

## Rationale

### Description

A rationale is a set of reasons or justifications that support a text's focus or the **argument** (Burge et al., 2008). In contrast to a **warrant**, which often functions implicitly, a rationale typically consists of an explicit set of claims about a **topic**, which establishes its value. The rationale is often part of the opening **framing** of an **introduction**, but may be included in other sections of the text. The gap in the research base that is typically established in **literature reviews**, for example, provides a rationale for the need for additional study on a topic, by identifying the borders of previous scholarship (Curry & Lillis, 2013).

In addition, rationales are used in the **methodology** section of research **articles**, where writers typically justify why they chose certain methods and how these methods help them answer research questions (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2006). The following excerpt from an article on environmental sciences exemplifies how the authors justified their methods. We italicized their rationale:

Due to the *lack of detailed data on the actual thermal characteristics* of the Palestinian residential buildings, the statistical approach was the most suitable method identified to be used in this research. *It is beneficial in cases where it is difficult to collect detailed physical features* like building geometry or thermal characteristics (Fouquier et al., 2013). (Al Qadi et al., 2018, p. 1295)

Here, the authors supported their choice of statistical methods with the rationale that certain data were unavailable and difficult to obtain.

### Variations and Tensions

23 In practice-oriented disciplines, a rationale may be prompted by real-life problems or  
24 issues (Rojon & Saudenrs, 2012). For example, the excerpt below shows the rationale for a study  
25 on using teacher professional development to support English learners:

26 (1) There are currently over 5 million English learners (ELs) in U.S. schools (National  
27 Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2015), and over 70% speak Spanish as their first  
28 language (Migration Policy Institute, 2015). (2) The majority of classroom teachers,  
29 however, have not had specialized training in working with ELs. ... (3) Latino ELs, on  
30 average, experience a persistent achievement gap in math and reading (García, Jensen, &  
31 Scribner, 2009) and are at higher risk for dropping out of school (Bohon, Macpherson, &  
32 Atilas, 2005). ... (4) Clearly, there is an urgent need for teacher professional development  
33 (PD) that focuses on best practices for working with English learners. (Babinski et al.,  
34 2018, p. 118; sentence numbers added)

35 The authors (1) cite statistics to emphasize the size of the population of interest (ELs); (2)  
36 identify the lack of teacher preparation; (3) explain why ELs need support; and (4) argue for the  
37 need for professional development.

### 38 **Reflection Questions**

- 39 1. How do authors provide rationales for **genres** in your discipline?
- 40 2. In the texts you are writing, where and how do you provide a rationale for the topic or  
41 other aspect of the work?

### 42 **For Further Reading**

43 Nygaard, L. (2015). *Writing for scholars: A practical guide to making sense & being heard* (2nd  
44 ed.). SAGE. The section, “Method: How did you get to your answer?” (pp. 110-113),  
45 explains how to justify the use of research methods.

46 Thomson, P. (2016, August 18). Thesis to journal article – five things to remember. *Patter*.  
47 <https://patthomson.net/2016/08/18/thesis-to-journal-article-five-things-to-remember/>.  
48 This post discusses argues that the rationale a thesis/dissertation can differ from that of a  
49 **dissertation** in terms of audience and the significance of the topic.

#### 50 **References**

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- 54 Babinski, L. M., Amendum, S. J., Knotek, S. E., Sánchez, M., & Malone, P. (2018). Improving  
55 young English learners' language and literacy skills through teacher professional  
56 development: A randomized controlled trial. *American Educational Research Journal*,  
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- 61 Curry, M. J., & Lillis, T. M. (2013). *A scholar's guide to getting published in English: Critical*  
62 *choices and practical strategies*. Multilingual Matters.
- 63 Onwuegbuzie, A. J., & Leech, N. (2006). Linking research questions to mixed methods data  
64 analysis procedures. *The Qualitative Report*, *11*, 474–498.
- 65 Rojon, C., & Saudenrs, M. N. K. (2012). Formulating a convincing rationale for a research study.  
66 *Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice*, *5*(1), 55–61.

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