

BASIC RESEARCH PAPER WRITING SKILLS

by

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Introduction

What is a research paper?

- A piece of academic writing that requires a critical and thoughtful level of inquiry.
- Most important aspect is acknowledging sources.
- Most dangerous aspect is plagiarism.

Introduction

- **Steps in writing a research paper**
 - 1. Choose a field, select a subject within that field
 - 2. Limit chosen topic
 - 3. Find sources (books, articles, journals)
 - 4. Make a list of references.
 - 5. Propose a working thesis
 - 6. Take notes
 - paraphrase
 - summarize
 - quote
 - 7. Make an outline
 - 8. Prepare referencing and bibliography
 - 9. Do final organization
 - 10. Do final drafting

Introduction

- ***Structure of a research paper***
 - Cover page
 - Contents page (some have abstracts)
 - Introduction
 - Body
 - Conclusion
 - Bibliography

STEP 1: Choosing a Topic

■ What to choose

- Subjects which are
 - Familiar
 - Interesting
 - Source availability
 - Contemporary

■ What not to choose

- Subjects which are
 - Very new
 - Too controversial
 - No interest

STEP 2: Narrowing and Limiting the Topic

- **Narrowing and Limiting the Topic**
 - **Introduction**
 - **Body**
 - **Conclusion**
- **Process**
 - **Too General**
 - **Still Broad**
 - **Less Broad**
 - **Narrow Enough**

STEP 3: Finding and selecting sources (books, articles, other)

- **Finding and selecting sources**
 - *Compiling a preliminary bibliography*
 - *Selecting from the preliminary list*

Note basis for your first evaluation

- Age
- Relevance
- Generality / Specificity
- Reputation
- Bias
- Length

STEP 4: Proposing a Working Thesis

■ Definition

- A statement of opinion about or attitude towards the topic which will either be proved or disproved by the argument in the research paper.
- A sentence that expresses the main idea of the paper.
- A specific statement that decides length of paper.

STEP 4: Proposing a Working Thesis

■ ***The working thesis***

- not repetition of the topic.
- only provisional
- can be adjusted

■ ***Formulation of the thesis***

One, complex sentence making a statement about the topic, showing personal judgment or evaluation.

STEP 4: Proposing a Working Thesis

- **Example:**

Topic : Osteoporosis

- **Thesis:** Osteoporosis, which is a common disease among men and women, leading to bone fragility and an increased susceptibility to fractures can be detected, treated, and prevented.

STEP 5: Note Taking

■ Paraphrase

Writing skill in which information is written in different words without changing its original meaning.

■ Steps to paraphrase

- Read the selection
- find synonyms
- Write a brief outline
- DO NOT change the meaning of the original text

STEP 5: Note Taking

■ ORIGINAL PARAGRAPH

- *When the Maracana soccer stadium in Rio De Janeiro, Brazil was opened to the public in 1950, and Brazil lost the World Cup to the Uruguayan team, the Brazilians were so disheartened one had the impression that the country itself had died. And people did die of sadness. Mere threats of defeat in a championship match can cause heart attacks and the despair of the public is so great that many beat their heads against the cement posts. Such as the Brazilian's passion for soccer.*

STEP 5: Note Taking

■ OUTLINE

- A. Brazil lost the World Cup
 - 1. Entire country was sad
 - 2. Some people died
- B. Possible defeat causes strong reaction
 - 1. Some experience heart attacks
 - 2. Some beat their heads
- C. Brazilians are very emotional about soccer

STEP 5: Note Taking

■ MODEL PARAPHRASE

- *In 1950, Brazil lost the World Cup in soccer to Uruguay in Rio de Janeiro. The entire country was overcome by sadness; some people even died from it. Brazilians react very strongly to potential defeat in championship soccer games. Some people have heart attacks, and others beat their heads against cement posts. Brazilians are very emotional about soccer.*

STEP 5: Note Taking

- Difference between legitimate and unacceptable paraphrases
 - Source :
“ What is unmistakably convincing and makes Miller’s theater writing hold is its authenticity in respect to the minutiae of American life. He is a first-rate reporter; he makes the details of his observation palpable.”
- UNACCEPTABLE PARAPHRASE
 - *What is truly convincing and makes Arthur Miller’s theatrical writing effective is its authenticity. He is an excellent reporter and makes his observation palpable.*
- LEGITIMATE PARAPHRASE
 - *The strength of Arthur Miller’s dramatic art lies in its faithfulness to the details of the American scene and in its power to bring to life the reality of ordinary experience*

STEP 5: Note Taking

■ Summarize

- Similar to paraphrase but usually shorter

■ Steps to Summarize:

- Find the main idea
- Keep most important supporting ideas and major details
- Rewrite sentences in your own words .
- Leave out unimportant words and emphasize most important ideas.
- Use transition words
- A third as long as the original material

STEP 5: Note Taking

- EXAMPLE SUMMARY
- *The Brazilian people become so emotionally involved with their national soccer team that in 1950, when their team lost the World Cup to Uruguay, the entire country was saddened, and some people even died. The mere possibility of defeat causes genuine physical suffering.*

STEP 5: Note Taking

■ **Incorporating summary or paraphrase**

■ Transitional phrases

- A.D. Collister in his book / article explains that, believes that, shows that... ..
- It is A.D. Collister's belief/opinion/view/conclusion that.....

STEP 5: Note Taking

- Explain your idea in your own words and mention other people who agree with you.
 - Example
 - It appears from the evidence that
- Using anyone's ideas without acknowledging them is **plagiarism.**

STEP 5: Note Taking

- **Introduce generally accepted ideas by impersonal expressions**
 - **Examples:**
 - It is generally believed / held / argued / acknowledged that
 - A commonly held opinion is that
 - Doctors/ teachers / scientists have said that
- **N.B. Every summary or paraphrase must have a source note (citation)**

STEP 5: Note Taking

■ Quote

- Repetition in speech or writing of someone else's words.
- Purpose: To prove or support a statement or opinion ; to emphasize an idea.
- Selection: Use quotations when
 - writer has used a particular apt expression
 - explained something in a very clear, clever, original or illuminating way

STEP 5: Note Taking

- **In case of lack of originality, do not quote, but summarize or paraphrase.**
 - **Note:**
 - Acknowledge source.
 - Do not use too many quotations.
 - Synthesize, comment on and analyze the information.
 - Do not quote just for its own sake.

STEP 5: Note Taking

■ Incorporating quotations

■ Punctuation

Example:

- A.D. Collister wrote, “ There is no evidence to suggest that the earth is anything but flat.”

■ Transitional Phrases:

Example:

- As X says, “.....”
- According to Y, “.....”

STEP 5: Note Taking

- Longer Quotations :
 - leaving a line empty
 - indenting the extract on both left hand and right hand margins
 - using single spacing.

- Ellipsis

Example....

- *It was found that. "In 1972 at Manchester University foreign students spent as average of 23 / 7 hours per week listening to English and only 6 hours speaking to English people (Nash, 1990, p. 45)*

STEP 5: Note Taking

- **Differences between quoting, paraphrasing, and summarizing**
 - **Quotations:** identical to the original
 - **Paraphrasing:** putting a passage from source material into your own words
 - **Summarizing:** putting the main idea(s) into your own words, including only the main point(s)

STEP 5: Note Taking

- **Rationale for using quotations, paraphrases and summaries**
 - Provide support or add credibility to the writing
 - Refer to work that leads up to work in progress
 - Give examples of several points of view on a subject
 - Agree or disagree with the thesis
 - Highlight a particularly striking phrase, sentence, or passage by quoting the original
 - Expand the breadth or depth of your writing

STEP 5: Note Taking

- **Frequently intertwine summaries, paraphrases, and quotations to make the writing smooth.**

- Example:

In his famous and influential work On the Interpretation of Dreams, Sigmund Freud argues that dreams are the “royal road to the unconscious” (page), expressing in coded imagery the dreamer’s unfulfilled wishes through a process known as the “dream work” (page). According to Freud, actual but unacceptable desires are censored internally and subjected to coding through layers of condensation and displacement before emerging in a kind of rebus puzzle in the dream itself (pages).

STEP 5: Note Taking

- **Definition of Plagiarism**
 - Polite term for copying.
 - The unacknowledged use of someone else's words or ideas.

STEP 5: Note Taking

■ Actions that might be seen as

Buying, stealing,
or borrowing a paper

Using the source
too closely
when paraphrasing

Hiring someone to
write your paper

Building on someone's
ideas without citation

Copying from another source without citing
(on purpose or by accident)

Deliberate plagiarism

Accidental plagiarism

STEP 5: Note Taking

■ Need to Document

- Using or referring to somebody else's words or ideas from a magazine, book, newspaper, song, TV program, movie, Web page, computer program, letter, advertisement, or any other medium
- Using information gained through interviewing
- Copying the exact words or a **“unique phrase”**
- Reprinting diagrams, illustrations, charts, and pictures

■ No Need to Document

- Writing your own experiences, observations, insights, thoughts, and conclusions.
- Using “common knowledge” – folklore, common sense observations or shared information.
- Compiling generally accepted facts
- Writing up your own experimental results

STEP 6: OUTLINING

- **Outline: a detailed plan or skeleton of paper**
 - **Form of outline:**

Title

I. First main idea

A. Supporting idea

1. Detail

2. Detail

3. Detail

i. Minor detail

ii. Minor detail

B. Supporting idea

II. Second main idea

STEP 6: OUTLINING

- Use only main ideas for main headings.
- Relate subheadings to main headings.
- Put all headings in a series of same type.
- Have at least two subheadings.
- Map outline to text.
- Indent items correctly.
- Put a period after each letter or number.
- Be consistent in format.

STEP 6: OUTLINING

- **TWO TYPES OF OUTLINING**: Topic Outline and Sentence Outline
- Example of a Topic Outline
 - I. Shakespeare Wrote
 - A. Tragedies
 - 1. Romeo & Juliet
 - 2. Hamlet
 - B. Comedies
 - C. History Plays
 - 1. King Lear
 - 2. Henry VIII

Step 7: Referencing

- ***What is Referencing?***
 - An important part of academic writing.
 - A way of referring to the work of others to provide evidence and support.
- **Why Reference? To avoid plagiarism**
 - (a) all sources used must be cited in the text. A full list of sources cited must be included in the reference list.
 - (b) accuracy and consistency.
 - (c) The Harvard and MLA styles of referencing

Step 7: Referencing

■ In Text Citation

- **Direct Citation** : Use exact words from text between quotation marks.
 - **Example:** *"There are not enough examples in this essay", (Brown, 1998:4).*
- **Indirect Citation** : Rewrite idea or opinion of author in your own words as a paraphrase or a summary.
 - **Example:** *Brown felt that a particular piece of writing was lacking in examples (1998:4).*

Step 7: Referencing

■ Footnotes/Endnotes

- **Footnotes:** at the bottom of the same page.
- **Endnotes:** citations and reference lists at end of paper

■ Using footnotes or endnotes

- (a) Put a number at the end of the sentence which requires citation.
- (b) Show number as superscript ¹⁵.
- (c) Leave four spaces between the last line of text and the first footnote on each page.
- (d) Indent first line.

Step 7: Referencing

■ Examples

¹⁵ Ronald E. Pepin, *Literature of Satire* (Lewiston: Edwin Press, 1988) 78

¹⁶ Rodulf Anaya, *Bless Me Ultima* (New York: Warner books, 1972) 66

¹⁷ Ibid, 155

■ Note: Ibid refers to the same author mentioned before.

Step 7: Referencing

- A reference list refers to all the books, articles and websites referred to in an assignment.
- A bibliography refers to the list of all the sources used, even if not cited . Includes reference list plus all read material.

Step 7: Referencing

■ Harvard style referencing rules

- List sources alphabetically by surname of author
- Chronological listing for more than one work for one author
- Separate elements by commas
- Author's surname appears first followed by author's initials, separated by a comma
- Author's initials are followed by a full stop but no spacing
- The citation ends in a full stop
- Separate names by commas for more than one author
- Include all necessary information. Be consistent and accurate.

Step 7: Referencing

■ Reference lists for different entries

■ Book

Brown, J. 1998, *Essay Writing for University Students*, Sage, London.

(Separate names for more than one author by commas).

Brown, J., Smith, L., & Jones, P. 1998, *How to Write Good Essays*, Sage, London.

Step 7: Referencing

- **Edited book**

Brown, J. & Smith, C. (eds), 1998, *Essay Writing for University Students*, Sage, London.

- **Chapter or section of a book**

Jones P. 1997, 'Some students simply cannot write good essays', in *Essay Writing for University Students*, ed. J. Brown, Sage, London, pp12-32.

Step 7: Referencing

- **Journal article**

Brown, G.1998, 'Some things are better left unsaid: An introduction to the art of minding your own business', *Journal of Self Improvement*, Vol.3, No.2, pp 4-15.

- **Electronic Journal article**

Brown, G. 1998, 'Some things are better left unsaid: An introduction to the art of minding your own business', *Journal of Self Improvement*, [online], Vol.3, No.2.

Available: Proquest 5000, [Accessed 7 June 2003]

Step 7: Referencing

- **Newspaper or magazine article**

Greenwood, J. 2004, 'When time runs out', *Gulf News*, 23rd June p.4

- **Electronic article**

Brown, G.1998, 'Some things are better left unsaid: An introduction to the art of minding your own business', *Self improvement*. Available:

<http://www.selfimprovement.com/brown/html>[Accessed 23 June, 2001].

Step 7: Referencing

- **Publication from a government body or organization**

United Nations Crime and Justice Information Network, 1999, *Report on Crime Rates in Developing Countries, 1997-1998*.

Available:

<http://www.uncjin.org/reports/1999/html>[Accessed 5 June, 2000]

- **Work with no apparent author**

The Economist, 1999, 'Do economic sanctions work?', [online], 23 February.

Available: <http://www.theeconomist.uk>[accessed 25 March, 1999].

Step 8: Final organization of paper

■ Checklist of main ingredients

Your paper should include the following sections:

- Title Page.
- Contents page and thesis statement
- Introduction
- Body
- Conclusion
- If you are using notes, place these after the conclusion (e.g.. glossary, appendix, etc)
- Reference List
- Bibliography

Step 8: Final organization of paper

■ Guidelines

■ Introduction

- engage the interest of the reader
- show main idea and how it will be discussed.
- a 'lead' to engage the reader's attention and interest.
- a statement of the thesis
- a summary of the problems/issues
- an explanation of how the paper is organized.

Step 8: Final organization of paper

■ Conclusion

- Similar to introduction, should be well-organized and brief.
- Summarize the argument .
- Show how/that the thesis has been proved.
- Suggest where further interesting research could be done.
- Make predictions leading from the research.

STEP: 9 Final Drafting (putting it all together)

- **Title Page (first page)**
 - Title, name, course, date
- **Contents Page (Second Page)**
 - Outline or TOC

STEP: 9 Final Drafting (putting it all together)

- **Final form of contents page**
- L/P On a page by itself
- Spacing and underlining
- Headings and sub-headings – position
- Thesis Statement – position and punctuation
- Numbering system, indentation (outline)
- C/O Thesis Statement
- Abstract, Introduction and Conclusion
- Glossary, Endnotes, Bibliography
- Content of body of paper shown with clear sub-headings but without details.

STEP 10: Proof Reading/Formatting

■ Proofreading

■ Examine the Introduction of your paper

- Is there a “lead”?
- Find the thesis, is it well defined?
- Does it summarize the issues ? how?
- Does it explain the approach to be used? How?
- Do you think it is a good introduction or not? Why? Could you improve it in any way? How?

STEP 10: Proof Reading/Formatting

- **Examine the conclusion of your paper.**
 - Does it have all the necessary required features?
 - Does it have the thesis statement ?
 - Does it provide a summary to the main points mentioned in your paper?
 - Does it suggest future recommendations?
 - Do you think it is a good conclusion or not, why? Could you improve it in any way? How?

STEP 10: Proof Reading/Formatting

- **Examine the layout, content, and grammar of your paper.**
 - Layout/Presentation : Margins, spacing, indentation, correct citation, references, page numbers etc.
 - Content/Organization: Thesis statement, outline, introduction / body / conclusion, quotations, paraphrases, summaries and correct citations, reference list and bibliography. Transition words, cohesive devices, smooth transition between paragraphs.
 - Grammar/Structure: Spelling, tenses, punctuation, etc.

STEP 10: Proof Reading/Formatting

- **Formatting:** (white, Arial/Times New Roman by 12 pp paper)
 - **Margins:** 2 cm margins all around the text of paper – left side, right side, and top and bottom.
 - **Spacing:** one and half spaced, including quotations, notes, and the list of works cited.
 - **Page Numbers:** Number pages consecutively throughout the manuscript (including the first page) in the upper right-hand corner of each page, one-half inch from the top.

STEP 10: Proof Reading/Formatting

- **Tables and Figures:** Tables should be labeled 'Table,' Other material such as photographs, images, charts, and line-drawings should be labeled 'Figure' and be properly numbered and captioned.
- **Binders:** Generally, the simpler the better. A simple staple in the upper left-hand corner of your paper should suffice.