
Writing ESSAYS and RESEARCH PAPERS

Extracted from the Business Open Learning Archive by C. Jarvis found at <http://www.brunel.ac.uk/~bustcfj/bola/study/skills9.html> and study skills tips from <http://nutsandbolts.washcoll.edu/structure.html>

Structure

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

The Introduction (beginning)

Explains the scope of the paper (what you are going to cover and why). First impressions matter, therefore it only makes sense that the person grading or reading your paper will be more inclined to look at your work favorably if the initial paragraph is clear, organized, and engaging.

The Main Body (middle)

Where you develop your ideas/line of argument as fully as you can (with one main topic or idea per paragraph). Describe, explain and justify the points you make. It is not enough just to assert them. Confirm your ideas by referencing published resources; support what you say with examples. **At all times** keep in focus the specification (what you have been asked to do and the main themes of your argument).

The Conclusion (end)

Where you summarize your main points, draw conclusions and make suggestions if appropriate. Refer back to your objectives for the paper. If it asks a specific question, have you answered it?

Writing the Paper!

1.1 Think about the assignment, the audience and the purpose

To prepare for writing, go over the requirements of the assignment to make sure you focus your writing efforts on what's expected by your instructor. Keep in mind the length of the paper and its due date. Consider the purpose of the paper as set forth in the assignment. Are you trying to persuade, to inform, to evaluate, to summarize, to bring about change?

- Who is your audience and how will that affect your paper?
- What prior knowledge can you assume the audience has on the topic?

What style and tone of writing are required by the audience and the assignment--informal, scholarly, first-person reporting, dramatized? What is the format to follow? Establish the **terms of reference (ToR)**, which define the scope (and therefore limits) of the essay/research paper, the ground it seeks to cover.

1.2 Research Your Topic, Gather and Analyze Information and Develop the Introduction

You may have information from different sources which examines different aspects of your topic. By breaking down the information you may be able to see relationships between the different sources and form them into a whole concept. One way to do this is to try out different organization patterns: compare and contrast, advantages and disadvantages, starting from a narrow premise and building on it, cause and effect, logical sequence. In general, your introduction should:

- capture the reader's attention
- reflect the question raised by the assignment
- provide essential context for your topic
- define key terms

Most importantly, your introduction should

- convey the *pattern of organization* you will follow in the paper
- build to the *thesis sentence*: a clear, concise statement of the specific position you will explore in your paper.

Constructing the Thesis Statement

A well-written thesis statement, usually expressed in one sentence, is the most important sentence in your entire paper. The thesis sentence is a clear, concise statement of the position you will defend in your paper. The thesis sentence should *argue a position*, not summarize information. When composing your **thesis sentence**:

- make sure your thesis reflects the *full scope* of your argument.
- 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.
- argue as *conceptually rich* a position as you can support. Ask yourself *How?* and *Why?* questions to deepen your thesis.
- make sure your reader can easily *identify* your thesis sentence.
- do not just reword the professor's question; *claim your own position*.
- declares the position you are taking in your paper,
- sets up the way you will organize your discussion, and
- point to the conclusion you will draw.

Weed out irrelevant information

After you are done gathering notes and analyzing your citations, you may have to get rid of some of them! No matter how interesting the information is, if it doesn't relate to and support the thesis you've chosen - don't try to cram it into the paper. You'll have an easier time writing if you do this weeding before you start.

Info Search - fill in the gaps

Once you've identified which of your research notes you'll use, you may see some gaps where you need an additional support for a point you want to make. Leave enough time in your writing plan for additional research time, just in case.

1.3 Prepare an 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. It is very useful to construct your "Table of Contents" first as an outline for the research paper. You can see the emergent structure of the research paper and use the headings to write the sections. Key aspects of an outline:

Introduction should include:

- Statement about the issue (background/context for the topic)
- your terms of reference - what you set out to do
- thesis sentence

Main Body should include:

- informative headings and sub-headings (not in the case of an essay)
- points, argument and supporting evidence
- points grouped together so that readers can concentrate on one aspect at a time
- may consist of several major sections (2, 3, 4, and 5) each covering a specific facet of the investigation. For example:

Paragraphs 2 and 3

Extent of the Issue (Who is affected? How? Work in sources.)

Paragraphs 4 and 5

Implications and Repercussions given the issue (Work in sources.)

Paragraphs 6 and 7

Future solutions (not necessarily your own. More sources.)

[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].

Conclusion Summary of findings and evaluation/analysis of what has been found.

1.4 Write the rough draft

A research paper has wider scope and is more action oriented than an essay. It is a more structured document conveying information, sometimes offering recommendations for a specific purpose. 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.

Proceed to write up your notes as a draft paper using the headings in logical sequence. Don't worry too much at this stage about precise spelling and grammar.

Use substantive statements - Each sentence should contribute to the development of your argument. Avoid fact-only sentences and instead incorporate facts into more substantive statements.

Clarify points. Modify. Make sure there are page numbers on every page etc. Review the layout and check the sequences and content. Cut and paste, add or delete sections. Read through what you have written and decide whether or not to include points you were unsure about earlier.

Add **appendices** if necessary. These would include detailed supporting information which the reader should have but which would interrupt the flow if included in the main body. Appendices must be numbered with the numbers clearly referred to in the main body.

Now tackle the English, the spelling, the punctuation and the grammar. Are sentences, sentences? Sort out the typos.

This is your first draft. 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!!!!

Revise and Proofread

If possible, LEAVE YOUR PAPER ASIDE FOR A DAY OR TWO. Proceed to read your paper out loud, to yourself. See if the arguments are coherent, logical and conclusive when read aloud.

Ask Yourself

- Does the essay or 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 acknowledged (references?)

- Is the length what was required? If it is too long can over-elaborate sections be made more concise. Can some sections be omitted for reason that they add little to your main argument?
- Is the research paper clearly written and well laid out? Have I really considered the reader's needs?
- Is the research paper legible and is the grammar, punctuation and spelling correct? Are the sentences and is the sense clear?

Proceed to have several experienced people read and critique your paper. Use the Writing Lab, Coaches or tutors as critics. If you choose to use friends, make sure they're A students in English! Discuss their feedback and, if appropriate, incorporate changes into future drafts. (That's right, drafts).

Use of Dictionary, Thesaurus & Spell-checker

A good dictionary and Thesaurus are invaluable. Buy one for your work desk/book shelf or use the built-in SPELL CHECKER and THESARUS features of your computer software. Check word meanings when conducting your research and writing your essay/paper.

Extracted from the Business Open Learning Archive by C. Jarvis found at <http://www.brunel.ac.uk/~bustcfj/bola/study/skills9.html> and study skills tips from <http://nutsandbolts.washcoll.edu/structure.html>