New Beginnings:
An Introduction to Introductions

By Simon Board

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Four questions

1. What is the question you are trying to answer?
2. Why is this question important?
3. What is your contribution?
   - How are you answering the question?
   - How is it different from previous work?
4. What are your main findings?
   - What are the implications of the findings?

- Be as clear as possible.
- Write answers before you start.

Contributions (Theory)

1. Paper asks a new question
   - E.g. anything by Becker.
2. Paper posits a new model
   - E.g. Akerlof's lemons.
3. Model speaks to application
   - E.g. School choice and matching.
4. Model identifies a new economic force
   - E.g. Spence's model of signaling.
5. Model develops new empirical predictions
   - E.g. Gravity model of trade.
6. Technical contribution, solving a long-standing problem.

Contributions (Empirical)

1. **Establish a new stylized fact**
   - E.g. Piketty-Saez on income distribution.

2. **Provide better measurement**
   - E.g. Schmieder-VonWachter-Bender on impact of UI insurance

3. **Provide a new method or design**
   - E.g. Angrist-Kreuger use birthdate as IV.

4. **Test a prediction of theory**
   - E.g. Card-Kreuger on non effect of minimum wage.

5. **Test theory itself; identify structure.**
   - E.g. Do agents fully insure? What is utility function?

6. **Distinguish between alternative models**
   - E.g. Donahue-Levitt on abortion & crime.

Canonical Introduction

- Broad motivation (1-2 paras). Why is this area interesting?
  - Application ("Why does inequality rise after recessions?")
  - Literature ("Coase's conjecture states that… ").
- The contribution (1-2 paras). See above.
  - Try writing "The contribution of this paper is…"
- Explain the model (1-2 paras).
  - Sketch out main elements that drive results.
- Explain your results (1-2 pages).
  - The driving forces and main insights
  - Important implications and predictions

Practical Tips

- Practice, practice, practice
  - Try many different types of introduction.
- Have a narrative
  - An introduction should tell a story (as should a paper)
- Know the purpose of each paragraph
  - The argument should have a clear structure
  - The first sentence should tell you what any para is about.
- Write your introduction in a modular way
  - I first write it in bullet points.
  - One can rearrange and easily move parts.
  - If I drop a sentence I indent it, so I can come back to it.

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Remarks

- Remember dual audience
    - Some readers on look at intro; others are experts
- This is not a mystery novel
    - Audience does not want to be surprised
- Don't make loose/grand statements
    - Readers will seize on anything looking fishy.
- Be brief
    - Main point should be clear, but don't repeat yourself (too much).
- Be consistent
    - Stick to one explanation/intuition throughout paper.
- Keep it interesting
    - Skip extensions and long-winded discussions/justifications.

Literature Section (1-2 pages)

- Explain relation between your results and related work
  - Do not just survey the literature
  - Describe other papers so reader understands contrast
- Keep it focused
  - Pick major papers and describe how your value added
  - Can put other papers in footnotes.
- Be generous. Compare:
  - "Arrow and Debreu (1954) ignore market power"
  - "We develop AD's canonical model to include market power"
- Remember the dual audience
  - Some readers don't know the literature; others are cited.