

Guidelines for Writing Research Papers
By
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Foreword

- A. Know your audience. Different audiences have different expectations and requirements. If publishing in a periodical, learn what subjects and styles are typical, read writers' guidelines. If presenting elsewhere, learn as much about your audience as possible beforehand, and tailor the presentation to their needs. Put yourself in their shoes.
- B. Become familiar with quality writing. Know APA rules, re-read Strunk and White every decade or so, read *Write to the Point* or another writing style book.

Introduction

A good research study must be convincing. What makes it convincing is a document that it is...

- A. Well written, ordered, and logical. Spell-check, avoid confusing it's and its. The more important the document, the more important it is that you have another set of eyes read it. Use section headers and other techniques to help the reader.
- B. Based on a literature review that identifies foundations for inquiry and gaps in the knowledge base. The literature review must identify the same variables that you will be using in your analysis, and does not review material irrelevant to your study.
- C. Presents hypothesized relationships in mind (or, for grounded theory development, a framework for investigation)
- D. Generalizable outside this context (or for consulting, a generalized principle is applicable). Justify the need for this study based on its generalizability.
- E. Includes a sound design – technique, plan, and method – is well-constructed and justifiable.
- F. Documents an execution carried out according to plan.
- G. Methodologically transparent and sound. The data will provide the answers, the sample isn't (too) biased, the statistical measures and method are appropriate.
- H. Based on the results. Conclusions are well-founded and unanswered questions are directed toward further research.

Objectives

- A. The thesis sentence and paragraph should tell the reader where you're going.
- B. The subsequent paragraphs will say why the subject is important.
- C. The literature review states what is already known about the phenomenon, and what is not yet known.
- D. Causal model: Your intro and review section identifies and defines your concepts.
- E. Arrows on the model go from left to right, and the right-most concept is the outcome or dependent variable. Independent variables are your explanatory variables. Control variables are necessary to recognize the tendency of some characteristics to modify the relationship.

Methods, Data and Variables

- A. Introduce the data source, sample description, timing of collection, number of cases, technique used to collect data (including all contacts, incentives, etc.), advantages/disadvantages of these data.
- B. Measures used must operationalized the concept. Whenever you hear about someone else's research that you find hard to swallow, this is one of the first areas you look, the second being the data and sample.
- C. Define your dependent variable, that is, its metric (nominal, scale, continuous, etc.), values taken (yes=1, no = 0; or where 1 = not at all satisfied and 10 = very satisfied).

- D. Do the same for your independent variables and control variables.
- E. Explain any recodings, variable constructions, interactive terms.
- F. If using anyone else's metric, cite the source, and justify usage here.
- G. Provide a table for variable descriptives (usually just mean and SD).
- H. Given the DV measure, identify the statistical technique(s) you will be using. Justify it, explain the model logic (e.g., $y = a + bx$ for regression) and if necessary, refer to the authoritative sources for this method.

Results

- A. State the results. Don't interpret them at this stage, beyond saying whether your hypotheses are supporter or not.
- B. Start with the most salient points for your research, i.e. your primary explanatory variables.
- C. Cite the coefficients and whether it was statistically significant (not just 'significant' unless immediately followed by statistical notation, e.g., $p < .001$).
- D. Mention the direction of support for the hypothesized relationship. That is, don't write just 'education was statistically significant' but 'the higher the educational attainment, the less likely one is to watch television'.
- E. Even results that aren't statistically significant may be of great interest, and do not be beholden to the $p < .05$ litmus test.

Discussion, Conclusions

- A. It can be helpful to include a brief summary of results. "As hypothesized, we found that employees with positive relationships with management are more likely to express loyalty to the organization."
- B. At this point stand back and reflect on what your results mean for your research question.
- C. You may want to refer to others' reflections as well, or refute, qualify or support a theoretical argument.
- D. Suggest further areas of research, if need be.
- E. Here you can speculate.

References

Schwab, Donald P. (2005). *Research Methods for Organizational Behavior, 2nd Edition*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates: New York. Chapters 15, 21.