

Academic Introductions and Titles

Prototypical Structure of Introductions: Problem, Thesis, Overview

Problem:

Usually the longest part, this introduces the reader to the problem the paper addresses. Sometimes the question can be directly stated, or often times the question is implied. Contains background information and reviews previous scholarship relevant to the problem. State why earlier attempts to solve the problem have been unsatisfactory and why the problem is significant and worth pursuing (mention of benefits, either pragmatic or intellectual, that will come from solving it).

Thesis:

This part explains the focus and purpose of the paper; you can state your thesis at this point or incorporate a “purpose statement” and include the thesis later.

Overview:

The final part gives the reader an overview of the whole paper, either by providing a brief summary of the argument or by forecasting its structure, e.g. First, I will show...the second part of the paper explores...finally I show...

How to Read and Write Academic Titles

Understanding how titles work will help you better understand the academic discourse system. Titles serve two functions: to help readers select what to read, and to get a nutshell sense of the whole paper/article. Titles need to be brief and detailed; they serve the function of introductions at the micro level. Below are the three most common conventions for academic titles:

1. **Question:** Some titles summarize the body of the paper with a question, e.g. *Will Patriarchal Management Survive beyond the Twentieth Century?*
2. **Summary of thesis or purpose:** Summary of paper’s thesis or purpose, e.g. *The Relationship between Client and Therapist Expectation of Improvement and Psychotherapy Outcome.*
3. **Two-part title with a colon:** Academic titles are frequently split into two parts, separated by a colon. The common approach is to present key words from the issue to the left of the colon and key words from the thesis to the right, e.g. *Money and Growth: An Alternative Approach.* Another pattern is to start with an arousing mystery phrase that becomes clear until the reader reads the paper/article. Following the colon the writer summarizes the paper’s key issue or thesis, e.g. *Fine Cloth, Cut Carefully: Cooperative Learning in British Columbia.*