The Writing Center
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO
DENVER | ANSCHUTZ MEDICAL CAMPUS

Introductions

Academic writers enter various conversations within their disciplines through their writing. Therefore, successful introductions effectively insert a voice into a conversation by generally meeting four expectations:

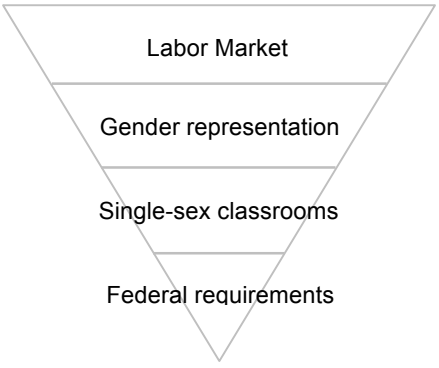
1. Acknowledging the conversation (context)
2. Contributing to the conversation (thesis statement)
3. Explaining the structure of the writer's contribution (forecast)
4. Justifying why the writer's contribution matters (exigency)

Let's look at how these four points work together with the help of a sample.

1) Acknowledging the Conversation (context)

Typically discussed as an inverted pyramid, the context provided in an introduction should move from broad to specific. This introduction, written for an upper-division education course, contextualizes the conversation by progressing through what others in the conversation have already said, moving from broad to specific:

> The future labor market of the United States faces serious shortages of workers in high-level science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields. Part of this is due to a marked discrepancy in gender representation as STEM fields are traditionally male-dominated. A growing body of research suggests that voluntary single-sex classrooms, especially in secondary school mathematics courses, can increase female enrollment in quantitative and scientific undergraduate majors. Though the morality and legality of single-sex classrooms has been fiercely debated, the federal government allows for such segregation as long as certain requirements are met.



2) Contributing to the Conversation (thesis statement)

After contextualizing the conversation, writers are now better qualified to contribute to that conversation with a thesis statement. Effective thesis statements:

- Seek to answer questions rather than raise them
- Are relevant to those involved in the conversation
- Examine the gray area of a conversation (i.e., are debatable)

For the "STEM fields and Single-Sex Education" sample, the student has entered the conversation by asserting this thesis statement:

> Therefore, it is important that more schools enact voluntary single-sex classrooms, which will profoundly and positively affect gender inequality in STEM academics and industries.

Notice how the writer's position offers an answer rather than a question (single-sex classrooms will counteract gender inequality); it is clearly related to the information given in the context, and it is debatable (single-sex classrooms "profoundly" and "positively" affecting gender in STEM fields is not a generally agreed upon truth).

3) Explaining the Structure of the Contribution (forecast)

Along with contributing to the conversation, it is helpful to provide readers with a forecast of the points covered in the body of the paper. Because academic writing values a logical ordering of ideas, nothing should come as a surprise; therefore, a preview of the main sections of the paper prepares readers for what is to come.

In the sample introduction, the writer has added a forecast:

> By first examining how single-sex classrooms provide an escape from inhibiting stereotypes, then looking at how the segregation of sexes in secondary schools increases the presence of female STEM undergraduate majors, and finally, by analyzing STEM field graduation and job-placement rates, this paper will show how such a radical education policy can change the composition of male-dominated fields.

Readers' expectations of the organization =

a. Single-sex classroom/stereotypes
b. Increased female undergraduates
c. Increased undergraduates = increased workforce

4) Justifying Why Your Position Matters (exigency)

Finally, consider offering readers a reason to keep reading. A good introduction not only inserts the writer's voice into the conversation but also proves why that voice matters, why that voice needs to be heard *now.* Exigency should be as concrete as possible, avoiding abstract idealism.

In the STEM sample, the writer can add exigency by directly relating the proposed course of action (more single-sex classrooms) to a real-world problem (the U.S. economy's dependence on STEM fields):

> With the U.S. economy increasingly relying on competitive STEM research, policymakers must consider new approaches and educational strategies that attract women, and by extension all students, to STEM fields.

Full Sample Introduction:

The future labor market of the United States faces serious shortages of workers in high-level science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields. Part of this is due to a marked discrepancy in gender representation as STEM fields are traditionally male-dominated. A growing body of research suggests that voluntary single-sex classrooms, especially in secondary school mathematics and science courses, can increase female enrollment in quantitative and scientific undergraduate majors. Indeed, despite some group's moral and legal objections, the federal government has safeguarded a school's right to segregate sexes in classrooms as long as certain requirements are met. Therefore, it is important that more schools enact voluntary single-sex classrooms, which will profoundly and positively affect gender inequality in STEM academics and industries. By first examining how single-sex classrooms provide an escape from inhibiting stereotypes, then looking at how the segregation of sexes in secondary schools increases the presence of female STEM undergraduate majors, and finally, by analyzing STEM field graduation and job-placement rates, this paper will show how such a radical education policy can change the composition of male-dominated fields. With the U.S. economy increasingly relying on competitive STEM research, policymakers must consider new approaches and educational strategies that attract women, and by extension all students, to STEM fields.

For further information on related concepts, please see the following handouts:
- Paragraph Development