

Tips for Writing an IQP Proposal

The Introduction Chapter

When students write their Introduction. They should consider the arguments or “rhetorical moves” that they are trying to make. An Introduction for this type of report usually requires five rhetorical moves, as follows: 1) establish the general topic or problem; 2) introduce the specific problem or issue; 3) define the scope of problem or issue by summarizing previous work, what is already known, and/or what has already been done; 4) create a research space by identifying a gap in previous work or opportunities for extension or new work; 5) establish the project by stating its goal, how it was achieved (objectives), justifying it, and suggesting its implications and possible impact. A shortened example can be found in rhetorical moves.

Take a look at the Introduction of some well-written IQPs, and try to detect these five moves. Note that some of these moves may require one or more paragraphs each, while others can be accomplished in a sentence or two. The idea is to start by outlining the argument and then make sure to tell a connected story that flows logically from one stage to the next. Try to be persuasive by using understatement, and by providing evidence for any claims you make.

Considerations for the Background Chapter

- 1 Ask whether your Background chapter provides readers all they need to understand your project. Does this chapter formulate clearly the problem you’re working on? Does it analyze the causes of the problem? Does it explain what approaches have been or could be taken to address the problem? Does it provide readers with needed information so they’ll see the significance of what you’re doing? Does it display this information so it’s easy to understand? Does it explain the meaning of the information? This Background chapter should set you up so that the Methodology you propose in the next section will seem to be the logical and inevitable response the problem you’ve formulated.
- 2 Is there a logical “storyline” and sequencing of topics?
- 3 Do you prepare readers for that storyline with a good introductory paragraph at the start of the chapter and at the start of each major section?
- 4 Are there smooth transitions between sections?
- 5 Are you *synthesizing* information into key points for readers rather than merely transferring information? You should be integrating multiple sources, contrasting alternative viewpoints, and telling readers what they should draw from your background research.
- 6 Are you distinguishing between fact and opinion? Are you acknowledging source materials correctly? (See guidelines on next page!)
- 7 Check your writing at the paragraph level: is there a good topic sentence that conveys the

- main point of each paragraph, and is all information in the paragraph related to that theme?
- 8 Have you cited all your sources? Every paragraph should really have at least one citation.
 - 9 Be sure to avoid unsubstantiated claims. See the guide on the following page for citing sources and providing authority and evidence behind any claims.

Some Guidelines for Acknowledging Source Materials

First, carefully read relevant sections in your writing guidebook.. Note that the only materials that do not require acknowledgement are common knowledge, facts available in a variety of sources, and your own findings (which don't belong in a background chapter). That implies that everything else requires acknowledgement! However, certain types of material require more than a footnote; they require explicit identification of the source in the text, to establish the nature of the authority behind the quote or assertion.

Direct quotations should be used very sparingly. In general, you should be paraphrasing and/or summarizing most source materials (see your writing guide for help on doing this). However, sometimes the actual wording itself, or the person who said it, will be of interest to the reader. In that case, it is typically appropriate to explicitly acknowledge the source in the text as well as providing a footnote:

Thai food is very complex; experienced world traveler Fabio Carrera has referred to it as “a party in your mouth.”

Facts not widely known or easily available are cited in the normal way. Because they are facts, there is typically no need for you to identify the source explicitly in the text:

Pad Thai is a noodle dish with origins in both Chinese and Indian cuisines.

Judgments, opinions, claims, and arguable assertions are by far the most challenging type of content to properly acknowledge, since they fall on a continuum. The more controversial, extreme, or subjective the content, the more necessary it is to explicitly indicate the source. Here are some examples.

Although the following is not a fact, it is a mild assertion that few would argue with, and you could probably get away with it as long as it was followed by some evidence:

Thai food is considered one of the great cuisines of the world.

However, note that you can actually turn the statement into a fact by attributing it:

Several renowned critics have identified Thai cuisine as one of the world's greatest cuisines 4,5,6,.

As the assertion, judgment, or opinion gets more controversial or subjective, the writer must get more careful:

Weininger concluded that Thais have developed the world's most complex and interesting cuisine.

Extreme positions require great care, and perhaps some balance:

Vaz has gone so far as to claim that Thai food will bring diners total consciousness; however, most authors have been content with praising the food's physiological effects.

When proofreading your background chapter, if you find yourself (or anticipate us) asking “says who?” then you need to provide at least a footnote, and quite possibly an explicit acknowledgement.

The Methodology Chapter

- 1 For the proposal, this chapter is typically in present or future tense. Once you start working on the final report, you will shift to past tense, even for steps that you haven't yet completed. For example, “We will accomplish our goal by...” will eventually be changed to “We accomplished our goal by....”
- 2 In a similar manner as the start of the Background chapter, write an introductory paragraph, positioned between the Methodology heading and the first section heading, that provides a preview of the chapter for the reader.
- 3 Make sure that the *purpose* of all the steps are clear (how do they lead to your goal) before jumping into details of technique.
- 4 As a guide to what should be in this chapter, consider all of the *how, why, who, what, where, when* information associated with your objectives. Another litmus test is that someone should be able to repeat your work using information provided in this chapter and in associated Appendices. (For example, a general idea of the nature of interview questions should be evident in this chapter, but you could put the actual schedule of interview questions in an Appendix if you decide it would disrupt the main body of the document.)
- 5 Draw upon best practices for your methods in the literature and cite them; doing so gives you more credibility as researchers.
- 6 Justify your choice of methods (the *whys*) and acknowledge their limitations as well.