




# Writing your Introduction & Conclusion chapters

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# Overview

- How important are your intro & conclusion?
- Purposes of the intro & conclusion in a thesis
- Relationships between these and other chapters
- Functional parts of the intro & conclusion
- Variations and options in structuring the parts
- Applying this to your own drafts or plans
- How & when to write your intro & conclusion





# How important are your introduction and conclusion chapters?

**For the examination of your thesis, they are VERY important**

**Examiners tend to read the abstract and intro first, and many skip next to the conclusion before reading other chapters.**

*An overwhelming conclusion from this research was the extent to which examiners' first impressions counted. [...] The initial impressions of the quality of the thesis are usually formed by the end of the second or third chapter of the thesis (Mullins & Kiley, 2002)*



# Why are they so important?

1. The first reason is the **specific purposes** of these chapters
  - The intro has the purposes of identifying the need for your research, your specific topic & questions, and making promises about what you will deliver in the rest of the thesis. It is where you first show that you are **making a meaningful and original contribution to knowledge**. It is also where you first give your reader a map: a chance to **predict what is coming up** in other chapters.
  - The conclusion has the purposes of confirming that you have **delivered on your promises**, and that the world is now going to be different as a result of your research. It is where you confirm that the thesis hangs together as a whole, and that you are **a reliable narrator**.

# Why are they so important?

2. The second reason is exactly because they are **being read first**, while examiners are getting a feel for who you are as a researcher and writer. So if you get these chapters right (content, structure, clarity, writing style, polishing), that has arguably more impact on your examiners than a few grammatical mistakes later in your results chapter.
3. The third reason is that the introduction and conclusion chapters are **so closely linked** to other chapters. They (especially the introduction) are a major part of the scaffolding which holds together all the other chapters. This means that they are very important in the whole thesis, for both **clarity** and for creating a **compelling whole narrative**.

Abstract

Intro

Lit Review

Methodology

Results

Discussion

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Abstract

Intro

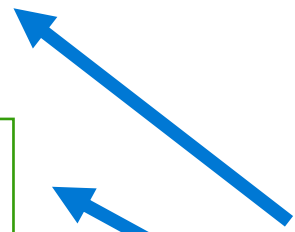
Lit Review

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What links the introduction and the literature review?

Abstract

Intro

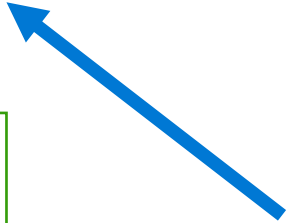
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How are the introduction and methodology chapters linked?



Abstract

Intro

Lit Review

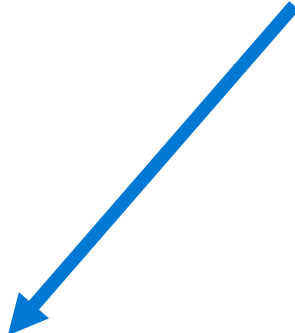
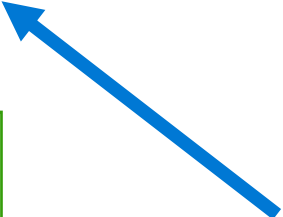
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What links the introduction and discussion chapters?



Abstract

Intro

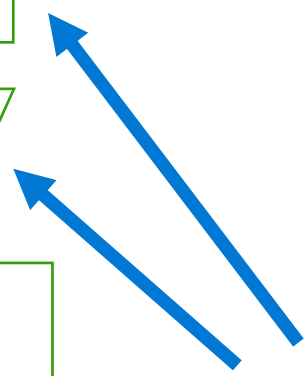
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How are these similar?  
How are they different?

Abstract

Intro

Lit Review

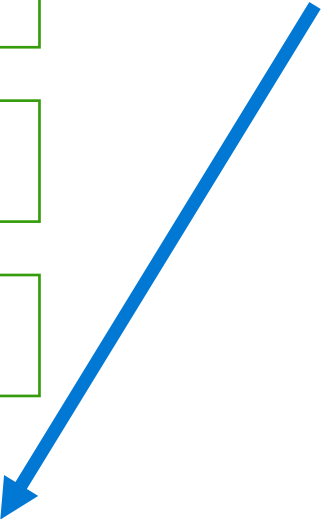
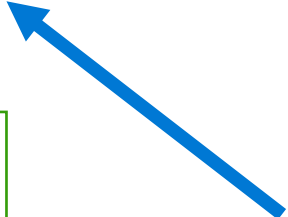
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How are the introduction and conclusion chapters related?





# Functional parts of the introduction chapter

1. Context for the research - e.g. industry context, policy, environmental, economic, social context
2. Need or significance of the research topic within this context
3. Specific research aims and research questions
4. Overview of thesis structure, chapter by chapter

**Typical order goes from general to specific to more specific.** This is often compared to a funnel, bringing the reader from the wider outside context for your research, into the narrower research questions, and then into your specific thesis structure.

# Functional parts of the introduction chapter

**Look at the handout examples, Text A to Text F**

1. First, notice the variability in the examples. Is anything consistent across all examples? Which ones are most similar to theses in your field?
2. Look more closely at the functional parts of the introductions...
  - Research context: What type of context is chosen? Are there any which have more than one type?
  - In each example, can you predict which section sets out the research questions?
  - Can you easily predict where the thesis structure will be outlined? If not, do you predict it will still be somewhere?



# Functional parts of the introduction chapter

## Variations in the introduction chapter:

- Traditional monograph versus thesis by publication
- Inclusion of literature review, or parts of the literature review – e.g. relating to research context
- Any others which you see in your field, or that you are considering for your own introduction chapter?

# Functional parts of the conclusion chapter

**... but first...**

**The conclusion is sometimes a separate chapter and sometimes combined with/into the discussion chapter, or a 'discussion and conclusions' chapter**

**... SO...**



Abstract

Intro

Lit Review

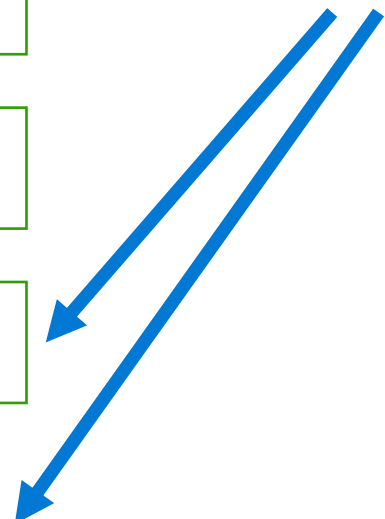
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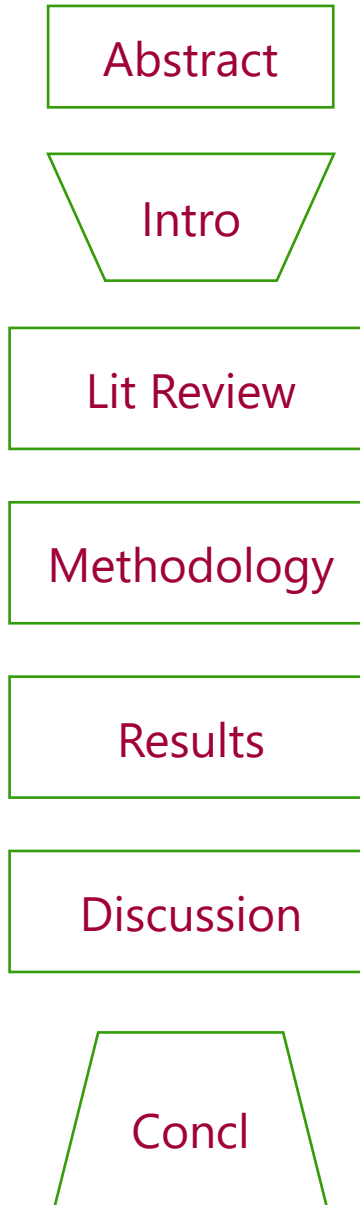
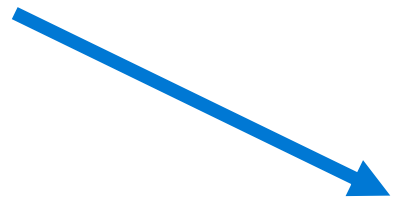
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Frequently grouped together into one chapter. Wherever they sit, whatever the chapter is called, all the functional parts must be achieved *somewhere*.





Interprets your analysis of the data. Relates the findings back to the research questions and aims. Discusses anything unexpected and proposes explanations. Shows how findings are similar or different to those in previous literature, and comments on why this may be.



Shows how the promises you made in the introduction have been kept. That is, summarises the top findings and confirms that research aims have been achieved and research questions answered/addressed. Discusses limitations of the research. Emphasises the significance & contribution of the research. Indicates directions for future research.

Abstract

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# Functional parts of the conclusion chapter

**'Mirror image' of the introduction chapter. Instead of general to specific, the conclusion moves from the specific to the more general to the wider context**

1. Very brief summary of top findings & claims
2. Confirms that research questions have been answered and research aims addressed
3. Identifies limitations
4. Emphasises the contribution to knowledge & significance, referring to the research context from the introduction
5. Makes recommendations and proposals for future research

# Functional parts of the conclusion chapter

Look at the examples in the handout, from Text G to L

Can you find any of these functional parts?

- Summary of key findings and/or claims
- Limitations
- Implications for future research
- Implications/significance for the research context

What differences do you see between the level of detail in the conclusions and the level of detail in the introductions?

# Functional parts of the conclusion chapter

Look at Text M in the handout

- Are any key findings summarised?
- Are limitations identified?
- Is there anything included which you might expect to find in a discussion chapter?
- Are implications identified? If so, what type of context are the implications related to? (e.g. the research context, industry context, policy context, social, environmental, etc.)

# Functional parts of the conclusion chapter

## Possible variations in the structure of the conclusion...

- Folded in with discussion chapter
- Range of titles – e.g. "synthesis", "discussion & recommendations"
- Some functional parts may be shuffled between discussion and conclusion – e.g. limitations
- Other variations which you have seen in your field?  
Any variations which you are planning to use in your own thesis?



# Applying this to your own draft or plan

Work with your own introduction draft or plan

(If you don't have one, work with the example in the second handout.)

1. Are all the functional parts present? Is there anything missing? Anything you are still working out?
2. Is it easy for your reader to find the functional parts and see how they link?
3. How do you feel about the context for your research, as it is currently presented in your draft/plan? Have you shown how your research is needed, valuable, timely? Do you have one type of context, or more than one?
4. Is it clear what you are promising the reader? Do a dot-point conclusion draft.

# How and when to write your introduction and conclusion chapters

You can draft your intro very early, when you have the ingredients (functional parts)... It's a good idea to do this, or at least make a **detailed** plan. (Very handy for mental clarity!)

1. What is the context for your research? Why is it useful, interesting, timely?
2. What are the research aims? What are the specific research questions?
3. How is your thesis (going to be) structured?

You will have these planned at the confirmation of your candidature... But **things** always **change** ... so your introduction always needs to be revised **at the end**



# How and when to write your introduction and conclusion chapters

Some things to consider for writing your introduction:

- You can revisit the draft/plan of your introduction, whenever you need to reconnect with the 'big picture' of your research, and when **things change** in other chapters.
- Frequent re-writes will also contribute to the **polish** of the intro chapter, which is important for your examiners' first impressions.
- You learn a lot, quickly, by looking at **examples of other people's introduction chapters**. Try to find multiple examples, which are related to your own field and type of research. Think critically about these: what would/wouldn't work for you?

# How and when to write your introduction and conclusion chapters

At the time of your final rewrite, when all other chapters are complete:

1. Write your conclusion with your introduction open in another window. They need to **match**: the promise and the delivery, the in-breath and the out-breath.
2. Check that all the key relationships **match** between the introduction and the other chapters, and between the conclusion and the other chapters – e.g. is it very clear that the gap identified in the literature review matches the research aims and questions in the introduction?
3. Give your introduction and abstract a ‘spa treatment’ for clarity: Do an extra level of editing focussing on flow between sentences, subheadings, topic sentences, etc.

# How and when to write your introduction and conclusion chapters

## Reflection and discussion

- What is your preferred way to approach your introduction & conclusion chapters?
- What is your next step?
  - e.g. are you clarifying the ‘ingredients’ (functional parts), such as the context for your research, or clearly stated ‘big picture’ research aims?
  - are you looking for examples of other people’s intro / conclusion chapters?
  - are you wrangling your chapters to line up, match and tell a coherent story?
- Anything to share with the group: questions, challenges that you are currently working with or strategies that you have found helpful?

**Thank you & happy writing!**

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# References

Mullins, G., & Kiley, M. (2002). It's a Ph.D., not a Nobel Prize: How experienced examiners assess research theses. *Studies in Higher Education*, 27, 369-386. doi:10.1080/0307507022000011507