

## Example: Plan for an Introduction

### On the content and organization of an introduction or introductory chapter

Introductions are prone to particular risks:

- Their length. Introductions tend to be too long and too general. This is most common when they introduce the topic of the study. How much should you present and what information is not necessary?
- Their structure. Introductory chapters or sections are often loosely organized because you want to tell everything about your topic. This is known as *Knowledge Telling* (as opposed to *Knowledge Transforming*), or an *Encyclopaedic Style*. During the Middle Ages, when information was difficult to find, collecting information was useful; we don't need it in our age of books, e-books, and the Internet.

The introduction is probably where your readers will decide whether or not to read your text. So the message should be, Read me! What would motivate your readers to continue reading? In general you could say, 'if they conclude that you are reporting on an interesting and quality piece of research'. You could describe what you have researched, why it is important or relevant, and how you did it. These are exactly the elements of the model described in chapters 3–6 of this book. In a thesis it is customary to give a brief summary of what will be described in the chapters to come; that way, readers can see specifically which chapters are relevant to them.

Before you start thinking about the content, take a few minutes to decide on the length of the introduction. How much 'space' is available for your introduction, as part of the whole text? If your story exceeds this number of pages, you might consider creating another chapter with background information or more theory. In your introduction you can point your readers to those sections or chapters for more information. Always try to view introductions in relation to the other parts of your text. This allows you to avoid excessive repetition.

Let us take a closer look at the introduction. The topic usually is something like 'my research' or 'my thesis'; that is, the thing you will be introducing. The questions to be answered are the *what*, *how*, and *why* of this research. The answers naturally differ depending on the subject and the field of study, but we can say in the abstract what the *elements* of the story should be. Described in an outline, it might look like this:

### My research

- + **What** did I research?  
*Research problem / main research question*
  - ++ What does this entail?
    - 1 *Definitions*
    - 2 *Choices*
    - 3 *Presuppositions*
  
- + **Why** did I research this?
  - 1 *Impetus* (for example: a knowledge gap or actual problem)
  - 2 *Relevance* (what harm will be reduced or what goals will be achievable?)
  
- + **How** did I research this?
  - 1 *Methods*
  - 2 *Sub-questions*
  - 3 *Operationalizations*

To get a good flow, writers usually begin with the ‘why’ question; writers describe where their interest in this issue started. Next, rather smoothly, this leads to the main question or problem to be studied. This question will be explained in more detail, after which the writer adds more information about what the answers to this question will mean for science and/or for society. Finally, they address the how-question to convince the reader that this is not only relevant but also a good piece of research. The steps of the research often form the structure of the text. In that case they can be described in the form of a signpost of what is to be expected in the rest of the text. To sum up, the story in the end could look like this:

### My research

- + **Why** did I research this?
  - 1 *Impetus* (for example: a knowledge gap or actual problem)
- + **What** did I research?  
*Research problem / main research question*
  - ++ **What** does this entail?
    - 1 *Definitions*
    - 2 *Choices*
    - 3 *Presuppositions*
  - ++ **Why** specifically this research question?
    - Theoretical relevance*
    - Societal relevance*

+ **How** did I research this?

1 *Methods*

2 *Sub-questions*

3 *Operationalizations*

**How** did I organize the report?

*Table of contents*

Based on *Transcript* (1993), pp. 52-53

This is only a sample outline of an introduction. When you make your own outline, all the answers should be described in terms of your own research.