

Tips for Writing a Research Paper

9/20/01

I. Goals of a research paper

A. The basic goal of a research paper is to communicate your ideas on a given topic.

1. Anything that breaks the line of communication between you and your reader interferes with this goal.
2. Providing support for your ideas by referencing past research and presenting your current findings help the communication of your ideas.

a) Be objective.

b) Present more than perspective.

B. Present enough information so that others can replicate your study.

C. Advance the understanding of a problem by evaluating one or more theories associated with the problem under investigation.

II. Organization

A. A successful research paper needs to

1. Specify the research question and indicate why it is important
2. Describe how the problem will be addressed
3. Present the results
4. Interpret the findings

a) What do the results mean?

- (1) How do they contribute to and advance our understanding of the problem?

b) What are the implications of the results?

c) What are some future directions for research on this topic?

B. Therefore, research papers are typically divided into four sections

1. Introduction

a) Start with a general statement of the problem

b) Present background information

c) State the specific question you want to address in the paper

2. Method

a) Describe your methodology

(1) Quantitative or experimental papers

(a) Subjects or objects of study

(i) Number

(ii) Special characteristics

(b) Instruments used

(c) Design

(d) Procedure

(2) Qualitative or theoretical papers

(a) Rationale

3. Results

a) Quantitative or experimental

(1) Present the findings of the study

(2) Use appropriate statistical analyses and notation

4. Discussion

- a) **Summarize purpose**
- b) **Summarize findings**
- c) **Present the implications**
- d) **Ideas for future research**

III. Considerations

A. Organization

- 1. The organization of your paper is critical. You can include all of the necessary information in your paper, but if it is poorly organized it will not be a successful paper.

B. Jargon

- 1. Assume your audience has a basic knowledge of your topic
- 2. Make sure all key terms are defined
- 3. Avoid using jargon specific to your topic since it may not be well known by all readers. If a reader does not understand a word or phrase that you use it will interfere with the communication of your ideas

C. Make sure the paper looks professional

- 1. Spelling mistakes should be avoided
- 2. Grammatical errors can detract from the meaning of a sentence
- 3. Make sure the paper is in the proper format

IV. Strategies

A. Outline

- 1. Outlines organize the main ideas of the paper

a) They can be useful for organizing your thoughts before you write

b) They can be useful in analyzing the flow of your arguments after you write

2. Therefore, a good strategy for writing a well organized paper is to outline your ideas either before or after you write

B. Write multiple drafts

1. It is difficult to write an error free paper in the first draft

2. Edit your drafts several times making sure to check the

a) Organization

b) Support of your arguments

c) Spelling

d) Grammar

3. If possible, allow time between drafts. Time allows us to think about our topics more. This can give a new or better perspective on the topic.

C. Have an outside reader

1. Many times we will miss mistakes because we know what we intended to write. However, what we intend to write and what we actually write are not always the same.

2. An outside reader will correct for this tendency. Also, an outside reader will be able to determine if the paper is well organized and free from specialized jargon that can be confusing to the reader.