Introduction

In the introduction of a research paper, you will briefly introduce the topic, explain the problem or research question (what it is and why it is important to address) and state your thesis.

The key to writing a solid introduction is to stay focused on the key details of your paper. By consulting your paper outline and prioritizing information, you should have little trouble organizing your introduction and staying focused as you write it.

Writing an Introduction

It helps to think of the introduction paragraph as an extremely concise version of the body of your paper. The reader should be able to gather all key information and want to learn more about the topic, as well as your research and proposed solutions.

The First Sentences

The example below illustrates the opening sentences of a research paper about overfishing, from the opening sentence to the research problem.

1. According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) (2016), nearly 30% of the world’s marine fish stocks are overfished to biologically unsustainable levels.
2. Humans, especially those living along coastlines, depend on marine fish as both a source of both food and income.
3. But in predator-prey relationships, balance is necessary for both species to survive; what happens then if humans become too good at fishing?

1. A reference to a statistic, not only grabs the reader’s attention, but also hints at the topic (overfishing in marine environments).
2. A step back from the quote, introducing the broad topic of marine fishing.
3. A transition into the problem that the author hopes to address, inviting the reader to think critically about potential problems related to the topic.

Introducing and Explaining the Problem

Below is a continuation of the sample introduction above, starting at the research problem and ending with the author’s justification for why the problem is a topic worth pursuing:

4. Currently, overfishing in marine environments poses a serious threat to fish species and humans who depend on these fish to live.
5. The potential extinction of overfished species creates several problems beyond itself. As species go extinct, food chains are disrupted, meaning that overfishing one species will harm others that rely on that one for sustenance.
6. Humans will also be affected if they overfish. Those who catch and sell fish for a living will see their livelihoods suffer; a scarcity of fish would force fishmongers to raise their prices, hurting consumers as well.
7. Between human and marine animal life, overfishing is a global issue that must be resolved.

4. The statement of the problem, the specific issue that the author will propose a solution to.
5. A lead-in to why the problem needs to be addressed.
6. One example, briefly detailing a tangible, detrimental effect that the problem will have on the world if left unresolved.
7. Another example.
8. A statement emphasizing to the reader that these potential negative effects are exactly why the problem is worth addressing and solving.
Thesis Statement

The answer to your problem/research question: how you propose to solve the issue and what evidence you plan to use to support your claim. Please see our Constructing a Thesis document on the ASC Writing Toolkit for more specifics on how to formulate a thesis statement.

9. There are a few ways that damage done by marine overfishing can be reversed. First, necessary authorities should impose strict regulations on how much fisheries can catch; this will curtail harmful competition that exploits and depletes marine fish stocks. Furthermore, fisheries should work to develop regulations to ensure that they only catch what they need and do not waste what they do catch. Additionally, areas such as coral reefs, as well as areas where fish mate and spawn, should be protected from fishing to allow species to replenish their numbers. By examining the current statistics overfished areas and contrasting them with areas that were once overfished but now thrive as a result of regulations that discourage exploitation and encourage stewardship, it will be made clear that improved regulation of marine fisheries is necessary to ensure a future for both marine and human life.

10. The intro to the thesis, previewing for the reader the breadth of solutions to be proposed.
11. A list of the potential solutions to the problem, as well as brief explanations for what they will accomplish if implemented.

After the Intro

Following the introduction, it is likely that you will transition into the Literature Review section, which for the reader the history of the issue and what the scholarly debate on the subject currently looks like. For more information on writing a literature review, please see our “Literature Review Guide” on the ASC Student Toolkit.
Sample Introduction

According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) (2016), nearly 30% of the world’s marine fish stocks are overfished to biologically unsustainable levels. Humans, especially those living along coastlines, depend on marine fish as both a source of both food and income. But in predator-prey relationships, balance is necessary for both species to survive; what happens then if humans become too good at fishing? Currently, overfishing in marine environments poses a serious threat to fish species and humans who depend on these fish to live. The potential extinction of overfished species creates several problems beyond itself. As species go extinct, food chains are disrupted, meaning that overfishing one species will harm others that rely on that one for sustenance. Humans will also be affected if they overfish. Those who catch and sell fish for a living will see their livelihoods suffer; a scarcity of fish would force fishmongers to raise their prices, hurting consumers as well. Between human and marine animal life, overfishing is a global issue that must be resolved. There are a few ways that damage done by marine overfishing can be reversed. First, necessary authorities should impose strict regulations on how much fisheries can catch; this will curtail harmful competition that exploits and depletes marine fish stocks. Furthermore, fisheries should work to develop regulations to ensure that they only catch what they need and do not waste what they do catch. Additionally, areas such as coral reefs, as well as areas where fish mate and spawn, should be protected from fishing to allow species to replenish their numbers. By examining the current statistics overfished areas and contrasting them with areas that were once overfished but now thrive as a result of regulations that discourage exploitation and encourage stewardship, it will be made clear that improved regulation of marine fisheries is necessary to ensure a future for both marine and human life.