



Research Article Introductions in English: Mind the Gap

In the introduction to a research article, academic writers across disciplines (STEM fields, social sciences, humanities) typically accomplish the 3 moves or *purposes* detailed below. While the moves are numbered, and very often appear in this order, writers may execute them in any order—this is a heuristic, not a template or a recipe—and the moves may occur in cycles, particularly in lengthier manuscripts, thus reminding readers of what came before. While many studies demonstrate that the 3 moves are standard or typical across disciplines, some steps are optional: they're discipline- and/or study-dependent.

Move 1: Tell the Research Story: Summarize the Conversation

The writer sets the context as they begin to tell the research story and invite others into the conversation:

Step 1: Claim Centrality (*optional*)

The writer asks readers to accept the current study as part of a significant or well-established research area; or the writer identifies the topic as timely/urgent and deserving of immediate attention.

and/or

Step 2: Provide Background Context

The writer makes statements about current knowledge, practices, and/or phenomena. and/or

Step 3: Review Previous Research

The writer cites relevant literature. When citing others, academic writers use *integral citations* (the author's name becomes part of the grammatical structure of the sentence) or *non-integral citations* (the author's name (and date; style guide dependent) occurs in parentheses or as a numerical superscript, typically at the end of a clause or sentence).

Move 2: Identify the Research Space: Listen for the Silence

The writer argues that there is a *research deficit* that the scholarly conversation hasn't yet addressed:

Step 1A: Make a Counter Claim

The writer refutes or challenges earlier research by making a counter-claim.

or

Step 1B: Indicate a Gap

The writer demonstrates that previous research does not address existing questions or problems.

or

Step 1C: Pose a Question

The writer asks questions about the field, suggesting that more research needs to be done.

or

Step 1D: Continue a Tradition

The writer presents the research as a useful extension of existing research (e.g., theory-building).

Move 3: Inhabit the Research Space: Join the Conversation

The writer turns the research deficit into the *research space*, as they join the conversation:

Step 1A: Outline Purposes

The writer indicates the main purpose(s) of the current research.

or

Step 1B: Announce Present Research

The writer describes the current research.

Step 2: Announce Principal Findings (*optional*)

The writer presents the main conclusions of the research.

Step 3: Indicate the Structure of the Research Article (*optional*)

The writer previews the organization of the remainder of the article for readers.

Bibliography

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