

Dissertation: Introductions, Conclusions and Literature Reviews

This guide seeks to explain in simple terms the structure and purpose of dissertations introductions, conclusions and literature reviews. This document is a generic, non-subject specific series of explanations; readers should bear in mind that there are subtle differences in each subject discipline. Your tutor is the subject specific expert in academic writing to whom ultimately you should defer. Across most subject disciplines however, introductions, conclusions and literature reviews follow a similar structure and purpose. The indicative examples given below are just that and should not be taken literally. To use the guide appropriately you will need to consider how you apply this guidance to your topic or subject discipline. If you have any doubts you should book a 1 to 1 with an Academic Skills Advisor at the 'Ask' desk in the University Library.

Introductions should have the following:

- What: Your focus, explain the specific question or topic you are examining. Clearly state what your principal argument will be in this dissertation.
- Why: Your rationale, how is your work original. (Note your What and Why will be discussed at length in your Literature Review.)
- How: say what your methodology, theoretical approach etc. will be. (Note: Your How will be discussed at length in your Methodology.)

Conclusions should have the following:

- What: restate your principal findings.
- Why: The importance of your findings in the academic field.
- How: Explain how your research question/s have been answered by the methods you employed and the evidence you have found.

Introduction: An example of a good title

As an example, let us presume that the dissertation title is something like 'The role of a Special Educational Needs co-ordinator in primary school management structures'. Note: this is a made-up title and introduction and should not be taken literally.

The '*What*', '*Why*' and '*How*' outlined in the first paragraph would be something like this:

This dissertation examines the Special Educational Needs Co-Ordinator's (SENCO) role within a primary school management structure in one school in the North West of England. This dissertation will seek to interrogate to what extent the limitations of the SENCO role in the management structure of the school aid or hinder the following of Government SEN agendas and policies. It will argue that though this is a single case it is indicative of the role of the SENCO: its limitations and opportunities for

supporting children with a Special Educational Need (SEN). The significance of the SENCO role is that it is often deemed as one of the key actors with responsibility for children with an SEN in a school. This dissertation will use a case-study methodology to examine the role of one SENCO in one school. It will use open ended interviews with the SENCO and the other senior managers within the school to assess the limitations and strengths of the SENCO's role (rather than the individual who fulfils that role) in delivering government policy at the local school level.

This introduction is now broken down into its three component parts: and each is examined in turn.

What:

FOCUS: This dissertation examines the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator's (SENCO) role within a primary school management structure in one school in the North West of England. This dissertation will seek to interrogate to what extent the limitations of the SENCO role in the management structure of the school aid or hinder the following of Government SEN agendas and policies.

PRINCIPAL ARGUMENT: It will argue that though this is a single case it is indicative of the role of the SENCO: its limitations and opportunities for supporting children with a Special Educational Need (SEN).

Here the focus and principal argument are stated first so the reader knows what the dissertation research is on and what the argument is that will be made throughout the dissertation. As this dissertation is a case study this could have been mentioned in the first sentence as well.

The Why and the How can now be considered together.

Why:

IMPORTANCE: The significance of the SENCO role is that it is often deemed as one of the key actors with responsibility for children with a SEN in a school.

This highlights the importance of the SENCO role. To improve it further if this role is under researched it would be useful to mention this here. Alternatively, there may be disagreements about the usefulness of this role: again, it would improve the sentence further to acknowledge this. To a certain extent this will highlight and emphasis further the rationale (reason for doing) your research.

How:

METHODOLOGY: This dissertation will use a case-study methodology to examine the role of one SENCO in one school. It will use open ended interviews with the SENCO and the other senior managers within the school to assess the limitations and strengths of the SENCO's role (rather than the individual who fulfils that role) in delivering government policy at the local school level.

The 'How' should be a very simple summary of the methodology adopted and the basic method you are using to gather your primary evidence.

Conclusions:

In writing the conclusions you should restate your principal findings, the importance of your findings in the academic field and explain how your research question/s have been answered by the methods you employed and the evidence you have found. To a certain extent this will replicate the introduction; in that it is a *summary*. Neither introduction nor the conclusion can outline anything in detail: both act as guides to the content within the rest of the dissertation.

Literature Reviews:

Every dissertation will have a literature review in some shape or form. A literature review needs to show that you understand the literature currently on or around your topic. However, its purpose is not only to demonstrate that you have a good grasp of academic work in your chosen field it should also identify what is NOT known and NOT agreed on. This is after all why you are doing this research: to address what is not known or agreed on. Therefore, your literature review does NOT need to explain every piece of academic work in your chosen field. You will need to provide a context for the topic you are examining and be aware of what is known and agreed on, but this is not the purpose of the literature review. Rather it needs to identify a specific gap in the literature. It is your rationale explained at length and should explain why this research is worth doing: what is the significance of this topic, why is a lack of research on this topic something which is worth rectifying. A literature review should identify key themes, authors and ideas for your specific topic: it does not need to capture every detail of the debate. You should also avoid quoting lots of authors word for word and at length.

On occasion it is *better* to paraphrase multiple authors: for example, 'Numerous authors have argued x (see for example Smith 2010, Jones 2009 and Bloggs 2001). Then acknowledge the counter arguments: for example, 'However other authors have suggested y (see for example Cooper 2011, Johnson 2005 and Butcher 2000). Then give your position or your arguments for x as against y. Paraphrase or quote single authors sparingly; you do not have time or space in a literature review to give a detailed account of each author. Generally speaking, avoid long quotations unless you are going to discuss one or two of them at length, using other authors, work to interrogate these quotations in detail.