

Key Points for Writing a Psychology Paper [Intro and Methods]

1. The problem/question.

What's been done before, and why should we care? In your introduction, you should outline the previous research that is relevant to your current study. Generally, you should start at a level that is somewhat more broad than your hypothesis. Within the introduction, you should also convey the reasoning behind your hypothesis. What question are you trying to answer, and why is that question important/interesting/significant?

Keep in mind that as you discuss the previous research, you should try to tell a coherent story. That is, do not simply take a few different and vaguely related studies and simply list their findings in a disjointed way. The logic of why you're talking about each of these studies (and why you talk about them in the order that you do) should be clear to the reader.

2. Hypothesis.

What do you expect your results to show? This should go near the end of your introduction. You should have a paragraph that gives a rough sketch of your research design, ending with your specific hypothesis. Hypotheses should be clearly testable, debatable (not obvious/common sense). The point of the rough sketch of your design is so that your hypothesis will make sense at this point in your paper. Generally, this paragraph should include your independent variable, the main task, and your hypothesis. You will go into much greater detail in the Methods section.

3. Methods

What did you do? This is where you get into the details of the experiment itself. Everything from how many participants you ran to what your task was to what demographic variables you looked at will go here. The biggest sub-section will be the procedure, where you literally explain what participants did in your study, step by step.

4. Your audience

Who is reading this? When writing your paper, it's important to keep your intended audience in mind. Yes, the simple answer to this question is: your TF; but generally, the audience for whom you should be writing is one that is intelligent, but may not know anything at all about psychology. So, you should make sure that you explain any psychological terms, theories, etc. Do not assume that everyone will know what you're talking about, so you don't need to explain anything.