

Guide to Developing and Writing a Research Paper

What Makes for Good Research?

Clear formulation of project purpose: What is the research you are conducting and why are you conducting it? What specific questions are you looking to answer?

Build on relevant theory. Learn the state of knowledge about the topic. Be clear on what you will try to learn in your investigation that you and your audience don't already know. (Could just be the specifics about what is happening in a given company).

Use appropriate methods to collect relevant data

- What specific data will you try to find? How will you try to find it?
- How will the data you are seeking answer the questions you pose? Will you be able to get sufficient data?
- Can you *triangulate* (i.e., use several approaches to answer a given question, thus providing much more confidence in your findings)?

Think about your analytical strategy

- Develop a system for storing your data.
- Think about your strategy for analyzing it: What is your hypothesis? How will you test it? How do you know if you're wrong?

What Makes for a Good Research Paper?

Good papers will provide strong, clear answers to all of these questions:

1. What problem have you analyzed and why should we be interested?
2. What are your findings?
3. How do you explain your findings? What evidence and theory has led you to your conclusions?
4. How do your findings and your analysis compare with received knowledge? Do your findings support, supplement, or contradict existing theory?
5. What does your analysis reveal that you had not known prior to the study and/or that readers would not have known before reading the paper?

Good papers help readers understand the answers to these questions through careful logic, organization, use of evidence, and clear, concise writing.

The **Levels of Development** chart on the next page provides a profile of various paper qualities and corresponding grades. The only paper grade that counts is the one that goes on the final version of the paper; you will have the opportunity to revise an assignment.

Developmental Rubric for Writing a Research Paper				
(Grade)	Argument	Organization	Evidence	Writing
Exemplary (High A)	The author knows what he wants to say and why. He goes beyond pointing out facts to using them to change the reader's understanding.	Every paragraph supports the main argument in a coherent way. Clear transitions point out why each new paragraph follows the previous one.	Key points and assertions are supported by concrete evidence drawn from primary research or reliable, cited sources.	The paper is clear and concise. The author exhibits good command of expository prose. Phrasing is strong and memorable.
Accomplished (Low A)	Paper has a solid, consistent focus, but (a) occasional leap of logic leaves reader unconvinced or (b) subject importance or relevance may not be clear. Alternatively, imaginative ideas may hint at a convincing and important argument, but do not completely cohere.	The paper is organized fairly logically, but sections and paragraphs do not always follow a consistent logic. It is unclear why some sections and paragraphs appear where they do.	The paper offers solid evidence, but may fail to identify the source, may include unsupported generalizations, or may fail to clarify the significance of evidence	The paper is generally readable, but may lack clarity or brevity, or may be weak in style or tone.
Developing (B)	Paper has the beginnings of a central topic and analysis, but structure is still a series of related observations, without explaining a reason or logic for their presentation	Observations are listed rather than organized. Often, this is a symptom of a problem in argument, as the framing of the paper has not provided a path for evidence to follow.	The paper relies on summaries and generalities. If concrete evidence is present, its origin or significance is not clear.	Reading is difficult because of wordiness, lack of clarity, indirectness, redundancy, frequent errors in syntax, agreement, pronoun reference, and/or punctuation.
Beginning (C)	The paper provides a series of observations, quotes, or stories but does not describe a central question, or develop an analysis.	Observations are set forth, but they lack coherence and comprehensiveness. Some may be restated or may not belong in the paper at all.	The author tries to support points, but not does not include concrete evidence or misuses evidence.	Reading is very difficult because of extensive errors in grammar, usage, spelling, and/or punctuation; nevertheless, with effort a reader may infer the writer's meaning.
No Credit (F)	The paper shows little evidence of converging on a central question or analysis	The reader cannot follow the line of thought. Both paper and paragraphs lack coherence.	No evidence or inapplicable evidence	The paper is incomprehensible due to constant and glaring errors.

Paper Presentation Basics

Format

Name, Date, Title up front

Page Numbers

Margins *at least 1"* on top, bottom, right & left

Be kind to older eyes: Use font size of at least 11 points, preferably 12 points or even 14.

For a longer report, especially if there are several appendices, charts, or tables, use a Table of Contents

Use consistent heading styles. Larger and/or bolder for Principal Headings. Not quite so large for Secondary Headings.

Double space anything that is going to be reviewed!

Introduction

Your readers are busy; they need to be able to read your work quickly and delve more in depth only as their interest and time permits. This means:

Begin with an Executive Summary (business reports), Abstract (academic papers), or for less formal memorandums, a clear summary in the first paragraph of the subject and its importance, principal findings and key points.

Be explicitly clear on organization: What are you going to tell the reader? How? When? Why?

Structure

All papers have structure. Sometimes you will want to make this explicit through headers. The ideal research paper makes

one big point (e.g., Buy Intel stock; despite stumbling leadership, the Widgets organization workforce was resilient; the key to Sandler O'Neill resilience was moral purpose) and several subpoints (e.g., Intel stock is a good investment because of (a) growth prospects (b) company leadership, and (c) industry structure).

Above all, an author needs to clearly state a thesis and its relevance and then prove the thesis.

Text

Keep the material concise and flowing. Edit out anything not directly relevant to making a key point.

Support

All assertions should be supported by evidence: most convincingly these come from citations of other research or primary data collected for the project – interview, observational, survey, archival, or quantitative measures. Examples from personal experience may also be used if they are clearly identified.

Source data or support for principal arguments should be put in appendices.

Charts, Tables, and Appendices

Do not include anything in the report (appendices, charts, or tables) that are not explicitly referenced in the text.

Appendices, charts, and tables must be explicitly labeled. All graphics should include a key.