

How to Frame an Argument

Introductions differ as much as their intended readers, but behind them is a shared pattern that readers look for in all introductions, regardless of field. That common structure consists of three elements:

- Contextualizing background
- Statement of the problem
- Response to the problem

Context + Problem + Response

STEP 1: Establish Common Ground

The opening context is called common ground because it establishes a shared understanding between reader and writer about the larger issue the writer will address. Introductions open with a stable context of a common ground—some apparently unproblematic account of research already known.

STEP 2: State Your Problem

Once you establish common ground, disrupt it with a problem. The statement of a research problem has two parts:

- a *condition* of incomplete knowledge or understanding, and
- the *consequences* of that condition, a more significant gap in understanding

The writer then disrupts it with a problem, saying in effect: Reader, you may think you know something, **but** your knowledge is flawed or incomplete.

STEP 3: State Your Response

Once you disrupt your reader's context with a problem, they expect you to resolve it with your main point.

As we have investigated environmental threats, our understanding of chemical processes in acid rain and the buildup of carbon dioxide has improved, allows us to better understand their effects on the biosphere. *common ground* [Sounds good]. **But recently the processes that thin the ozone layer have been found to be less understood than once thought** *destabilizing condition* [So what?]. We may have labeled hydroflourocarbons as the chief cause incorrectly . . .

Source: Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams, *The Craft of Research*, Third Edition, New York & London: The University of Chicago Press, 2008.