

## Part E

# Writing the Introduction and Literature Review

Having studied Parts A through D of this book, you are now ready to begin writing. Before beginning, however, determine whether the introduction needs to be separate from the literature review or whether the literature review should be integrated with the introductory remarks. The sample proposals near the end of this book illustrate the latter.

Topic 22 in this part of the book provides suggestions for those who will be writing a separate introduction, which is often required of thesis and dissertation students. Topic 23 deals with the integration of an introduction with a literature review. The remaining topics deal with the development of an effective literature review.

The following outline shows the components of a typical research proposal. We will refer to this outline at the beginning of each of the remaining parts of this book to help you get the big picture of where you are and where you will be going while writing your proposal.

- |                        |                        |
|------------------------|------------------------|
| I. Introduction        | ← <i>You are here.</i> |
| II. Literature Review* | ← <i>You are here.</i> |
| III. Method            |                        |
| A. Participants        |                        |
| B. Instrumentation     |                        |
| C. Procedures          |                        |
| IV. Analysis           |                        |
| V. Discussion**        |                        |

\*May be integrated with the Introduction.

\*\*Followed by writing a title and an abstract as well as developing a timeline.

# Notes

## A Separate Introduction

---

In research reports in academic journals, the literature review is usually integrated with the introductory statements. In theses and dissertations, it is more common to present an introduction in the first chapter and the literature review in the second chapter.

Following are some guidelines for writing a separate introduction, which might be required in a thesis, dissertation, or term project. Note that some of the guidelines will be explored again in more detail in later topics.

- The first paragraph should usually introduce the *specific* problem area in which you will be conducting research. For instance, if your problem area is the effects of rewards on creative behavior in the classroom, do *not* start with a discussion of the importance of education in a technological society. Instead, start by discussing why educators are interested in fostering creativity and ways in which they use rewards.
- As soon as possible, establish that your problem area is important. This can be done in a number of ways. For example, you might be able to point out that government agencies or prominent scholars have called for additional research in your area. You might also have some statistics showing that many people are affected by the problem you are proposing to investigate.
- Provide definitions of key terms early in the introduction. For example, how is *creativity* defined by other scholars? What definition will be used in your research?
- Provide an overview of the important points and trends in the literature you have read. Do not get too specific because the literature review will be presented in the second chapter. However, it would be appropriate to make statements such as, “As the literature review that follows shows, several experiments suggest that creativity is not enhanced by the provision of material rewards. This finding is consistent with the theory of...” (In the separate literature review, you will want to cite the specific experiments and provide some details on them.)
- Provide an overview of your proposed research methodology. What *type* of research are you proposing (e.g., qualitative, survey, and so on)? Why did you select that type?
- Point out why your particular study is needed. For instance, given that a number of studies on the effects of rewards on creativity have already been conducted, how will your study advance knowledge in this area? Will you use a better sample? Will you examine a different type of creativity? Will you measure creativity with a

new instrument? These issues usually should be addressed in general terms in the introduction because the specifics will be addressed later, in the proposal for the section on the proposed research methods.

- Discuss the broad implications of your proposed research in general terms. Note that a detailed discussion should be provided in the last section

of your proposal (i.e., the discussion section, covered later in this book).

By incorporating these suggestions, your introduction will provide a broad overview of your proposal, which will show your readers the big picture before they begin reading for details in the proposal's subsequent sections.

## Exercise for Topic 22

1. Determine whether you are required to write an introduction that is separate from the literature review. If you are, what guidelines, if any, exist for this activity?
2. Prepare a topic outline of what you will cover in your introduction. Refer to any guidelines that you have been given as well as to the suggestions in this topic.
3. Get feedback from instructors and colleagues on the topic outline you have written. Revise it in light of their suggestions.
4. Write a first draft of the introduction and have it reviewed.

## Topic 23

# An Integrated Introduction and Literature Review

---

The previous topic provided guidelines for writing a separate introduction. If you will be writing an introduction integrated with the literature review, you will be covering the same material discussed in Topic 22. However, you will be relying heavily on the literature for specifics to support your points.

As in the case of a separate introduction, the first paragraph should introduce the *specific* problem area—not some broad general topic. Also, use the first paragraph or two to establish the importance of your research problem, using specifics from the literature to support your contention. The first paragraph of a proposal is important because a strong beginning is likely to convince readers that the remainder of the proposal is worthy of careful consideration. It is so important that the next topic in this book is devoted to writing the first paragraph.

In an integrated introduction and literature review, key terms should be defined early. Usually, conceptual (dictionary-like) definitions are sufficient. Operational definitions that describe how you identified or measured the variables will be presented later in the proposal. The following example presents a conceptual definition that was drawn from another research article. Note that it is not necessary to create

new definitions if previously published ones are adequate.<sup>1</sup>

### Example

Empowerment is defined as making someone stronger and more confident, especially in controlling their life and claiming their rights (Pearsall & Hanks, 1998).<sup>2</sup>

Following the definitions, literature should be cited that shows the development of intellectual thought in your subject and a discussion of the major findings in previous research. The remaining topics in this part of the book provide guidance on how to do this. At this point, however, note that an effective literature review presents the literature *from your point of view*. In other words, you are responsible for organizing the literature into various topical groups and for showing your reader how it fits together (or fails to do so). In order to do this, you will need to add your own commentary and not simply write a string of summaries of individual studies.

As you write the literature review, point out which studies are most closely allied with your proposed study. In addi-

---

<sup>1</sup> All academic fields have dictionaries that provide definitions of terms written by experts in those fields. Consult your reference librarian for information on dictionaries such as *The Social Work Dictionary*, published by the National Association of Social Workers.

<sup>2</sup> Mok, E., Martinson, I., & Wong, T. K. S. (2004). Individual empowerment among Chinese cancer patients in Hong Kong. *Western Journal of Nursing Research*, 26, 59–75.

tion, discuss how your study is similar to (as well as different from) those previously published.

Typically, a literature review (whether it is written as a separate section or is integrated with the introduction) ends with the specific research questions, purposes, or hypotheses that form the basis of your proposal. If your literature review is well constructed,

your questions, purposes, or hypotheses will be seen by your readers as a natural outgrowth of the literature you have reviewed for them.

If you have not done so already, examine the beginnings of the model research proposals near the end of this book for examples of introductions integrated with literature reviews.

## Exercise for Topic 23

1. What key terms will you be defining at the conceptual level? Will you be creating new definitions or using those suggested by others? Explain.
2. Do you have a *point of view* on the literature you have read (i.e., do you have a sense of what it means *as a whole*)? Explain.
3. Do you anticipate that you will be able to show your readers how your research questions, purposes, or hypotheses naturally flow from the literature you are reviewing? Explain.

# Writing the First Paragraph(s)

The first paragraph of your proposal (whether it is a separate introduction or an integrated introduction and literature review) should identify the specific problem area. In Example 1, the “poor beginning” of the beginning of the first paragraph is not as specific as the “improved version” for a study on the validity of the Graduate Record Examination.

## Example 1

*Poor beginning (not sufficiently specific):*

The issue of college admissions has become of increasing concern to students, parents, and the public. This is especially true in the new millennium, in which many more students will be enrolling in college and eventually going on to graduate school.

*Improved version (specific to the research topic):*

The Graduate Record Examinations (GRE) General Test is a standardized test of verbal, quantitative, and analytical reasoning that is designed, primarily, to facilitate admissions to U.S. graduate schools. Since its inception in 1949, the original measure and several revisions have been widely used and frequently studied (e.g., see Briel, O'Neill, & Scheuneman, 1993...)<sup>1</sup>

The first paragraphs normally should establish (or start to establish) the importance of the problem.

One technique for establishing the current need for a study in an area is to cite specific statistics indicating the numbers of people affected by the problem

<sup>1</sup> Powers, D. E. (2004). Validity of Graduate Record Examinations (GRE) General Test scores for admissions to colleges of veterinary medicine. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 89, 208–219.

that will be investigated in the research. This was done by the authors of the following example.

## Example 2

It is estimated that 14% of total mortality (300,000 deaths annually) could be prevented through lifestyle improvements such as regular physical activity (McGinnis & Foege, 1993). Regular physical activity has been shown to help prevent and control a variety of chronic diseases and conditions, including cardiovascular disease (CVD), hypertension...<sup>2</sup>

Note that the statement in Example 2 is much stronger than a statement without specific statistics such as, “Many deaths could be prevented through lifestyle improvements such as regular physical activity.”

Like Example 2, the following example shows a first paragraph that is both specific to the research problem and supported by specific statistics.

## Example 3

Alcohol consumption among students is one of the primary health concerns for U.S. colleges and universities. Heavy consumption of alcohol is common among undergraduate students, with an estimated 48.6% of men and 40.9% of women classified as binge drinkers, according to the 2001 Harvard College Alcohol Study...<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Collins, R., Lee, R. E., Albright, C. L., & King, A. C. (2004). Ready to be physically active? The effects of a course preparing low-income multiethnic women to be more physically active. *Health Education & Behavior*, 31, 47–64.

<sup>3</sup> Usdan, S. L., Schumacher, J. E., & Bernhardt, J. M. (2004). Impaired driving behaviors among college students: A comparison of Web-based daily assessment and retrospective timeline followback. *Journal of Alcohol and Drug Education*, 48, 34–50.

Be prepared to write and rewrite the first paragraph(s) until you have a strong, specific beginning. Get feedback from

others, and carefully consider their assessments during this process.

## Exercise for Topic 24

1. Will you be using one of the techniques discussed in this topic in the first paragraph of your proposal? Explain.
2. From whom will you get feedback on your first paragraph?



# Using a Topic Outline

Developing and following a topic outline while writing helps to produce focused, logical prose. When dealing with a large amount of literature, it will also help you to avoid becoming overwhelmed by the volume of material to be covered.

In Topic 19, you were instructed to organize the literature you collected by topic, to put the name of each topic on a card, and to write the article numbers that touched on each topic on the cards. At this point, try sorting and resorting the cards to establish the order in which the topics will be addressed in your literature review. Then prepare a topic outline.

Here is a sample topic outline for a literature review:<sup>1</sup>

*Problem area:* Parents' feelings about the amount of time spent with their children

1. Name specific problem area
2. Amount of time parents spend with their children: historical and contemporary statistics
3. Factors associated with feelings about time with children
  - A. Gender of parents
    - (1) Mothers' feelings
    - (2) Fathers' feelings
  - B. Age of children
    - (1) Preschoolers
    - (2) School-aged children
    - (3) Adolescents
  - C. Parental employment
  - D. Family structure
    - (1) Single-parent households
    - (2) Two-parent households
  - E. Other factors

<sup>1</sup> This topic outline is loosely based on the work of Milkie, M. A., Mattingly, M. J., Nomaguchi, K. M., Bianchi, S. M., & Robinson, J. P. (2004). The time squeeze: Parental statuses and feelings about time with children. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 66, 739–761.

- (1) Race/ethnicity
  - (2) Parents' ages
  - (3) Socioeconomic status
  - (4) Gender differences in valuing science (interest)
4. Statement of the research questions

Next, you should begin writing while referring to your topic cards for appropriate references. Note that more than one reference may be used to substantiate a given point. In the following example, for instance, two studies are cited to support the statement in the second sentence.

## Example

Studies suggest that there are some cultural variations in parenting and children's time use by race and ethnicity. Black families tend to emphasize the importance of involvement in church activities and achievement at school (Julian, McKenry, & McKelvey, 1994; Rashid, 1985), and, indeed, black children spend more time than white children at church and school (Hofferth & Sandberg, 2001). Hispanic families tend to value children highly and integrate them into their daily lives (Slo-nim, 1991); hence, compared with white children, Hispanic children spend more time on housework....<sup>2</sup>

If you are writing a long review (say, three or more pages), it is very desirable to use major headings and sub-headings within the review to help your readers understand its structure. The topics in your topic outline can be used as such headings. Note that writing short essays about one subtopic at a time makes the overall task of writing a long review easier.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 742.

For a long literature review, consider writing a summary of the literature review. Usually, such a summary should be placed just before the statement of re-

search purposes, questions, or hypotheses that conclude the review.

## Exercise for Topic 25

1. Write a topic outline on which to base your literature review.
2. Do you anticipate using major headings/subheadings within your review? Explain.
3. Will you end your review with a statement of your specific research questions, purposes, or hypotheses? If not, where will it be placed?

## Being Selective and Critical

---

The literature covered in a typical research proposal should be selective. Generally, you should select those articles that bear most directly on your research plans. If there are many of this type, select and emphasize those that have the strongest research methodology (see Topic 20 for reminders on evaluating research literature). Other things being equal, more recent research should be emphasized over older research except when you are providing a historical overview of your research topic (see Topic 21).

If you will be citing only some of the studies that support a statement, use “e.g.,” meaning “for example,” as is done in Example 1.

### Example 1

Factors that have been found to predict individual differences in job performance include cognitive ability (e.g., Hunter & Hunter, 1984), conscientiousness (e.g., Barrick & Mount, 1991), goal orientation (e.g., Button, Mathieu, & Zajac, 1996), and motivation (e.g., Ambrose & Kulik, 1999).<sup>1</sup>

Note that if you are writing a research proposal for a thesis or dissertation, your committee may expect you to be comprehensive in your citations to demonstrate that you are familiar with all the literature that has a direct bearing on your proposal. Thus, you may not be permitted to use the technique of citing

---

<sup>1</sup> Yeo, G. B., & Neal, A. (2004). A multilevel analysis of effort, practice, and performance: Effects of ability, conscientiousness, and goal orientation. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 89, 231–247.

only examples of studies that support a certain point.

In addition to being selective, you should also be critical. You can warn your readers of tenuous results with various techniques, such as referring to a weak study as a pilot study or by referring to certain specific weaknesses, such as having a very small sample. Example 2 illustrates these techniques.

### Example 2

In a series of pilot studies, X was found to precede Y in most cases (Smith, 2004).

Based on interviews with just five teenage boys, Jones (2003) found that A is stronger than B.

You should also consider critiquing groups of studies on a given topic if they all have a common weakness (or strength). Example 3 illustrates this.

### Example 3

Almost all the available data on this topic were collected using mailed surveys with low response rates. Hence, little is known about the views of nonrespondents.

You should also point out gaps in the literature. Are there unstudied groups and variables? Have researchers tackled your problem only from one theoretical perspective and not others? A strong feature of any proposal is being able to show that the proposed study will help to fill a gap in our knowledge of an important topic.

## Exercise for Topic 26

1. How selective will you be when you write your literature review? Will you cite all the studies? Only the most important ones? Explain.
2. Do you have sufficient command of the literature that you have collected to be critical? Are there groups of articles with a common weakness? Explain.
3. Are there gaps in the literature? Will your study fill the gaps? Explain.