

From the Editor

The introduction, the link between applied research and a successful publication

Fenton N.J. (2019). The introduction, the link between applied research and a successful publication. *Silva Fennica* vol. 53 no. 4 article id 10285. 2 p. <https://doi.org/10.14214/sf.10285>

A lot of the research undertaken in forestry is very applied and designed to address a specific question. Consequently, many articles are written from a very narrow point of view, and sometimes without general objectives or hypotheses. This style of writing, while efficient for the transmission of information to already interested parties and partners, is problematic for two reasons. First, it reduces the chances the article will be published in a broad journal like *Silva Fennica*, and second, it deprives researchers working on similar problems in other contexts from benefiting from the results and insights. Consequently, it also reduces the impact of the article and diminishes its impact beyond the specific research group with which it was developed.

A well-structured introduction is the key to ensuring that interesting applied research is published in a format that makes it available to a variety of researchers. A key role of the introduction is to frame your work in terms of broad concepts or questions that are interesting to a specific target audience, for example silviculturalists or forest ecologists. It is important to choose the breadth of this target audience wisely. Are the results only pertinent for silviculturalists in Finland? Or may silviculturalists in other countries also find the results interesting? Depending on the target audience, the initial sentences should frame a more or less broad question or conceptual framework that clearly shows the audience why they should read the article. Once the reader's interest is captured, the introduction should gradually narrow the scope, funneling the reader to the way you are examining this question in your study system. When this is well done, the introduction incites a broad readership and is rarely more than five paragraphs in length.

Several examples illustrate this point. The recent article by Canuel et al. (2019) in *Silva Fennica* examined the legacy effects of pre-commercial thinning of balsam fir (*Abies balsamea*) on the regeneration of the subsequent stands in southeastern Canada. While this may seem a very narrow topic, the way it is presented highlights its potential interest for forestry professionals and researchers in general. First, the silvicultural technique is presented, in this case pre-commercial thinning. Then the focus narrows to the use of pre-commercial thinning in balsam fir stands in eastern Canada. The third and fourth paragraphs present the research question: what are the legacy effects of pre-commercial thinning in a context of cumulative disturbances? Finally, the fifth paragraph presents the objectives and how the researchers will specifically address the research question.

An article by Teixeira et al. (2019) is an even more extreme example of narrowing focus. In only four paragraphs, the authors move from a very general opening, global forest degradation and reforestation via secondary succession as a potential solution to this problem, to very specific questions applied in a specific biome, the Atlantic forest of South America. These questions are: 1) how does secondary succession change soil and vegetation function? And 2) what are the mechanisms that can explain the influence of vegetation on soil function?

In this short editorial, I have highlighted some key elements that increase the impact of articles. For those looking for more information, Schimmel's excellent book (*Writing Science: How to write papers that get cited and proposals that get funded*) offers many different examples and details on how to approach writing an introduction (and other parts of a scientific article) for different target audiences. By presenting the big picture of an article, a broader audience is reached without diminishing the applied and practical aspects of the paper. Consequently, articles with this structure are easy to review and more easily published. Furthermore, they are more likely to be cited and contribute more broadly to the progress of your field of research, both specifically and generally.

References

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Nicole J. Fenton

Associate Editor for Forest Ecology