

The following is an excerpt from “**Writing Economic Theory Papers**” by **Simon Board and Moritz Meyer-ter-Vehn, October 2018.**

The Introduction

A canonical Introduction [of a theory paper] has the following steps.

1. Broad motivation (1-2 paragraphs). Why is this area interesting? The paper can be motivated by an application (“Why does inequality rise after recessions?”) or via the literature (“Coase’s conjecture states that a monopolist who cannot commit cannot price above marginal cost”).
2. The contribution (1-2 paragraphs). See above. It’s a good idea to have the line “The contribution of this paper is...” in order to force yourself to be explicit. For example, if your model and results are novel, then you might want a paragraph on both. Remember: people don’t know your model at this point, so everything should be self-explanatory.
3. Explain the model (1-2 paragraphs). If readers are going to understand your results, you need to explain the setup. This does not need to be formal, but it needs to sketch out the main elements that drive your results.
4. Explain your results (1-2 pages). The aim is to give an overview of your main insights. Explain what you are doing, the driving forces behind your results and some important implications. This should inform readers who will only read the introduction (i.e. the majority of readers) and whet the appetite of those who are interested in this area.
5. Explain the relationship between your results and related work (1-2 pages). The aim is not to survey the literature, but to elaborate on your contribution. Never criticize others work explicitly: it is unnecessary and those authors may be your referees. Instead of saying “Arrow and Debreu (1954) ignored market power” say “we develop Arrow and Debreu’s canonical model to include market power”.

The Introduction (generalized version by Miri Stryjan adapted from the above list.)

A canonical Introduction (non-theory papers) has the following steps.

1. Broad motivation (1-2 paragraphs). Why is this area interesting? The paper can be motivated by a real life application (“Why does inequality rise after recessions?”) or via the literature (“In their influential analysis of the determinants of growth in Sub-Saharan Africa, Easterly and Levine (1997) singled out the effect of ethnic divisions.”).
2. What THIS paper does (1-2 paragraphs). See above. It’s a good idea to explicitly write “In this paper, I...” or “The contribution of this paper is...” in order to force yourself to be explicit. *For a thesis, that does not typically have a large new contribution, you can instead write “This thesis examines the question of X”. Also briefly explain how you do this (e.g. “through conducting a literature review”).*

Remember: readers don’t know your topic well at this point, nor do they know how you have chosen to address it, so everything should be self-explanatory.

3. Explain in some more detail what you do in the paper/thesis. *If you have a theoretical/conceptual framework that guides the rest of your thesis, you can also*

present this here. If you use data, you can mention what data this is, and what type of analysis you perform with the data. If you divide the literature review into different sections, you can introduce these here.

4. Explain your results (1-2 pages). The aim is to give an overview of your main insights. Explain what you are doing, the driving forces behind your results and some important implications. *This part can be shorter in a thesis.*
5. Explain the relationship between your results and related work (1-2 pages). The aim is not to survey the entire literature, but to elaborate on your contribution/put your paper in context. Never criticize others work explicitly. Instead of saying “Arrow and Debreu (1954) ignored market power” say “we develop Arrow and Debreu’s canonical model to include market power”. *This part is often longer in many empirical economics papers, which often do not have a separate literature review. In a thesis that is (mainly) a literature review, this part can be quite short.*