**THREE STEPS TO A COMPELLING INTRODUCTORY SECTION**

**1. Establish a “research territory”**

**Show that your topic is important**. You can do this in two ways: You might explain the “problem” & its effects (think climate change or the use of solitary confinement in modern prison) AND/OR you might show that this is a problem that researchers in your field have been grappling with for a while (your readers might not care about how Walt Whitman represents class in his poetry, but you can show it’s important by explaining that nineteenth-century scholars are tracing the ways that representations of class in literature both reflected and influenced the work of political theorists of the time).

**Show that you are qualified to make this argument.** You can do this by summarizing the most important research done so far and by presenting this research clearly, succinctly, and accurately for your readers.

**2: “Carve out a niche”**

**Here’s where you show that your argument is important.** You can show your readers a “gap” in the knowledge or research that’s already been done, or you might raise a question about the methods or results of this research. Or you might explain how your new, original idea will build on this research to expand current understanding of your topic.

**3: “Occupy the niche”**

**Here’s where you explain how your argument works.**

**Explain your research.** Here you present the big results of your inquiry: what have you found out, exactly?

**If you’re writing a proposal,** then explain what you expect to find out.

***After reading your introductory section, your readers should have no trouble answering the question “So what?”***

Adapted from:

Swales, John M. And Christine B. Feak. *Academic Writing for Graduate Students: Essential Tasks and Skills*. 2nd ed. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004.