

Editing the Introduction—Checklist for Editors

1. Are all the elements of an introduction section present?

(possible answers include yes, no, somewhat, N/A, or whatever else you feel like writing)

- “Big picture” context for the reported research
- Significance of the problem tackled
- Background/current state of knowledge or technology
- **Gaps or shortcomings** of current knowledge or technology
- **Clear statement of the paper’s purpose, question, or hypothesis**
- Brief description (and justification, if necessary) of approach
- Optional: summary of findings
- Bonus: “drama” in the form of opposing theories, challenged dogmas, long-standing mysteries or technological barriers, or “hook”, such as recently published findings related to the student’s work.

2. Is there extraneous information? Could some information be simplified, eliminated or moved to other sections?

- Too much background (started too far back in time, or too wide)
- “Textbook syndrome”: too much information about what is known or has been done, not enough about the gaps or controversies that justify the student’s research
- Some background appears specific to methodology rather than question/hypothesis (could be moved to corresponding results or methods)
- Description of previous work too detailed (some of these details could be more useful in the Discussion)

3. Flow, emphasis, continuity

- Does Introduction follow a discernable “funnel shape” (in particular from the big picture to the specific question)?
- Does information flow from familiar to new, general to specific, known to unknown, accepted to controversial?
- Is key information (such as accepted knowledge, unresolved questions, controversies or paradoxes, etc.) properly emphasized? (For instance as a paragraph’s concluding sentence, or with signals such as “However, none of these experiments address whether...”)
- Are key terms repeated faithfully (as opposed to being replaced with potentially ambiguous synonyms)?
- Are key terms precise and understandable to intended audience? (Avoid jargon and define technical terms.)

4. Paragraph and sentence structure

- Do paragraphs have a clear topic, topic sentence, and concluding sentence?
- Are there clear transitions between paragraphs or topics? (Transitions can take the form of single words, clauses or full sentences).
- Are similar ideas conveyed through clauses/sentences of similar structure? (Parallelism)
- Do sentences link “old” and “new” information in an orderly fashion? (Serially: A→B. B→C. C→D.; or in parallel: A→B. A→C. A→D.)
- Or are there gaps in the logic? (e.g. A→B. C→D.)
- Are sentences too long, too complex, incomplete?

5. Overall evaluation

- what is well done:
- what needs work: