

Instructors Guide to a Getting Started Workshop

Start with a round of introductions. “What’s your name, where are you from, and what paper are you writing?” If you have time, you can ask, “What’s hard about it?” In a diverse group of strangers, this step can help participants identify partners for trading reviews of the exercise and even provide professional networking opportunities.

1. Introduce the problem: “You are not used to having an answer and picking a question to match. This is your task now. For most of you, the problem you initially set out to answer will no longer be the best question to motivate your research. You might want to start the exercise with Part 3, Results. You can’t change those. But you can change the question that goes with that answer. So Part 1, your question, has to match with Part 3, results. Part 2, why is this important, should match with Part 4, conclusions.” Put up an example of a completed exercise.

2. Give 10 minutes for filling out the Getting Started Exercise, the whole thing (don’t let them think they have 10 minutes for Part 1). Provide a 5-minute warning and an 8-minute warning. Suggest that students can raise a hand to get help. Circulate, look especially to see if the “why” is broad enough and that the conclusions address it (i.e. that they are not results). Interrupt your group (and stop the clock) to share an example when you find one. At some point, you might want to point out that this process is going to result in the first drafts of their abstracts.

3. Give 10 minutes for sharing the exercise with a partner. Objectives: Revise and improve your “abstract” before sharing it with us. If your statements aren’t clear, your partner will let you know. If your partner is from a totally different field, that’s great, because they are going to help you elevate your “why is this important” to be more general. Tell them the list of common errors so they can help each other.

At 5 minutes, suggest that they switch off, if they haven’t already. Make sure they write down the improved version, or it will take more time when they explain rather than read their “abstracts.” They need to decide which version of their objectives they like better.

This is a time when the facilitator can roam and try to help out. If you can read from a distance without disturbing the pairs, do that, and step in with suggestions.

4. Ask for a volunteer to go first to read the exercise. If the groups are small, everyone will read their “abstract” out loud. If the group is large, take volunteers until the time is up. Encourage the other members of the group to give feedback, otherwise they can tune out. Ask for volunteers who have problems they can share; we learn the most from the problematic cases.

They should realize that these parts correspond to the parts of their paper. “When you write your Introduction, you’ll include a question to go with that answer.”

Common errors:

- 1) Conclusions are often restated results, sometimes written better than in the results. Conclusions should address the ‘why is it important’ question
- 2) Often Results sections have answers for which no question was asked.
- 3) “Who cares” is commonly not general enough. The objectives can be specific to the project, but the problem statement should be broader.