

EXERCISE 35—CHECK IT

TIME NEEDED: 10 minutes x session

MATERIALS NEEDED: Timer; draft of your introduction

This week, you will practice systematically checking the draft of your introduction (purpose statement, rationale, literature review, and theoretical framework). Go through each question in the checklist below and answer honestly those that apply to your piece. If you sense certain segments need more work (either generating new text or editing), tackle the problem right then: Either spend time generating/editing, or make a note to yourself, in the text, to return to that portion to add or rewrite.

Dedicate 10 minutes per writing session to the checklist below. If you find you need more time, that's okay, but don't binge and dedicate your entire writing session to the checklist. Keep in mind you risk burning out and not wanting to return to your text if you binge write.

Checklist for Introductions³

- ☐ Is the problem, topic, research question, or hypothesis I propose to address presented clearly? Can readers outside my field easily identify WHAT I'm proposing to do, even if they do not understand my subject area well?
- ☐ Is the importance of my topic, problem, or research question evident to the reader? Can readers outside my field identify my rationale (WHY I am proposing this), even if they cannot understand the specific arguments or available data?
- ☐ Does my introduction contain a clear purpose statement or a sentence beginning with "The purpose of this paper/grant is . . . "?
- ☐ Does my introduction contain any unnecessary information? Can I delete it?
- ☐ Do I cite sources to support my problem (research question, topic, or hypothesis)?
- ☐ Do I cite sources that contradict the importance of my problem/topic (alternative points of view)? Am I being fair in presenting the alternative argument?
- ☐ Do I cite authoritative sources from my field of study?
- ☐ Do I cite recently published literature?
- ☐ Does my literature review show I know the most important and relevant sources regarding my topic (published as well as unpublished)?
- ☐ Is my literature biased exclusively toward my field? Many topics have been studied by different disciplines, yet we often tend to confine our reading to our particular area. For example, adolescent pregnancy prevention is a popular topic in the public health and pediatric medicine literature, but it has also been

studied in the fields of economics and law. Does my literature review provide evidence I have tried to avoid paradigmatic biases (when appropriate)?

- ☐ Do my citations include secondary sources (e.g., "Jones, 1939, as cited in Smith, 1950")? (Note: If you're using secondary citations, be careful. Some fields view the practice of quoting secondary sources as problematic. Some as possible, cite the original references.)
- ☐ Are all the citations I present *necessary*? Does each one contribute to the text, or are some redundant? If redundant, what can I delete? (Note: Remember that citations—even the numbered formats—add to your text's word count. Some printed journals limit the citations the author[s] may include, due to page restrictions.)

- ☐ Are the citations helpful to the readers? Will they be able to learn something if they check these citations themselves?
- ☐ Am I citing or using other authors' materials, for which I need permission to publish? (Note: If you are using a table, figure, photo, or diagram from another publication, you need to ask for permission from the publisher holding the copyright to that piece. Ensure your use of citations is covered by copyright laws' "fair use" clause.)

- ☐ Is my theoretical framework presented logically and clearly? Could I add a graph or figure to help readers visualize the relationships among the variables in my study?
- ☐ Do I provide enough background about the theory (or theories) I chose to use, to orient readers who are not familiar with the framework?

Notes

1. Grant proposals for federal agencies such as the National Institutes of Health and the National Science Foundation ask for a one-page, all-inclusive synopsis of the proposal labeled the "specific aims" section. That section must contain the following elements: (a) a "catchy" introductory sentence, (b) a brief description of current knowledge, (c) the gap in the knowledge base about the topic, (d) the long-term goal for the project, (e) the objective, (f) the central hypothesis, (g) one to three specific aims the proposal plans to achieve, and (h) expected outcomes (Russell & Morrison, 2009/2010).

2. My students always ask me if I know a good strategy for conducting and organizing literature reviews. It is beyond the scope of this book to teach you how to review the literature in your field, but I would strongly recommend J. Garrard's (2011) *Health Sciences Literature Reviews Made Easy* as a useful resource. Take a look, also, at Appendix A at the end of this book—*Reading & Writing: How to STOP Making the Literature Review an Excuse for Not Writing*—where I explain one of the recommendations Garrard makes in her text (to use review matrices for organizing your reading). In her book, Garrard walks the reader step by step through the process of conducting a systematic literature review (i.e., a special type

of review that is more rigorous and systematic than the traditional ones). Even if you're doing a traditional literature review, you may benefit from her tips and suggestions. Also worthy of notice is the more recent book, published in 2012 by SAGE and edited by Booth, Papaioannou, and Sutton: *Systematic Approaches to a Successful Literature Review*.

3. Adapted from Reitz's (1984) article "An Academic Author's Checklist: Essential Questions a Scholar or Scientist Must Ask of Any Manuscript in Preparation—and an Editor or Referee Must Also Consider."

Electronic Sources

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Chapter Seven—Main Points in One Page

1. Beginning your piece by rough-drafting the introduction has several advantages. The most important one is this: You will develop a blueprint for writing the subsequent sections.
2. EXERCISE 29—Learn how to draw a mind map and develop one for your introduction or specific aims section of your journal article or grant proposal. Then write about one branch of the map at a time.
3. EXERCISE 30—Without stopping to think or to correct any mistakes, write as fast as you can everything that comes to mind about the purpose, the rationale, the background, and the theoretical support for your piece. Don't worry about order, appropriateness, or clarity (yet).
4. EXERCISE 31—Write as many variations as you can of the answer to this question: *What is the purpose of this paper/report/proposal?*
5. EXERCISE 32—Identify the various rationales you wish to present in your writing (rationale for the topic, for the methodological approach, for the analytic strategy). During writing sessions “dump” your ideas for each of the rationales.
6. EXERCISE 33—Using template-sentences, begin presenting the literature that supports and contradicts the problem, research question, or hypothesis about which you are writing.
7. EXERCISE 34—Using template-sentences, write about the theory or theoretical framework that supports/informs the study you are reporting, or the argument you are developing.
8. EXERCISE 35—Using the checklist provided, determine whether your writing addresses each of the components of a well-written introduction. In subsequent writing sessions, devote time to filling in the gaps or strengthening the weak “spots.”