

Preparing the Report

Planning Research Papers 10

Organization and Emphasis

1. Prepare draft copies of information that will be included later in the report while these are still fresh in your memory.
2. Work on the manuscript as you go along; don't wait until the study is finished.
3. Organize and integrate the research articles into related topics instead of merely arranging the Review of Literature chronologically.
4. Give more emphasis and space in your Review of Literature to more important and relevant studies and less space to less pertinent studies.
5. Use as much of your own thoughts and words as you can; don't use too many quotations or select quotations that do not make their point as well as you could using your own words.
6. Provide a description of the research sample and measures used so that your readers could use it to reconstruct your study.
7. Discuss and emphasize important findings, but don't waste time and space on minor findings that you can present better in a table or diagram.

Language and Style

A good beginning narrows the topic and points to the main idea:

- Be as explicit as possible in telling what the topic is, even if you have to say something as dull as, "The purpose of this paper is..."
- Don't over-explain or use a long, wandering buildup to the topic. Keep it brief and focused.
- Resist the temptation to put details in the introduction; that's what the rest of the paper is for.

The body contains the real point of your paper, so make sure it's understandable and accurate:

- Evaluate your evidence. Are your arguments valid? Make sure that your statements are facts and that you back up the facts with valid, logical arguments, not feelings or preconceptions with little support.
- Cover all the points in question. Anticipate the readers' possible questions and answer them.
- Don't get off the track—stay with the central idea. Omit unnecessary details—if you can't relate something to the topic, no matter how interesting you think it is, get rid of it.
- Organize necessary details; arrange your thoughts in a logical order.
- Watch transitions: Are they smooth and clear? Have you indicated explicitly to the reader that a cause and effect relationship exists, or a contrast exists? Transitions should lead your reader to the next phase of the story.

But if in doubt, cite.

- Acknowledge your sources:
 - √ Get familiar with and use the citation style common to your field to give credit to those authors you borrowed, adapted, or adopted ideas from (and to give credibility to your ideas).
 - √ Don't cite obvious facts (e.g., Robert Oppenheimer led the Manhattan Project).
- Choose words wisely—use words you know and are comfortable with; the big word is not necessarily the best one.
- Punctuate and spell accurately—in the final copy.
- Say what you mean—tactfully.
- Write concisely but don't overdo it.
- Put descriptive words where they belong (not “I found a dollar walking home” but “Walking home, I found a dollar”).
- Write sentences that lead your reader along your train of thought.
 - √ Place older, less important, known information before newer and more important information.
 - √ Put people or their surrogates (e.g., “The White House issued ...”) in the action position.
- Give your paragraphs coherence.
 - √ Use transitions within them.
 - √ Use transitions between them.
- Lead the readers through your writing by using an appropriate and helpful layout.
 - √ Use meaningful headers if they will help the readers see the organization.
 - √ Use visuals (diagrams, tables, etc.) but only when appropriate and helpful.
- When you quote, quote accurately; nothing destroys a writer's credibility faster than an obvious misquotation.
- Plan to revise what you write, and then do it.
- Turn in a good-looking final copy of the paper—one that looks as if you care about it.

The conclusion should contain the main point of your paper and should not be too long:

- Summarize throughout the paper as you switch from one aspect of the topic to another (or wherever you think a quick summary would be useful), but also include a final conclusion.
- Don't merely repeat the thesis statement of your introduction; instead, emphasize the main thrust of the idea that you ended up with now that you have led the reader through all that research you wrote about so clearly.

A brief note on writing style:

Justin Leonard, former assistant conservation director of Michigan, once said, “The [journal article writer] can make the editors quite happy with plain, unadorned, eighth-grade level composition.” -- *Bio-Science*, Sept. 1966