

## Unit Eight

# Constructing a Research Paper II

In this final unit, we deal with the remaining parts of a research paper in this order:

Introductions

Discussion sections

Titles

Abstracts

Acknowledgments

### Introductions

It is widely recognized that writing Introductions can be slow, difficult, and troublesome for many writers. A very long time ago, the Greek philosopher Plato remarked, “The beginning is half of the whole.” Indeed, eventually producing a good Introduction section always seems like a battle hard won.

Writing the Introduction of an RP is particularly troublesome. In some kinds of texts, such as term papers or shorter communications (including case reports), it is possible to start immediately with a topic or purpose statement, as in these examples.

The purpose of this paper is to . . . .

This paper describes and analyzes . . . .

My aim in this paper is to . . . .

In this case report, we discuss . . . .

However, this kind of opening is increasingly uncommon in longer and more substantial RPs (only a small percentage of contemporary published RPs start in this way). In fact, statements like these typically come at or near the end of an RP Introduction. Why is this? And what comes before?

We believe that the answer to these questions lies in two interconnected motivations. The first part of the answer lies in the need to appeal to the readership. When a paper is written to fulfill a course requirement, the reader is set and known. (Indeed the reader is *required* to read and evaluate your paper!) On the other hand, a paper that is designed for the external world needs to appropriately situate the work within the existing body of related research and attempt to attract an audience. We can illustrate the importance of these purposes by taking the case of one of those few published papers that actually does start by announcing the present research. Here is the opening sentence of the Introduction.

In this paper, we address the problem of scheduling and balancing sports competitions over multiple venues (Urban and Russell, 2003).

The Urban and Russell paper, “Scheduling Sports Competitions over Multiple Venues,” was published in a journal called the *European Journal of Operational Research*, a journal whose audience is researchers and practitioners working in the area of Operational Research/Management Science. Doubtless, the very specific opening to the Urban and Russell paper will appeal immediately to those researchers actively involved in this specific topic. On the other hand, it may “turn off” many other readers of the journal—readers who have no direct interest in the actual scheduling of sporting events.

To explain the second half of the answer as to why simple purpose statements are uncommon first sentences, we believe a metaphor—that of *competition* as it is used in Ecology—is relevant for the writing of RP Introductions. Just as plants compete for light and space, so writers of RPs compete for acceptance and recognition. In order to obtain this acceptance and recognition, many writers will employ a widely used organizational pattern. In this first task, we would like you to try to identify this pattern.