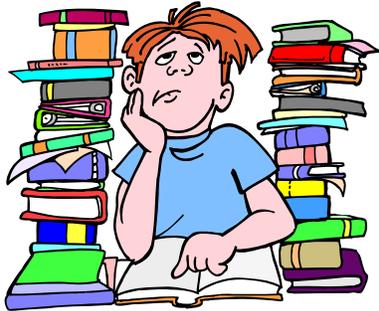


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## WRITING A RESEARCH PAPER

### Structure

A well-structured research paper must have a **beginning**, a **middle**, and an **end**.

**The Introduction**, or beginning, explains the scope of the paper (what you are going to cover and why). It needs to be clear, organized, and engaging.

**The Main Body**, or middle, is where you develop your ideas as fully as you can.

**The Conclusion**, or end, is where you summarize your main points, draw conclusions and make suggestions if appropriate.

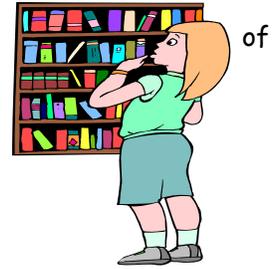
Before you begin researching a topic, think about the assignment and the length of the paper:

- \* What is the purpose of the paper. Are you trying to persuade, to inform, to evaluate, or to summarize?
- \* Who is your audience and what prior knowledge can you assume they have on the topic?
- \* What style and tone of writing are required? Is it informal, scholarly, first-person reporting?

### STEP 1: RESEARCH YOUR TOPIC, GATHER NOTES AND ANALYZE INFORMATION

- Seek information from different sources.. Search through your library's reference system and remember that **your most valuable resource is the Reference Librarian**. He/she can direct you to the most current and comprehensive sources of information, both online and on print.
- Use inexpensive 3'5 index cards to write notes. Write on only one side of the card, and only one topic per card.
- Include the author's last name, or the title of the reference in the top left corner of the note card. Include the page number (s) in parentheses at the end of the items of information to enable you to find the exact page if further information is needed.

- Write notes in *your own words*. This will help insure that you understand what you are reading. *Always distinguish clearly between your words and the author's*. Failure to do so might lead you into copying someone else's work or ideas and trying to pass it as your own (plagiarism).
- If you need direct quotations, use only a few phrases or sentences. Most students tend to quote too much and too often.
- Abbreviate only the common words, too much time will be lost in figuring out unfamiliar "shorthand."
- When ideas and insights occur, write them on separate note cards under the caption "my own."



### Categorize Your Notes

By recording only one topic on each card this permits you to arrange your cards into separate topic stacks. Also, writing on only one side of the card enables you to see your full notes without turning cards back and forth.

By breaking down the information you may be able to see relationships between the different sources. You also have to **Narrow Your Subject** by moving from a category to a class within a category. For example: Public opinion polls → Accuracy of polls → The accuracy of such polls in national elections → Factors that determine the accuracy of public opinion polls in national elections.

### Decide on an Approach and Weed Out Irrelevant Information

- Take time to analyze all your citations. Try to **build your thesis statement** by writing a clear, concise sentence of the specific position you will explore in your paper. As the most important sentence in your entire paper, the thesis sentence should *argue a position*, not summarize information. When **constructing the thesis statement**:
  - ✓ make sure your thesis reflects the *full scope* of your argument and point to the conclusion you will draw.
  - ✓ avoid using a thesis that is *too broad* to be defended in your paper or *too narrow* to be a full response to the assignment.
  - ✓ make sure that it is easily identifiable by the readers.
- Get rid of information that is not directly related to the topic you have in mind, regardless of how fascinating it may be.
- **Fill in the gaps**. Once you've identified which of your research notes you'll use, you may see some gaps where you need additional support for a point you want to make. If so, conduct additional research.

## STEP 2: WRITE UP A DETAILED OUTLINE FIRST

- Outline your argument as fully as possible *before* embarking on the first full draft. Outlining first helps you to see the shape of your argument, making writing the draft much easier. Think of the outline as the "Table of Contents" to your research paper. Each "heading" is a section of your paper. The key aspects of an outline are the:

### The Introduction:

- Provides background/context for the topic
- Defines key terms
- Explains what you set out to do by conveying the *pattern of organization* you will follow in the paper
- Includes the *thesis statement*/the question raised by the assignment
- Captures the reader's attention

### The Main Body:

- Consists of the points, argument and supporting evidence. It should be organized in a way that allows readers to concentrate on one aspect at a time. Therefore, each paragraph should cover one main topic or idea. *Cite your sources as you develop your **References/Bibliography** section by listing of all sources used, including the author, the title of the work/article and publication details.*

### The Conclusion:

- Summary of findings and analysis of what has been found.

If you are asked or choose to provide **recommendations**, these should come after the conclusion and follow naturally from points made in your research paper. Recommendations should not be made if they refer to issues not covered earlier in the research paper.

## STEP 3: WRITE YOUR FIRST DRAFT

- The first draft is usually rough, full of deletions and additions. At this stage don't worry too much about precise spelling and grammar. Each sentence should contribute to the development of your argument. Avoid fact-only sentences but instead incorporate facts into sentences that somehow draw the readers back to your thesis statement.
- Clarify points. Modify. Cut and paste, add or delete sections. Make sure there are page numbers on every page etc. Review the layout and check the sequences and content. Read through what you have written and decide whether or not to include points you were unsure about earlier.
- This is the time to check the spelling, the punctuation and the grammar. Are your sentences structurally correct? Buy a good dictionary and Thesaurus or use the built-in SPELL CHECKER and THESARUS features of your computer software. Check word meanings when writing your paper.
- By now your first draft is done. The creative work is largely accomplished but final editorial work can be very, very time consuming. Hence don't leave things to the last minute!!!!

#### **STEP 4: REVISE, PROOFREAD AND EDIT YOUR PAPER**

- If possible, LEAVE YOUR FIRST COMPLETE DRAFT ASIDE FOR A DAY OR TWO. Proceed to read the paper slowly to yourself. See if the arguments are coherent, logical and conclusive when read.
- Add and delete material to achieve balance and support your thesis statement.
- Look to insert transitional words and phrases.



#### **Ask Yourself:**

- \* Does the research paper satisfy what is being requested in the assignment?
  - \* Does the introduction reflect what you have discovered through the process of composing the full argument?
  - \* Is the content relevant, well sequenced (logically arranged) and to the point?
  - \* Are all the main aspects covered in sufficient depth? Is each main point well supported with explanation and evaluation, examples and argument?
  - \* Is there a clear distinction between your ideas and other people's ideas? Are all sources/ references properly acknowledged?
  - \* Does the paper have the required length?
  - \* Is the research paper clearly written and well laid out? Are the grammar, punctuation and spelling correct?
- Continue to polish and clarify ideas. Your draft is a constant work in progress, evolving as you re-read and re-write your work.
  - Proceed to have several experienced people read and critique your paper. Use the Writing Lab or tutors. If you choose to use friends, make sure they are "A" students in English! Discuss their feedback and, if appropriate, incorporate changes into future drafts.

#### **STEP 5: WRITE YOUR FINAL COPY**

- After the paper has been proofread by others and corrections have been made, read it again to make a final comprehensive revision.
- Unless your instructor specifies precisely what color and size of paper to use, use white, 8 1/2 ´ 11 inch paper printed only on one side.
- Double-space unless your instructor specifies otherwise. Leave 1 to 1/2 inch margins around the text.
- Write a title page which should include your name, date, course title, the instructor's name, and the title of your paper.
- Hand in the paper on time to avoid losing points.