

## **Dissertations: Writing Introductions**

### **Dissertation Introductions: The Importance**

Introductions are important in any assignment. Each one contains a range of ideas that are essential to orientate the reader to the rest of the piece. However, they can cause difficulties for students who can often spend more time writing the Introduction than the other parts. When you consider that the other parts are usually worth more marks than the Introduction, this can be problematic.

The above also applies to Introductions in dissertations. Indeed, there could be an argument that Introductions in dissertations matter more than those in essays. The introduction serves as the foundation of your dissertation. According to Creswell (2014), it establishes the research problem and its significance. A well-written introduction grabs attention and guides readers through your work.

For example, consider this excerpt: "This study investigates the impact of social media on mental health among adolescents." This sentence immediately highlights the topic and its relevance. Such is the importance and length of a dissertation, it is essential that the Introduction is detailed, clear and explanatory. Doing this, ensures that the reader has no doubt about what the topic and focus of the work is, and also what subsequent chapters will contain.

When we think of what goes in an Introduction for an essay, there are some areas we expect to be covered. For example, background information on the topic being written about; maybe definitions of key terms; maybe a thesis statement. As well as this, a rationale as to why the topic needs to be discussed; a structure of the rest of the essay. Remember that Introductions in essays can often be two paragraphs or more paragraphs, especially if they are part of a larger section.

### **Dissertation Introductions: Good News**

The good news is, dissertation Introductions fundamentally follow the same structure as those found in essays. The difference is that, obviously, dissertation Introductions are more detailed. They may also be more flexible with the organisation of ideas, and they may have elements that are not in standard essay Introductions.

Dissertation Introductions, usually contain:

- Background information to set the scene (moving from general to specific)
- Information showing why the topic is important
- An outline of the problem or knowledge gap that will be addressed
- An outline of the main aims of the dissertation
- The structure of the rest of the dissertation

# Dissertation Introductions Structure

## Background

With the background information in the Introduction, you have to take a “step back”. Remember that the main topic of the dissertation will be researched and detailed in the Literature Review. So, with the Introduction, you need to detail it but in a more general way to what follows. In effect, you are almost doing a pre-literature review (minus the analysis). In the Introduction, there needs to be some connection by topic between the Introduction and the Literature Review chapter, ensuring that the background detail moves from general to specific.

For example, if your dissertation is related to job performance and productivity, the Introduction could contain background ideas about the world of work and then move onto how it was changed within the last ten years.

If your dissertation is about consumer buying behaviour in a specific group, the Introduction could have background ideas about how buying behaviour has changed, and then how this group may have been affected by the change. Remember: start general and then let the ideas become more specific.

What this also means is that when you are making notes for your Literature Review, be sure to also include notes that can be used for your Introduction. That way you all the ideas will link together and create a seamless flow for your work.

## Aims

If you have written an effective background, you will be able to finish by leading it into your aims and objectives. The way to do this, is to finish the background element by informing the reader what problems exist in the topic area. This could be the research gap that is not being filled or the rationale for need to do the research. For example, in a dissertation researching the aforementioned consumer group, you could include: "Despite growing evidence, limited research explores coping strategies for affected individuals."

Following this, you can then state the Introduction's aims and objective. For example, if the dissertation was about sustainable housing development, you could begin, "Thus the aim of the study is to...", and then continue, "...establish what constitutes sustainable development in relation to empty homes. From this, it intends to assess the extent to which the national and local policy framework is supportive of the sustainable development of empty properties."

In this part it is important that the language is precise and focussed so the reader is aware of what the dissertation will try and cover and nothing more. In the example, we know the

research will aim to "establish what constitutes sustainable development" and then "assess" how much the relevant frameworks are "supportive of...sustainable development."

## Objectives

It is common for the objectives to be written and listed in bullet points. Also, in the example, notice the use of the infinitive verb forms which, as with the aim, are focussed and varied in language

- To gain an understanding of the meaning of the term 'sustainability' in relation to the issue of empty homes
- To review all relevant national and local policy to determine the role that planning plays in refurbishment of empty homes, and the degree to which policies are coherent and comprehensive
- To situate the research within existing discourse relating to sustainable development and the issue of empty homes

When writing the objectives, remember their function and how they relate to the aim. If the aim is telling the reader what your research will attempt to do, the objectives inform the steps you will take to do this. This also means that you must ensure you do not have too many objectives listed or you may run out of words and run out of time.

## Road Map

Just like an essay introduction, the one for your dissertation will usually end with an outline of what the rest of the dissertation will cover. This way the reader knows what to expect and in what order.

## Dissertation Introductions: Take Aways

- Follow a logical structure - the one I listed above will work well
- Separate the Introduction into sections
- Use references in the background section
- You can use bullet points when you list your objectives (remember to use the infinitive of the verb e.g. "evaluate the extent to which consumers...")
- Include a rationale for doing it (the reason why the area is worth reporting)
- Include the research gap - what you aim to fill or contribute to
- Don't see the Introduction as unimportant - start strongly and make a good impression

Creswell, J. W. (2014). \*Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches\*. Sage Publications

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