

Academic writing uses a standard construction to make it more efficient for readers to navigate the document according to their needs, to find specific information or arguments. One part of the standardisation is the order of the story. Most papers follow a strict sequence of sections, often with standard headings.

There usually are not explicit headings for Review of the existing literature and state of the art, and for the New Idea, the contribution of this paper (see functions).

TIPS PER SECTION

- = What (function of the section)
- = How (tips for writing it)

Title

- The title is the first thing people will see: make it appealing and informative (AIDA).
- People will see your title in a table of contents, imagine how your title looks in a list.

Authors and Affiliation

- It is common to say your name, where you work, and provide contact information.
- During blind (peer) review, the presentation is anonymous, and this information should not be in the paper.

Abstract

- Many readers read the abstract **instead of the paper**. The abstract summarizes not only the introduction and main idea, but also what was done and what was found.
- Try to write your abstract before you write your paper. It helps you define your main point and goal, which makes writing the rest easier.
(Often, writers leave the abstract to the last because they 'will have to rewrite it in the end anyway' they are right and wrong: right because they will write it later, and wrong because they will have to rewrite it, and most of the rest of the paper, more often if they didn't choose their main message).

Introduction

- The introduction leads the reader into the problem field where the paper is situated; it starts in general terms, and explains the focus of the paper, the question addressed.
- It may flow directly into state of the art and new idea.
In writing the introduction, do not assume that the reader has read the abstract.

Review and New Idea

- When you have indicated your question/focus/problem, explain the state of the art: what is already

known about this in the literature, maybe discuss existing products, etc. This part makes clear what the new contribution of the paper is.

- Usually these parts are in a section in or after the introduction, and carry a heading that indicates the content, e.g. "Gift-giving in Western culture". It often works best to first review the status quo, then explain your new idea, and show how it fits in and adds to that.
If you write an empirical paper testing a hypothesis, that hypothesis is explained here.

Method

- The method section describes what you did with enough detail for the reader to
 - understand where your results came from.
 - repeat the essence of your method and find results that can be compared to yours.
- Don't give too much or too little...
The method is a description of what you did in the past, so, use the past tense ('we *asked* five people'). The methods section should convince the reader that your method was appropriate for the goal of your study (to explore an area widely, or to test a specific hypothesis).
For a literature review paper, the methods part describes how you sought, found, and selected the sources that you review.

Results

- Especially in empirical papers reporting a quantitative measurement or test of a hypothesis, results can be straight data, and their summarizing statistics, presented as such, presented as a fact, without discussion.

Discussion*

- In the discussion, you interpret the results, and make sense of what they mean for your story.
For explorative, qualitative studies, separating data and interpretation can become very difficult for both reader and writer, and a single section Results and Discussion is made. Still it helps the reader if the author clearly separates data from interpretation.

Conclusion*

- The conclusion is the last section of the paper. In it, you move back to the general level of the introduction, explain what the importance is of what you found, and indicate broader impact of the work, and possible future steps for research or application.

* *Don't let the headings confuse you: in the discussion section you 'draw conclusions' from the data; in the Conclusion section you round off the story.*

References

- The references appear at the very end of the paper, and are structured following the rules of the journal. Usually they are presented in alphabetical order on author.

Do you need to use 'Introduction, review, method,...' as headings for your sections? It depends. If you are sending this to a journal or conference, these will have explicit instructions, down to the level of spelling, fonts, and spacing.

Unless specific headings are specifically asked, you can vary, but notice that they serve a function for the navigating reader. Some are more standard (everyone knows the first text is the introduction, but people may want to skip to the discussion, or find the methods section).

Sometimes you can do both 'Discussion: main themes from this study' or 'Discussion: people prefer yellow'. But the standard headings are recognised by all readers (less exciting, but functional).

References should allow readers to find the original source in a library.

There are hundreds of rule sets, one of the most common formats is the APA style used in the cartoon papers.