

QGWSS Episode 2: Writing an introduction

- N: Hi, welcome back! In the last episode, we had an overview of the IMRD structure, that is, introduction, methods, results and discussion. This episode will help you learn to write the first IMRD section, the introduction. Many of the examples will come from this article.
- V: “Words for what? Contrasting university students’ receptive and productive academic vocabulary needs”
- N: To recap, the purpose of this article is to understand the range of academic vocabulary which students need for success at university. Receptive means being able to understand words when reading or listening. Productive means being able to use words when speaking or writing. Section headings can be worded in different ways. For example, this is called “introduction”, but this one is called “background to the study.” Whatever it’s called, the purpose of an introduction is to give background information, helping readers make sense of the text. There are three main approaches to doing this. We’ll call them “moves.” And there are strategies for accomplishing each move. The first move is to place the study within a meaningful area of research. Here are two strategies our article uses to do this. It identifies the problem of learning to use academic vocabulary as difficult, so we can see that it’s important to know how to help students with it.
- V: “It is widely acknowledged that learning vocabulary productively is significantly more challenging than learning vocabulary receptively.”
- N: Another strategy is to describe what we already know about the topic. Here’s an example:
- V: “EAP scholars and practitioners commonly classify some words as ‘academic’ on the basis that they are used more frequently in academic than non-academic settings.”
- N: Describing what we already know about a topic often involves a third strategy, referring to the existing research, like this:
- V: “To this end, Gardner and Davies are careful to make a distinction between “established disciplinary writing” as an “[established] target” and “emerging disciplinary writing” as more appropriately construed as a “process.”
- N: The next move is to identify a smaller part of the area that needs more research. To do this, you can choose different strategies. You can point out imperfections in the existing research.
- V: “Researchers have not treated this question in much detail.”
- N: You can also show that it’s important to continue an existing line of research:

- V: “Vocabulary is well established as an important topic within English for Academic Purposes (EAP). Several recent contributions to the broader area of EAP have considered the question of what constitutes academic vocabulary.”
- N: The next example uses another strategy, describing a knowledge gap, a question which the research literature has not yet answered.
- V: “It is therefore of interest to understand the nature of the gap between receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge. However, to date research has given considerably more attention to the former than the latter.”
- N: Now you've identified your broad area of research and a space within it where more work is needed, with the third move you announce how your work will fill that space. A common strategy for doing this is to state the purpose of the study.
- V: “However, [existing research] places greater emphasis on disciplinary differences rather than identifying a general productive academic (core) vocabulary and its relationship to receptive academic vocabulary. These latter two tasks are the focus of the present paper.”
- N: So when you write an introduction, you need to: identify a worthwhile research area; identify a topic within that area which needs more research; and tell your reader what you're going to do about it. A selection of strategies can help you do these things. And as you may have noticed from the examples, there are some common phrases which can help with each strategy. For example, this phrase used to identify a knowledge gap:
- V: “but no studies have investigated. . .”
- N: Other common phrases to introduce the gap include this:
- V: “It is still not known whether. . .”
- N: or
- V: “Currently there are no data on. . .”
- N: You can find more phrases like these for introducing your IMRD text in the Academic Phrasebank. Good luck with your introduction!