



MODULE 4: GUIDING THE READER: INTRODUCTIONS AND HEADINGS

Duration: 4 - 6 hours

**How can you make
the organization of
your report visible
to the reader?**

Page 1

Introduction

QUOTE



"At any moment in any document, readers need to know what they're being told. They shouldn't have to get to page 50 and wonder, 'Why am I here?'"
—Task Team Leader

Until this point in the writing process, your report only exists as a planning document in the form of the [Dialogue With the Reader Worksheet](#) and a [Pyramid Outline](#). Although your pyramid outline makes the organization of your ideas clear to you, your readers will not see this framework. In this module, you will begin to work on the report that your readers will see.

You will begin to develop your report with two steps:

1. By writing an introduction, and
2. By creating the headings that you will use throughout the report.

Both of these features serve to guide your readers through your report and help them stay focused on the main message.

Page 2

Learning Objectives

By the end of this module, you should be able to

- Identify commonly used components of introductions.
- Write an introduction that effectively positions the main message of your report and guides readers into the body of the document.
- Compose headings based on the information in your pyramid outline to provide structure and to guide your readers through the document.

Page 3



Guiding Your Reader

Your [pyramid outline](#) has prepared you to write your report, but you still need a way to alert your readers to your purpose and main message before you begin to present all the evidence. You can do this with your introduction. Although the introduction is not part of your pyramid outline, it is an important part of your report because it guides your readers to the main message. The introduction helps raise the main question for your readers. It then answers that question by stating the main message.

The purpose of the introduction is to gain the attention of the readers and set the direction for their thinking. For this reason, it has a different structure than your pyramid.

In the first part of this module, you will consider the structure of a good introduction by looking at a few examples.

Page 4



The Basics of an Introduction

You are working at your desk when the phone rings. You pick it up and your colleague says,

“No, I really don’t think it will work. I can explain why, if you need to know all the reasons.”

Most likely you are confused. If you are like most other World Bank staff, you are in daily communication with many people on many different subjects. Even limiting the conversation to topics of common interest, your colleague could be talking about several things: an ongoing project, a new idea for a program, or a decision that was made at a recent meeting.

Now what if he had begun the conversation this way:

Hi! Remember that e-mail you sent a couple of weeks ago about delaying the mission to Nairobi? I'm very sorry for the delay—I know it is really important to you—but now I'm ready to follow up. I know you had some other issues to discuss, too, but right now I am writing to answer your question about delaying the Nairobi mission.

I had to go back and forth with the borrower quite a bit. We even had to check with the country director. Well, here's what I found out: It looks like we really can't delay the mission for several reasons. I am afraid you're going to have to do it at the end of the month, as planned. So let me explain some of what I found out first, and then let's figure out how to make this thing work for you and your team.

Context

Purpose

Main Message

Road Map

Click on the buttons above to identify the **context**, **purpose**, **main message**, **relevance**, **scope**, **methodology**, and **findings** of the introduction.

In this example, your colleague has given you a basic introduction. And like any introduction, it has certain components that make it effective. Click on the buttons in the box above to see where the components appear in the text and read a description of the main components in this example.

In a more complicated situation—especially in written reports—an introduction might need more than these three basic components; in fact, later in this module you'll see other examples. But nearly every introduction has **context**; many have an explicit statement of **purpose**; and all introductions must have a **main message**. (In Module 2, you already composed a purpose statement and main message for your report.)



Beyond the Basics

Consider the same phone call scenario but as an e-mail with a few added details. For example, what if the delay between the initial request and the response had been longer? What if the writer had expected the reader to resist the main message? In that case, the e-mail might look like this:

Hi! Remember that e-mail you sent a couple of weeks ago about delaying the mission to Nairobi? I'm very sorry for the delay—I know it is really important to you—but now I'm ready to follow up. I know you had some other issues to discuss, too, but right now I am writing to answer your question about delaying the Nairobi mission.

I had to go back and forth with the borrower quite a bit. We even had to check with the country director. Well, here's what I found out: It looks like we really can't delay the mission for several reasons. I am afraid you're going to have to do it at the end of the month, as planned. So let me explain some of what I found out first, and then let's figure out how to make this thing work for you and your team.

Context

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Road Map

Click on the buttons above to identify the **context**, **purpose**, **main message**, **relevance**, **scope**, **methodology**, and **findings** of the introduction.



The Role of the Introduction

In many ways, an effective introduction in a report is similar to the phone calls discussed previously.

To be effective, the introduction must be able to do the following:

- **Interest your readers and provide needed context.** Unless you succeed in capturing your readers' interest, they probably won't read your report. Briefly explain the circumstances that gave rise to the report so that readers can understand its significance.
- **Make the purpose understood.** You must ensure that your readers understand why you are writing so they have accurate expectations and are prepared for your main message.
- **State the main message.** As we have seen, the main message is the answer to the reader's main question, and it must relate closely to your overall purpose. The main message provides the reader with a preview of the rest of the document.

To write an effective introduction, you need to determine which components are necessary for this particular document.

You also need to arrange the components in an appropriate order. For example, context almost always comes first; the main message generally comes last.



Components of an Introduction

As you have seen, an introduction may include various components; not all introductions need every one. For reference, here are the components in the order they should generally appear:

Essential Components

Context

In the opening section of the report, you should get the reader's attention and provide needed **context**. One to two paragraphs of context is usually sufficient, even for longer reports.

Main Message

The **main message** answers the reader's main question. It states the writer's thesis or provides an overview of key topics in the form of an umbrella statement.

Optional components

You do not need to include all of the following in your report, only what you deem to be necessary.

Scope

The **scope** establishes what the report includes and what it deliberately omits.

Relevance

The **relevance to readers** highlights why this report will be important to them, to the institution, or to the client.

Purpose

The **purpose** establishes what the writer wants to achieve with the report. You should omit it only when the purpose is implicitly understood by the reader.

Methodology

The **methodology** explains how the writer researched the report. If included, this should be very brief. Often reports have separate sections to explain the methodology in detail.

Summary of Findings

The **summary of findings** quickly points the readers to the main points. If used, it often provides the theoretical or factual basis for the main message. Depending on purpose of the report, the summary of findings may be the main message.

Road Map

The **road map** reveals the structure of the report and explains briefly how the report is organized. This is only required if you think your readers will need extra guidance on the structure of the report, or if it is mandated by your work unit for a particular type of report.



Identify Components of an Introduction

Now that you have discovered the different components of a good introduction, let's see if you can identify them in three examples. As you read through each example, you will find some components, but not all. Also, the order may vary.

Select a sample introduction below. You will notice that these three introductions vary in length and scope. But each one contains some of the components of a good introduction. For each sample, try to match the component with the appropriate text in the introduction.



Plan Your Introduction

Now that you have had a chance to review a few samples, it is time to plan the introduction for your report. Your planning will help to determine which components you should include.

Open the **Reflections File** for this activity by clicking on the link below. In this file, you are given a checklist of the different components of an introduction. Each component includes some comments for you to consider. This will help you determine whether you need this component for your introduction. This checklist will help you to plan your introduction. You will write your introduction as Assignment 4 described at the end of the module.

REFLECTION



Reflection 8:
[Checklist for Your introduction](#)



Showing the Way for Your Reader With Good Headings

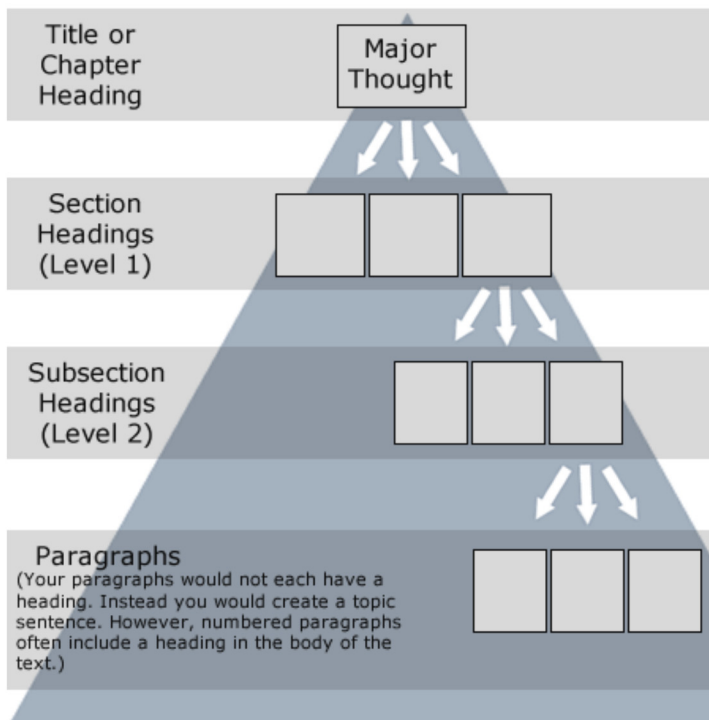
Your introduction prepares the reader for the main message and states the main message. Throughout the report, headings guide the reader by letting them know where they are, how far they've come, and where they are going next. The primary purpose of headings is to provide visual cues to the structure of your report. By formatting your headings properly and consistently, you should be able to show your reader

- What topics or groupings you have used to organize your report
- How these topics are related to each other within the hierarchy of the pyramid outline

The following figure shows how a typical arrangement of information in the pyramid outline can translate to headings in a report.

Headings based on the pyramid outline

Your headings come from your pyramid outline. Level 1 headings come from the questions or answers at the first level of your pyramid. Level 2 headings come from the questions or answers at the second level of your pyramid.



Effective headings will alert your readers to the content that follows. Readers should be able to skim the headings of your report—either in the report itself or by reviewing the table of contents—to get a sense of its structure.

This diagram is based on Barbara Minto's example in *The Pyramid Principle*, page 76.

Using Headings Effectively: Correct Grouping

On this screen and the following three screens, there are some guidelines to help you use headings effectively.

Headings, whether they are chapter titles, section headings, or subsection headings, show the reader the relationship between groupings of information. Each grouping of information should have a heading at the appropriate level so that this relationship can be seen easily.

Examples

The following examples show two versions of a table of contents for a report. The left column shows incorrect grouping with the main sections (in boldface type) subdivided into only one topic. The right column demonstrates correct grouping with each of the main sections subdivided into more than one topic.

Incorrect grouping	Correct grouping	The rationale for grouping
Features of Good Program Design in Africa Targets areas with high rates of poverty and community involvement	Features of Good Program Design in Africa Targets areas with high rate of poverty Encourages community involvement	Note that two types of features are presented. Each feature should have a subheading and appear independently in the table of contents.
The Market Potential for Care and Service Providers Privatized home helpers, social workers, and group homes for children	The Market Potential for Care and Service Providers Privatized home helpers Social workers Group homes for children	Note that three information groupings are indicated here, each requiring its own subheading.

Page 12



Using Headings Effectively: Conciseness

Make sure that your heading captures the main idea for each of the topics you have defined. But avoid including too much information. Headings are good for catching your reader's attention, but not for explaining.

Examples

Too much	Concise
Strategies for improvement recommended based on the preceding analysis	Recommended strategies for improvement
Seek out new funding to help expand the scope of the project	Seeking new funding
If you want to proceed, here is what to do	Next steps
Implementing a better framework with purchases, reforms, and marketplace developments	How to implement a better framework

Page 13



Using Headings Effectively: Parallel Structure

Headings at the same level should have parallel structure. This means that they must follow the same grammatical pattern. Writing in parallel structure creates an expectation for the reader that your headings will follow a consistent format and style.

Examples

The examples below demonstrate how parallel structure helps reveal the structure of a report. As you scroll down through each column in the following table, notice that there are different ways of writing headings in parallel. You can also see that when headings are not parallel, they can detract from the quality of the report.

Parallel (correct)	Parallel (correct)	Not parallel (incorrect)
Implementing a Better Framework Set up the purchase Reform budgets Make a marketplace Establish licenses Reform the providers Handling the Transition Analyze the current system Develop the new institutional structure Cost and project financial flows Develop facilities and management planning Develop a project plan	How to Implement a Better Framework Set up the purchase Reform budgets Make a marketplace Establish licenses Reform the providers How to Handle the Transition Analyze the current system Develop the new institutional structure Cost and project financial flows Develop facilities and management planning Develop a project plan	Implementing a Better Framework Setting up the purchase Budget reforms Make a marketplace What licenses are needed? Reform the providers How to Handle the Transition Analyzing the current system Develop the new institutional structure Costing and projection of financial flows Facilities development and management planning Develop a project plan
This example follows a straightforward parallel structure with each first-level heading in gerund form (ending in -ing). The second level headings are all in the imperative form.	This example is slightly different from the first one. It uses its top-level heading to pose an indirect question (How to implement, how to handle). The headings at the next level use the imperative form of the verb (develop, set up, establish, etc.) to form the answer to those original questions.	This example includes a mix of heading styles: nouns, gerunds, questions, and verbs. When the parallel structure is absent, so is the sense that these headings share any commonality, particularly their order of importance in the hierarchical structure of the report.

Page 14



Using Headings Effectively: Separation From Text

Keep your headings separate from the text of your document. Your text should stand alone rather than rely on headings for meaning. Make sure to repeat key words from headings in the text. Headings are really only for guiding your readers, not for introducing information.

Example

Headings and text not separate (incorrect)	Headings and text separate (correct)
Reforming the providers This will go a long way to creating a stable economic situation. The key element in initiating such reforms is ...	Reforming the providers Creating a stable economic situation requires immediate reforms, particularly involving those who provide the funding and resources for country-wide projects. The key element in initiating such reforms ...

Page 15



Identify Report Headings

Next, you will be applying these principles of headings. Refer to the pyramid outline below. Based on the outline, list the major sections of the report and headings for each.



Pyramid Activity: **Identify Report Headings**

Headings and subheadings will grow out of the pyramid outline. Some writers prefer to base them on the questions, some on the answers. Either approach can be effective.

Page 16



Assignment 4: Introduction and Headings

This assignment requires you to complete two tasks: writing the introduction for your new report and creating the headings and subheadings that will guide readers through it.

To write your introduction, refer to the [Checklist for Your Introduction](#), which you created and saved to a Reflections File earlier in this module. Remember that the role of the introduction is to interest your readers, lead them to your main message, and then state your main message.

To create your headings and subheadings, first give your new report an overall title. Then refer to your pyramid outline, which you created at the end of Module 3. Write your headings and subheadings based on the reader's questions and mini-main messages in your pyramid outline. Include at least two levels of headings beyond the overall title.

Once you have written your introduction and created your headings and subheadings, [upload the assignment into the Assignment section in Moodle](#).

Page 17



Resources and Documents

Examples of introductions

- [Bahia Health Project](#)
- [Is It Worth It?](#)
- [Integration of Planning and Implementation in Maluda](#)

Reflections files

- [Checklist for Your Introduction](#)

Other resources

- [Background Readings: Report Writing](#)
- [Module 4 Printable \(PDF format\)](#)

Page 18



Summary

One of the first challenges in writing your report is to bring out the logic that you established in your planning and outlining. The report introduction and headings help you meet this challenge: they establish your logic and guide your readers through your report.

An effective introduction quickly leads your readers to the main message of your report. This gives your introduction a particular importance because it is the place where your reader will first encounter your main message. Therefore, you need to set up your introduction in a way that makes your main message clear to your reader.

A good introduction contains a number of components. Not all of them will appear in every introduction, but components should be chosen that give guidance about the direction of the report. The following list shows components of introductions, in the order in which they typically appear. Only the context and main message are essential components.

- **Context (essential)**
 - Scope
 - Relevance to the reader
 - Purpose
 - Methodology
 - Summary of findings
- **Main message (essential)**
 - Road map (the only component that may come after the introduction)

After the introduction, use headings to guide your reader through your document. These headings are based largely upon the questions and answers that you have determined through your pyramid building process. When the reader skims your headings, they should understand the organization and hierarchy of your ideas in the document.

QUOTE



*"I want a document to be easy for me to read.
Make it easy for me to understand
what you're trying to say."
—Sector Manager*

