



Tips for Dissertation Introductions

The introduction (around 1250 words) informs your audience about the importance of your topic, the research question(s) you plan to investigate, and your hypothesis or core claim (thesis statement). It also outlines the structure of the rest of the dissertation, through a chapter overview.

Write your Literature Review First (before your Intro.)

You should wait and write your Introduction after you have written your Lit. Review, or after you have narrowed down your topic and identified your research question(s).

A strong research question should be:

1. **Narrow** and specific
 2. **Original** in some way
 3. **Answerable** with your data (or with your research)
- See “**Tips for Writing a Literature Review**” **handout for tips on refining and narrowing your research question (and hypothesis or claim) as you do research.**

See our “**Tips for Writing a Lit. Review**” **handout**

What to Include in the Introduction (around 1250 words):

Purpose and Significance of the Study: Answer the questions “So What? Who Cares?”

Explore the significance of the topic or the broader implications of your argument or findings by answering the following questions:

- Why is this an important area/problem/question in your field?
- Who is researching the topic or working to address some of the issues?
- Who is affected by the topic, or could be affected by the main claims or findings?
- How will the results of the study contribute to the field? How will they be used?

Theoretical Framework

Include a *brief* overview of your theoretical perspective or conceptual framework. In other words, answer the questions:

- Within which sub-area(s) of your field will you situate your study?
- What are several of the most important previous studies in that same sub-field, or which have laid the groundwork that has made your research possible?
- Why have you chosen the specific (theoretical or methodological) approach that you will use for your study?

Preview your Literature Review

Paraphrase the part of your Literature Review (Chapter II) that demonstrates that your original research fills a “gap” in the literature and/or contributes something new or has implications for specific areas of study within the field.

- Save all other “background” on your topic for the **Literature Review** (Chapter II), which will overview, synthesize, analyze, and critique relevant previous research.

Clearly state your research question and hypothesis/objectives

You should include your research question(s) in your introduction. For example, you might include a sentence like: “This dissertation will investigate the following research questions:”

Chapter Overview

Orient the reader to the organization of your dissertation by briefly describing what will be discussed in each chapter. (See reverse side for an example.)



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Example “Chapter Overview” wording:

This chapter has introduced the problem and discussed the significance of the study. The two main research questions and hypotheses were then presented.

Chapter II reviews the literature on mindfulness, stress-reduction, and the links between the two. The methods used in the study are described in Chapter III, after which the results relevant to each hypothesis are presented in Chapter IV. Finally, Chapter V discusses the results and outlines the main implications of the findings; it also considers some limitations of the study and offers recommendations for further research.

What to Avoid:

- ❑ **Don’t overlap too much with the Literature Review (Chapter II)**
Cite several key studies and sources in your Introduction, but do not provide extensive background on your topic or cite less relevant or non-key studies. Save the more extensive background for your Literature Review.
- ❑ **Don’t overlap too much with Methods chapter (Chapter III)**
Provide a brief rationale for your theoretical or methodological approach, but save the more detailed explanation of your sampling, data, and methods for the Methods chapter.
- ❑ **Don’t start your introduction with your research question.**
Give your readers some context before introducing your research question and stating your claims or hypothesis.

Dissertation Intro. Tips:

- ❑ **Keep it brief**
Keep your Introduction short – aim for around just 5 pages or 1250 words. Your introduction should be limited in scope and scale; its only purpose is to explain to the reader the purpose and significance of the study, introduce the theoretical framework and research question(s), and provide a structural overview.
- ❑ **Cite a few key sources**
You should include some in-text citations in your Introduction. Cite past studies to demonstrate that your topic addresses an important question in your field, to highlight some of the previous research that’s most relevant to your topic, and to situate your study within a specific sub-area of your field.
- ❑ **Group and cite multiple sources in the same paraphrase using semicolons**
 - E.g.: Several studies have identified a positive correlation between meditation and stress reduction (Berkowitz et al., 2003; Derryberry & Reed, 2005, 2007; Rothbart, 2003).

This will help demonstrate the credibility of specific findings and/or will demonstrate the validity/importance of specific types of research or methods/approaches within your field.