

“Create a Research Space” (CARS) Model of Research Introductions¹

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Sometimes getting through the introduction of a research article can be the most difficult part of reading it. In his CARS model, Swales describes three “moves” that almost all research introductions make. We’re providing a summary of Swales’s model here as a kind of shorthand to help you in both reading research articles and writing them. Identifying these moves in introductions to the articles you read in this book will help you understand the authors’ projects better from the outset. When you write your own papers, making the same moves yourself will help you present your own arguments clearly and convincingly. So read through the summary now, but be sure to return to it often for help in understanding the selections in the rest of the book.

Move 1: Establishing a Territory

In this move, the author sets the context for his or her research, providing necessary background on the topic. This move includes one or more of the following steps:

Step 1: Claiming Centrality

The author asks the **discourse community** (the audience for the paper) to accept that the research about to be reported is part of a lively, significant, or well-established research area. To claim centrality the author might write:

“Recently there has been a spate of interest in . . .”

“Knowledge of X has great importance for . . .”

This step is used widely across the academic disciplines, though less in the physical sciences than in the social sciences and the humanities.

and/or

Step 2: Making Topic Generalizations

The author makes statements about current knowledge, practices, or phenomena in the field. For example:

¹Adapted from John M. Swales’s *Genre Analysis: English in Academic and Research Settings*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990.

“The properties of X are still not completely understood.”

“X is a common finding in patients with . . .”

and/or

Step 3: Reviewing Previous Items of Research

The author relates what has been found on the topic and who found it. For example:

“Both Johnson and Morgan claim that the biographical facts have been misrepresented.”

“Several studies have suggested that . . . (Gordon, 2003; Ratzinger, 2009).”

“Reading to children early and often seems to have a positive long-term correlation with grades in English courses (Jones, 2002; Strong, 2009).”

In citing the research of others, the author may use *integral citation* (citing the author’s name in the sentence, as in the first example above) or *non-integral citation* (citing the author’s name in parentheses only, as in the second and third examples above). The use of different types of verbs (e.g., *reporting verbs* such as “shows” or “claims”) and verb tenses (past, present perfect, or present) varies across disciplines.

Move 2: Establishing a Niche

In this move, the author argues that there is an open “niche” in the existing research, a space that needs to be filled through additional research. The author can establish a niche in one of four ways:

Counter-claiming

The author refutes or challenges earlier research by making a counter-claim. For example:

“While Jones and Riley believe X method to be accurate, a close examination demonstrates their method to be flawed.”

Indicating a Gap

The author demonstrates that earlier research does not sufficiently address all existing questions or problems. For example:

“While existing studies have clearly established X, they have not addressed Y.”

Question-raising

The author asks questions about previous research, suggesting that additional research needs to be done. For example:

“While Jones and Morgan have established X, these findings raise a number of questions, including . . .”

Continuing a Tradition

The author presents the research as a useful extension of existing research. For example:

“Earlier studies seemed to suggest X. To verify this finding, more work is urgently needed.”

Move 3: Occupying a Niche

In this move, the author turns the niche established in Move 2 into the *research space* that he or she will fill; that is, the author demonstrates how he or she will substantiate the counter-claim made, fill the gap identified, answer the question(s) asked, or continue the research tradition. The author makes this move in several steps, described below. The initial step (1A or 1B) is obligatory, though many research articles stop after that step.

Step 1A: Outlining Purposes

The author indicates the main purpose(s) of the current article. For example:

“In this article I argue . . .”

“The present research tries to clarify . . .”

or

Step 1B: Announcing Present Research

The author describes the research in the current article. For example:

“This paper describes three separate studies conducted between March 2008 and January 2009.”

Step 2: Announcing Principal Findings

The author presents the main conclusions of his or her research. For example:

“The results of the study suggest . . .”

“When we examined X, we discovered . . .”

Step 3: Indicating the Structure of the Research Article

The author previews the organization of the article. For example:

“This paper is structured as follows . . .”