Rethinking Introductions: How to Draft Effective Research Introductions

Writing introductions for research papers is intimidating; there seems like A LOT to introduce. However, introducing all of your background information in your introduction usually leads to an overly generalized summary, instead of a focused introduction to a problem. Remember, college-level research papers require you to enter a conversation and respond to an issue. Check out the following myths about research paper introductions and tenets of effective research paper introductions.

Myths about Research Paper Introductions
--They have to include all relevant background about topic.
--They have to illustrate the way all background information is related.
--They have to introduce all major sources.
--They cannot span over one paragraph.

Four Tenets of Effective Research Paper Introductions

Big Problem
The “big problem” is the larger (scholarly, popular, etc.) conversation you are entering. The “big problem” gives your discussion context but is too broad or complicated to make a legitimate claim about.

Specific Issue
The specific issue is a sub-section of the big problem. This issue is more focused than the big problem, which means that your research paper can legitimately explore its possibilities and limitations.

Thesis/Focus
The argument that you present about the specific issue. By analyzing the specific issue, you should be able to shed new light on the big problem.

Road Map
A brief explanation about how your paper is organized. The road map illustrates the way in which you will explore the specific issue.

India, at the moment, is an under-recognized super power on the verge of becoming a model democracy of the twenty first century. Its democratization process has been immensely successful in creating unprecedented unity in a people of different histories, languages, races, and religions. Numerous insurmountable barriers have been hurdled as officials work to foster quality in all people under the law. With the introduction of other backwards classes (OBC’s) and affirmative action, however, some fear that the privileged are abusing the system and in doing so they are perpetuating the gap between the rich and the poor, hindering the nation’s social and economic development. In order for India to move forward, this “creamy layer” of privileged OBC’s needs to be identified and purged, allowing the resources allotted to reach those in need. If successful, India’s polarized money distribution will equalize and a proper middle class will emerge, launching India’s democratic model into the competitive world arena.
The introduction below does not fulfill the four requirements above. Read the following introduction, looking for the four tenets described above.

Kautilya’s *Arthashastra* served as a blueprint for proper governance, delineating ways in which the Maurya Empire should be run. Fixed governmental policies gave the empire direction, but individual and territorial cooperation across India was equally necessary for dynastic prosperity. To rule effectively, Book I, Chapter 7 illustrated that rulers should lead righteously considering input from both officials and citizens. Next, the Maurya Empire relied primarily on taxation from agriculture for economic development. Because Mauryan territory stretched over the Indian subcontinent, direct governance from central authorities proved difficult. Therefore, political administrations were constructed differently. However, taxation remained unchanged in all areas to appease central authorities. Likewise, uniform laws established social order most of which involved death and legitimized the Mauryan dynasty. Lastly, the unconventional non-violent social ethic Ashoka embodied illuminated a different political ideology that permeated into Indian politics during the Mauryan Empire.

Violence defined the Maurya Empire until the third emperor, Ashoka, approached ruling more peacefully. Ashoka’s reign began with conquest until the battle at Kalinga promped *dhamma*, that is, a non-violent social ethic.

Revised introduction

Violence defined the Maurya Empire until the third emperor, Ashoka, approached ruling more peacefully. Using Kautilya’s *Arthashastra* as a blueprint for proper governance, Ashoka delineated ways in which a reformed Maurya Empire could be governed. To rule effectively, Book I, Chapter 7 called for rulers to lead righteously, considering input from both officials and citizens. This more collaborative political ideology created the conditions for Ashoka’s unconventional non-violent social ethic, economic policies that led to prosperity, and fair taxation policies. As a result of the new governance system, Ashoka was able to unite India’s diverse regions, religions, and classes, resulting in a more peaceful India.

Is the following introduction effective? Why or why not? See if you can identify the problem, specific issue, thesis, and road map below.

Distinguishing the primary causes of any revolution can be a daunting task, making the idea of analyzing such factors in a country with as rich, textured, and complex a history as Egypt’s truly overwhelming. A full appreciation of the causes of—and, in some sense, the necessity for—the events that transpired in Egypt on and subsequent to January 25th, 2011, entailed the development of a deep understanding of the interplay of the social, political, religious, economic, and overall cultural elements of Egyptian life that span over hundreds of years. While it would be almost impossible to identify a single set of factors or events that finally plunged this nation into revolt after countless decades of passive suffering, what we can do is analyze the condition of pre-revolutionary Egypt through the lens of the people’s demands. Perhaps the best way to do this is to draw from one of the main slogans that could be heard echoing through the streets of Cairo at the very beginning of this fateful revolution: “Aish, Horreya, Adala, Egtema’eya!” or “Bread, freedom, social justice!”