *problem*, or *need*. The term you choose reflects your authorial style or voice, but may also reflect a typical or recurring stylistic choice from others in your discipline.

Establishing the Territory (CARS Move 1)

Telling the Research Story: Summarizing the Conversation

The background context and literature review in your Introduction represent the conversation you listen to for a while before joining in and adding your voice (Move 3). As you listen, you’re able to determine the boundaries of the conversation so that when it’s your turn to speak your contribution is *relevant* and *engaging*.

Writing Exercise 2

Write 3 - 4 sentences that provide readers with the narrative trajectory for your research story (e.g., *relevant* background context; centrality/significance claim; *relevant* literature review). What story are you telling and for whom? Whose voices do we hear? Whose voices are silenced, and why? What shape does the story or conversation take—thematic or chronological or something else—and why?

Occupying the Niche (CARS Move 3)

Inhabiting the Research Space: Joining the Conversation

Now it's time to have your say—to join the ongoing conversation and tell your research story. Like all adept conversationalists, you need an opening gambit.

Writing Exercise 3

Write 1 sentence that states the primary aim, goal, or objective of your study (research story). Then, follow that statement with 1 sentence that states the significance of your contribution. Finally, write 1 sentence that provides the transition to your research question or hypothesis (and, if possible, include the question/hypothesis).

Stitching the Text Together

The Story Continues: Guests Come and Go

Now that you've joined the conversation and have the floor, it's time for others to fall silent. Your story has just begun and you want the other storytellers to stay and listen for a while.

Writing Exercise 4

Bring together the writing from *Exercises 1 – 3* to form a coherent research story. This will involve some rewriting, some reordering, some additional storytelling, and some stitching together (transitions) to make a cohesive whole: the research article Introduction.

To ensure that the others keep listening, the remainder of your research narrative has to have some of the typical features of compelling storytelling: a beginning, middle, and end, distinctive characters (like you), setting, dialogue, conflict, and resolution.

References

Swales, J. (1990). *Genre analysis: English in academic and research settings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.