

Writing a Paper

in English

Approach

Begin with a puzzle, unexplained event, phenomenon, question you have been pondering, some curious incident you would like to know more about it. Or see if there are conflicts between different views and arguments in the literature, or does your reading point to any gaps and under-researched areas.

MAKE AN ARGUMENT – WHY-QUESTIONS. When you identify a topic or issue, try to ask not so much **WHAT** it is like or **HOW** it is but rather **WHY** it is the way it is. In short, do not merely remain descriptive but become analytical. This means you have to make an argument that one thing explains or causes another. You will then try to define evidence that, when you gather it, will confirm that indeed A did cause B. The **WHY-Question** becomes your **RESEARCH QUESTION**.

Research Question

Do not ask, for example, what is democratic peace or argue that there should be peace, or inquire how to achieve democratic peace **BUT** why there is peace among democratic societies. How can a phenomenon be explained?

General style

Make a paper readable!

- Print or type using a 11-12 point standard font, such as Times, Geneva, Bookman, Helvetica, etc.!
- The text should be 1.5 spaced on A4 paper with regular margins.
- Number of pages consecutively!
- Adhere to recommended page limit: Papers of no more than 15 pages in pro-seminars and no more than 20 pages in seminars, excluding bib., appendix, etc! Nonetheless, students should check with their professor if they are unsure as to the paper's length and format.

Mistakes to be avoided

- Placing a heading at the bottom of a page with the text following on the subsequent page (insert a page break!).
- Dividing a table or figure - confine each figure/table to a single page.

In all sections of your paper

- Stay focused on the research topic of the paper.
- Use paragraphs to separate each important point (except for the abstract)
- Present your points in logical order.
- Avoid using superfluous pictures and include only those figures necessary to present results. Do not include tables and graphs in the text that are not discussed.

Style/Prose:

- Organize your ideas, making one major point with each paragraph.
- Use present tense to report well accepted facts - for example, 'the grass is green'
- Use past tense to describe specific results - for example, 'When a weed killer was applied, the grass turned brown'.
- Avoid informal wording, do not address the reader directly, and do not use jargon, slang terms, or superlatives.
- The abstract is a single paragraph usually written in smaller font without additional formatting.
- Present background information only as needed in order support a position. The reader does not want to read everything you know about a subject.
- State the hypothesis/objective precisely - do not oversimplify.
- As always, pay attention to spelling, clarity and appropriateness of sentences and phrases.

Components of the Paper

(4 Main Components)

- Title (Page)
- Abstract
- **INTRODUCTION**
- **ARGUMENT/THEORY**
- **EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE**
- **CONCLUSION**
- Bibliography/ Notes

TITLE PAGE

Make sure you state

- the **title** and **subtitle** (the title should imply the research question or the suggested answer). Catchy titles can make your work stand out but be mindful that is serious work. Use a subtitle if the main title is too short or “too catchy” to be sufficiently clear: E.g., “*Development Matters – Explaining Variations in Human Rights Performance*”),
- your full name,
- student id number,
- date,
- your email address (to get quickly in touch with you if there are questions),
- course information (number, course title).

ABSTRACT

The summary should be two hundred words or less. An abstract is a concise single paragraph summary of completed work or work in progress. In a minute or less a reader can learn the rationale behind the study, general approach to the problem, pertinent results, and important conclusions or new questions. As a summary of work done, it is always written in past tense and an abstract should stand on its own, and not refer to any other part of the paper.

INTRODUCTION

Your introduction should not exceed two pages. The purpose of an introduction is to acquaint the reader with the rationale behind the work, with the intention of defending it. It places your work in a theoretical context, and enables the reader to understand and appreciate your objectives. NOTE: Personal remarks (especially in a longer paper) are better placed in the Foreword/Preface and not the introduction.

Writing an introduction

- Describe the importance (significance) of the paper - Why was this worth doing it in the first place? Provide the context! Provide a rationale!
- Are there conflicts in the literature? New insights? New developments?
- State briefly your approach, what you intend to do and how you intend to do it.
- You may already state your specific hypothesis(es) or objective(s), and describe the reasoning that led you to select it/them but be mindful that this will have to be done in greater detail in the section titled Argument/Theory.

Some authors place the literature review in the introduction, others in the section on the argument.

ARGUMENT/THEORY

This section contains your argument beginning with restating the puzzle or research question and then surveying the literature for possible answers. Then, derive from the literature theoretical explanations for your question, or add your own insights if there are no adequate explanations.

Literature Review:

- Review other publications on this research question and show which common positions are held in the literature about your topic. Then explain where your own approach fits in:
 - Does it correspond to an existing approach,
 - does it pursue new avenues,
 - or does it synthesize two or more existing approaches?

Causal Argument—Hypotheses:

- Before you can develop your argument about cause and effect you need to define clearly the concepts that represent the cause(s) and effect(s) that you are investigating. Do not assume that concepts such as “inequality”, “infant mortality”, “radical rightwing”, “conservative”, “wealthy”, “highly educated”, “interventionist”, “political corruption” etc. are obvious, unambiguous, and generally understood and thus clear.
- Develop a causal argument about what factors/variable(s) explain what you want to explain. Note that you will also have to rule out rival explanations (rival hypotheses) or at least provide an explanation for why other explanations do not apply.
- The Argument results in one or several hypotheses.
- If the hypothesis is very general (often called a proposition), it may have to be made more specific to make it empirically testable (=test hypothesis).
- Hypotheses typically take the form
 - H1: If....., then.... (or The....., the....)
 - *H1: If societies develop rapidly, social inequality tends to increase.*
 - *H1: The more rapidly societies develop, the greater the social inequality.*

EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE

General intent

The purpose of a results section is to present and illustrate your findings. The objective here is to provide an interpretation of your results and support for all of your conclusions, using evidence from your experiment and generally accepted knowledge, if appropriate. The significance of findings should be clearly described.

Testing Your Hypothesis

- You need to specify how you will test your hypotheses, respectively how you will know that you have achieved the support for them – note that you have to specify this beforehand. You cannot begin looking for evidence before you know what kind of evidence you are looking for. “To know it when you see it” is not good science.
- Consider again whether the concepts and variables employed in your hypothesis capture indeed the relationship that you mean to be investigating. If not then you have a validity problem as you may be measuring something else entirely.

Materials and Methods:

General intent

This should be the easiest section to write, but many students misunderstand the purpose. The objective is to document all specialized materials and general procedures, so that another individual may use some or all of the methods in another study or judge the scientific merit of your work.

NOTE: It is not to be a step by step description of everything you did, nor is a methods section a set of instructions. In particular, it is not supposed to tell a story. Note that some students state under “method” that they went to the library, consulted a lot of books and on-line documents. This is inappropriate as these activities are in and of themselves not methods but merely tools employed when following a certain method.

Results – Discussion:

If you practice economy of words, 5-10 pages should be plenty of space within which to discuss the results of your research.

Writing a discussion

Interpret your data in the discussion *in appropriate depth*. This means that when you explain a phenomenon you must describe mechanisms that may account for the observation. If your results differ from your expectations, explain why that may have happened. If your results agree, then describe the theory that the evidence supported. It is never appropriate to simply state that the data agreed with the expectations and leave it at that.

- Decide if each hypothesis is supported, rejected, or if you cannot make a decision with confidence. Do not simply dismiss a study or part of a study as "inconclusive."
- You may suggest future directions, such as how the experiment might be modified to accomplish another objective.
- Explain all of your observations as much as possible, *focusing on mechanisms*.
- Try to offer alternative explanations if reasonable alternatives exist.

Style:

- When you refer to information, distinguish data generated by your own studies from published information or from information obtained from other students (verb tense is an important tool for accomplishing that purpose).
- Refer to work done by specific individuals (including yourself) in past tense.

The biggest mistake that students make in discussions is to present a superficial interpretation that more or less re-states the results. It is necessary to suggest *why* the results came out as they did, focusing on the mechanisms behind the observations.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion restates the objectives of the paper and summarizes its principal challenges, findings, and conclusions and may provide direction of further research. No empirical data and no new ideas should be introduced in the conclusion.

LITERATURE CITED—BIBLIOGRAPHY

List all literature cited in your paper, in alphabetical order, by first author. In a proper research paper, literature refers always to proper academic sources, articles authored by original investigators, and official documents. Be cautious about using web sites as references - anyone can put just about anything on a web site, and you have no sure way of knowing if it is truth or fiction. If you are citing a journal accessed through an electronic database, use the journal citation (name, volume, year, page numbers). When citing on-line journals (i.e., such that are published only online), your citation must also include the full web address.

For further information and proper citation see for example (Harvard Style Citation):

- <http://www.uni-salzburg.at/pls/portal/docs/1/1571179.PDF>
- <http://www.uni-salzburg.at/pls/portal/docs/1/1381182.PDF>
- <http://www.uni-salzburg.at/pls/portal/docs/1/1381182.PDF>
- <http://www.lib.monash.edu.au/tutorials/citing/harvard.html>

CHECKLIST ONE:

1. Is my thesis statement concise and clear?
2. Are my arguments presented in a logical sequence?
3. Are all sources properly cited to ensure that I am not plagiarizing?
4. Have I supported my thesis/argument with strong evidence?
5. Have I made my intentions and points clear in the essay?

Re-read your paper for grammatical errors. Use a dictionary or a thesaurus as needed. Do a spell check. Correct all errors that you can spot and improve the overall quality of the paper to the best of your ability. Get someone else to read it over. Sometimes a second pair of eyes can see mistakes that you missed.

CHECKLIST TWO:

1. Did I begin each paragraph with a proper topic sentence?
2. Have I supported my arguments with documented proof or examples?
3. Any run-on or unfinished sentences?
4. Any unnecessary or repetitious words?
5. Varying lengths of sentences?
6. Does one paragraph or idea flow smoothly into the next?
7. Any spelling or grammatical errors?
8. Quotes accurate in source, spelling, and punctuation?
9. Are all my citations accurate and in correct format?
10. Did I avoid using contractions? Use "cannot" instead of "can't", "do not" instead of "don't"?
11. Did I avoid using phrases such as "I think", "I guess", "I suppose"?
12. Have I made my points clear and interesting but remained objective?
13. Did I leave a sense of completion for my reader(s) at the end of the paper?