Framing Your Argument: Introductions in Social Science Papers

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Hook: Here, we see an example of an effective hook where the author draws in the reader's attention with a concrete and evocative anecdote. The hook is directly related to the conceptual framing that we see introduced at the beginning of the second paragraph.

Framing: This initial framing is a generalized statement of the tension or problem that was illustrated with the hook. This serves as the "elevator pitch" that gets the reader interested and hits all of the important parts of the research (before the more in-depth literature review and analysis that show how this contributes to disciplinary and academic knowledge).

This sentence also serves as the initial framing that will reference the bigger picture outside of the world of scholarship. In other words, this points to the question of, "so what?" The initial framing can be illustrated through an example; the puzzle, tension, or problem should demonstrate that it has real world implications.

Motivation: In this section, the author establishes his motivation for research. Because this is an ethnographic contribution, the author positions himself as a central actor in the intellectual puzzle. In other words, the author describes his motivation from a first-person positionally. In other, non-ethnographic research papers, motivation might be established by illustrating an intellectual puzzle from a position where the author is not an explicit actor.

We are seated in the courtroom of the Inter-American Human Rights Court in San José, Costa Rica, in mid-November 2000. On the right are Edmundo Castillo and Rosenaldo Castro, pugnacious lawyers for the Nicaraguan government, who are visibly irritated by the preposterous idea that the "Illustrious Nicaraguan State" would be brought to Court by Awas Tingni, a small indigenous community… After six years of arduous legal maneuver and untold years of struggle, Awas Tingni leaders have the chance to speak truth to power.

Broad questions of indigenous land rights lie at the heart of the trial. Since the early 1990s, Awas Tingni community members had experienced increasing incursions into areas they consider to be theirs, most dramatically in the form of a government concession of logging rights to a multinational company.

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In part, my reaction was literal: I really had approached the trial in hopes of contributing useful and persuasive expert testimony; the idea of carrying out a critique of the problematic notion of culture underlying the community's claim could not have been further from my mind. But the challenge runs deeper. After all, the trial transcript is a 240-page, single-spaced treasure trove of claims and counterclaims that calls out for precisely this kind of scrutiny. In the face of that allure—to which I partly succumb—this article attempts to rationalize my adamant refusal of cultural critique as a resting place for anthropological research and writing.

Note: The example in this handout pertains to ethnographic research. These guidelines can be applied to non-ethnographic work, either qualitative or quantitative, but may not always use first-person language.

Source: C.R. Hale, "Activist Research v. Cultural Critique: Indigenous Land Rights and the Contradictions of Politically Engaged Anthropology"