

TEACHING HOW TO WRITE A RESEARCH PAPER

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ABSTRACT

The article aims at offering help to lecturers that want to teach their students how to write an acceptable research paper. As grammar and/or syntax can contribute to writing correct sentences but cannot aid students in developing a well-written research paper, lecturers should teach their students how to acquire important skills that will help them to compose a correct research paper. Such skills involve the acquisition of the ability to develop paragraphs, a series of sentences developing one topic, and the composition of a paper through a series of paragraphs that develop several related topics. Paragraphs need to include unity, coherence, transition, reasons – to accept the arguments in the research paper – and some examples in order to give the reasons in the research paper more validity. While long paragraphs can make the reader tired, many short paragraphs can become monotonous and boring. In other words, the length of paragraphs in a research paper is important. So is a closing, a summary sentence for the end of the development of the topic sentence, signalling that the writer is ready to move on to another idea and lists of details, like illustrations, examples, contrast, comparison, cause and effect and a combination of methods. The purpose of the research paper is considered to be of utmost importance and corresponds to one of the four main types of writing, including explanation, argument or mixtures, depending on the title and the central idea. Limiting the subject by providing an outline is helpful in organizing the student's thoughts and avoiding overlapping. The inclusion of citations and a bibliography are obligatory for diligence in fulfilling the requirements of the university or college.

Keywords: Research/academic paper, outline, paragraph development, citations, bibliography.

INTRODACTION

If someone reads a scientific periodical like “Journal of Second Language Writing”, one will understand that academic writing involves “transferring general writing skills” and thoughts on a scientific topic and that “writing instructions would be provided by writing/language teachers” (Journal of Second Language Writing, 2004, p. 48).

An acceptable research paper can help students to achieve academic success, as the task can aid them in improving their reading skills. Developing reading for critical evaluation, not just for the purpose of knowledge, developing reasoning skills while reading articles or books to collect sources for the paper; and/or developing the skill of making a conclusion by asking questions that need answers. In other words, the purpose of reading several sources for a research paper is to understand and evaluate an idea, a scientific problem or a social issue and conclude it.

What is more, writing a research paper helps students to understand the process of scientific discovery and document it in order to reach their fellow students and lecturers. A well-written research paper offers undergraduate students a sense of achievement, repute and qualifications among their peers and lecturers, helping them to learn the skills for future researches or the basic process of writing essays, dissertations and a thesis. Not only do undergraduate students learn the process of research that involves the selection of a topic, the revision of a piece of literature, the collection and evaluation of data but they also learn to understand how to solve a problem, find an answer to a scientific question and compose a review.

RESEARCH RESULTS

A research paper is a formal, well-documented composition based (for the most part) on outside readings. These readings can be from various books, magazines and articles that can be found in the college library or the Net. According to *Harbrace College Handbook* (Hodges, 1998), the usual steps in writing a research paper are the following:

- I. Select and limit the subject
- II. Prepare a bibliography
- III. Develop an outline
- IV. Take notes on reading
- V. Avoid plagiarism
- VI. Write a well-documented paper

The six steps are examined and analysed below to help students to follow them correctly when writing a research paper.

I. Select and limit the subject

When students are given a specific writing assignment, they need to begin their research by asking questions. The answers will help them to compose the paper they want to write. Let us say that the topic of a writing assignment is *Contemporary*

Greek History 1800-1900. Here are some questions – examples of ways of starting research:

1. What does the topic involve? (*Definition*)
2. What are the characteristics of the topic? (*Characterization*)
3. How did it happen? (*Narration*)
4. What is its value? (*Evaluation*)
5. What is the present status? (*Comparison*)

Answers to the questions can help students to limit the topic to “The Greek War of Independence 1821-1834” and then organize the paper as follows:

1. Ottoman Rule in Greece
2. Social unrest and armed fighting
3. Hardships and sacrifices
4. Civil and religious freedom from the Ottoman rule
5. Independence and self-government

In other words, the type of research paper a student wants to write depends on his/her purpose. To write a short paper for undergraduate purposes he/she needs a central idea, an outline, some chapters, composed of paragraphs, the notes and the bibliography. For example, if a student wants to write a paper on “The Meaning of Dreams,” he/she has to write a detailed report on the work and opinion of others. i.e. the Austrian neurologist and founder of psychoanalysis Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), the Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961) and the Austrian medical doctor and psychotherapist Alfred Adler (1870-1937), the founder of the school of individual psychology.

Furthermore, if students want to prove or disprove a writer’s opinion or theory, they need to write a *thesis* or a lengthy academic paper based on original research. To help students consolidate the information mentioned above, an exercise like the following seems in order: “List three general fields which interest you, i.e. history, fiction, poetry. Then limit your subjects to two topics, i.e. “Greek poetry 1940-1960” and “Contemporary War Fiction,” one which is suitable for a paper of one to three thousand words and one in which you have a special interest. Please remember that students need to be prepared to decide whether each topic is suitable for a *report* (the former) or a *thesis* (the latter).

II. Prepare the bibliography

When students write a research paper, they have to cite references to acknowledge their sources. Science progresses by building upon the work of others and citations to sources show that students are aware of the background of their work and the context into which it fits. Citations help them to give validity to their arguments and reference citations help readers to find out more about their work, contributing to the evolution of science. Citations can come from books, periodicals or reference books that students can find in the library or the Net. Here is an exercise that can help students prepare a bibliography on the following topics:

1. Civil disobedience in contemporary cities
2. Immigration to Greece
3. Racism: a global phenomenon

A student can use general or specific periodicals and reference books, general or specific dictionaries and encyclopaedias, and the standard bibliographical form, like the following model of standard bibliographical entries:

Books

Thoreau, H. D. (1993). *Civil Disobedience and Other Essays*. New York: Dover Publications, Inc. [One author]

McQueen, R. A. & Knussen, C. (2006). *An introduction to research methods and statistics in psychology*. Harlow: Pearson Prentice Hall. [Two authors]

Beck, Robert E. Editor. *Immigration to Greece*. Athens: Hamilton House Publishers, 2010. [One editor]

Encyclopedias

Nelson, Ralph L. *International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences*. 1989, XXV, 345-347. [A signed article]

Groombridge, Brian. "Biodiversity." *Microsoft® Encarta® 2006* [DVD]. Microsoft Corporation, 2005. [A signed article]

Government publications

Statistical Abstract of Greece, 2001, Dept. of Immigration. Athens: Government Printing Office, 2006.

Migration Control and Data, Government Publications. Brussels: European Union Printing Office, 2004.

On Line – The World Wide Web

Kearney, Kevin. "The Importance of Academic Writing." University of Tennessee, Knoxville. <<http://www.opinion/studies/academic-writing.htm>>. November 8, 2012.

[Author's Last Name, First Name, "Title of Page," Address (URL), Month Day Year of Posting.]

Whatever bibliographical form a student adopts, he/she must remember that he/she needs to give the author's name, the title and the facts of the publication. In addition, a student has to use commas, periods, italics (underlining) and quotation marks exactly as they are shown above. The reference list should include all of the references cited in the paper. It should be arranged in alphabetical order by the last name of the first author.

III. Develop the outline

After completing a preliminary bibliography and a minimum of general reading on the subject (two or three encyclopedia articles and one or two other works will suffice), students make a preliminary outline in order to find their direction to their research. The outline can help them to omit irrelevant material from the bibliography and begin to find passages on which they want to make notes. They need to remember that the preliminary outline can change: as they make notes, they have to revise the preliminary outline, changing headings and subheadings or dropping subheadings. Let us say that a student wants to write a paper on the subject of the books that he/she has read. First, the student has to limit the subject to "War Stories". Next, he/she has to limit the subject to "Types of War Stories". Finally, the student has

to write down the central idea, war stories reveal important facts about war, and a list of items related to the topic.

War Stories

Types of War Stories	What they reveal
Reports of events	Consequences
War records	Armed fighting, battles
Letters	Attitudes and problems

The next step when making an outline is to group the listed items under a few headings. As the use of the above types of war stories would lead to a long paper, students need to group them further. Subheadings under more general headings will classify war stories according to what they reveal about the author's experiences. Therefore, any war story could be entitled "What the writer experienced," "What the writer felt" or "What the writer did." Then, students could illustrate each type by examples and list the main headings in a logical order.

IV. Make notes

While making notes on their readings, students learn how to evaluate useful passages. Whole articles or books cannot be used as subject matter for a paper. It is a good idea to use the table of contents and the index of a book to find the passages that students need. Then, they can evaluate the passages and make notes. Making notes is a key part of the research process because it helps students to learn and see the information that they have collected in a useful way. College handbooks advise students to keep in mind the following when making notes:

1. Skim the source before they read it in detail to understand the main ideas.
2. Search for the subject headings in the material they are reading.
3. Copy down every fact that may be of use to them in the paper.
4. Break down the text into small groups of paragraphs.
5. Write every word, every capital letter and every mark of punctuation as in the original if they cite a direct quotation.
6. Re-write the facts or ideas into their own words.
7. Quote passages, use figures and illustrations and acknowledge the sources.
8. Direct quotations that are more than four lines long. Set them off from the rest of the paper by use of narrower margins and single spaced lines.

Here is an example on how to direct a quotation that is more than four lines long:

And the ladies told Sir Lancelot that Queen Guinevere told them all or she passed, that Sir Lancelot had been a priest near a twelvemonth, and hither he cometh as fast as he may to fetch my corpse; and beside my lord, King Arthur, he shall bury me. Wherefore the queen said in hearing of them all: I beseech Almighty God that I may never have power to see Sir Lancelot with my worldly eyen; and thus, said all the ladies, was ever her prayer these two days, till she was dead. Then Sir Lancelot saw her visage, but he wept not greatly, but sighed. (Dandoulakis, 2014, p. 22).

In addition, here is an exercise students need to make notes on a long paragraph taken from a book entitled “The Origin of the Greek Theatre”.

The origin of the Greek theatre stretches back to ancient Greek mythology and religious rites. It developed from the cult of Dionysus, the God of Wine and Vegetation, who was also known as Bacchus. His father was Zeus, the King of the Gods and of the mortals, and his mother was Semele, the daughter of Cadmus and Harmonia, the King and Queen of Thebes. Hera, Zeus’ jealous wife, realizing her husband was in love with the Theban Princess, tricked Semele, who was pregnant, into allowing her to see him in his full splendour. When Zeus appeared before the young woman as the Lord of the Thunderbolt and Semele gazed upon him, the destructive flashes of lightning that radiated from him consumed her. Zeus rescued her unborn child from the ashes and gave it to the Hyades nymphs, who nourished Dionysus in infancy and childhood. For their care, Zeus rewarded the Hyades by changing them into the stars that bring rain when they near the horizon. Dionysus born of Zeus, the Wielder of Lightning (or the heat that ripens the grapes), and nursed by the Hyades, the Goddesses of Precipitation (or the rain that nourishes the grapevine), discovered the culture of the vine and the mode of extracting its juices. Envious Hera struck Dionysus with the curse of madness. He wandered all over the earth until he reached Phrygia in Asia Minor. There the Goddess of Nature, Cybele, cured him. Her intervention enlivened his life and so Dionysus set out to introduce his religious rites into Greece. They included celebrations ... because Dionysus died each winter and was reborn again each spring. This resurrection, the symbol of nature coming to life ... was celebrated with ... choral hymns ... [that] evolved into the Greek drama (Hatziolou, 2008, p. 1).

The example-passage below helps students to learn to make notes of important facts of what they have read in order to study or reference them later: “The origin of the Greek theatre goes back to the Greek mythology and religious rites. It developed from the cult of Dionysus, the God of Wine. The son of Zeus, the King of the Gods, and Princess Semele, a mortal, Dionysus was raised by the Hyades nymphs when his mother died. Born of Zeus, the Wielder of Lightning (the heat that ripens the grapes) and nursed by the Hyades, the Goddesses of Precipitation (the rain that nourishes the grapevine), Dionysus discovered the culture of the vine. As he died each winter and was reborn each spring, the people celebrated his resurrection with choral hymns that evolved into the Greek drama (5th and 4th centuries B.C.)”.

V. Avoid plagiarism

If a student fails to acknowledge borrowed material, then he/she is plagiarizing. Plagiarism is the copying or paraphrasing of other people’s work or ideas into

a writer's own work without acknowledgement. Plagiarism should be avoided because it is a breach of academic integrity.

VI. Learn to write the paper

After students have completed the outline and made a number of notes on every section and subsection of the outline, they need to begin writing. Because they usually take their material for their papers from others, they need to give credit. They can do this by using endnotes numbered consecutively throughout the paper and placed in one list at the end of the paper. Every quotation must have its endnote and so must all the facts and opinions taken from others. Note that the first endnote reference to a source is similar to, but not identical with, the bibliographical entry:

Mansfield, George. *World War I*. London: Rutledge Inc, 2005.

[Bibliographical entry.]

George Mansfield, *World War I* (London, 2005), p. 201.

[Endnote reference.]

As an overview, here is advice on how to construct well-structured paragraphs. To write well-constructed paragraphs students need to state the topic of the paragraph (topic sentence) at the start. After the topic sentence, they need to provide illustrations or evidence to support the topic sentence. These are called topic points. There are several topic points in a paragraph and each one should be supported by specific details. For example,

Topic sentence

Topic point A: specific detail 1, 2, 3, etc.

Topic point B: specific detail 1, 2, 3, etc.

Topic point C: specific detail 1, 2, 3, etc.

Specific detail under the various topic points can include anything from examples, statistics, figures, graphs, scientific formulas, pictures, dates and description to support an argument. These examples, i.e. statistics, graphs, scientific formulas, pictures, dates and description, can come from various writers through quotations, paraphrase or summary. Here is an example of a well-constructed paragraph. Read it and then look at how the paragraph is structured.

Trees

Trees are very important to us for many very practical reasons because of the uses to which the wood can be put. However, their value in economic terms is nothing compared to their role in helping to regulate the world's climate and providing fertile soil. The wholesale destruction of trees is a threat to us all because trees support life. A single tree can take up 1000-2000 litres of water from the ground every year, releasing most from the leaves as water vapour. This water vapour is then added to water vapour from other sources to form clouds. It eventually returns to the ground in the form of rain or possibly snow. This ability to move vast quantities of water vapour from one place to another has a significant effect on the regional climate and on local water table levels. Another factor is that the ground in a forest acts like an enormous sponge. It absorbs rainwater

and holds it within the soil, releasing it gradually back into the atmosphere. Where trees have been cut down, the ground is unable to absorb water so easily and it runs off, rapidly causing flooding in other areas. A further factor is the degree to which most trees add to the fertility in the soil around them. Every year millions upon millions of leaves, flutter down and rot into the soil, adding to the richness of the soil base in which other plants can grow. Insects thrive within this rich, damp environment and they are themselves a source of food for other animals up the food chain. All of them are threatened when trees are cut down in large numbers.

(Trees <<http://waylink-english.co.uk/academic-writing/writing-paragraphs>>).

Now, observe how the paragraph on “Trees” can be structured:

Trees are very important to us for many very practical reasons because of the uses to which the wood can be put. *[Topic sentence]* However, their value in economic terms is nothing compared to their role in helping to regulate the world’s climate and providing fertile soil. *[Topic point 1]* The wholesale destruction of trees is a threat to us all because trees support life. *[Specific detail A]* A single tree can take up 1000-2000 litres of water from the ground every year, releasing most from the leaves as water vapour. *[B]* This water vapour is then added to water vapour from other sources to form clouds. *[C]* It eventually returns to the ground in the form of rain or possibly snow. *[D]* This ability to move vast quantities of water vapour from one place to another has a significant effect on the regional climate and on local water table levels. *[Topic point 2]* Another factor is that the ground in a forest acts like an enormous sponge. *[Specific detail A]* It absorbs rainwater and holds it within the soil, releasing it gradually back into the atmosphere. *[B]* Where trees have been cut down, the ground is unable to absorb water so easily and it runs off rapidly causing flooding in other areas. *[Topic point 3]* A further factor is the degree to which most trees add to the fertility of the soil around them. *[Specific detail A]* Every year millions upon millions of leaves flutter down and rot into the soil, adding to the richness of the soil base in which other plants can grow. *[B]* Insects thrive within this rich, damp environment and they are themselves a source of food for other animals up the food chain. *[C]* All of them are threatened when trees are cut down in large numbers.

(Trees, <<http://waylink-english.co.uk/academic-writing/writing-paragraphs>>).

CONCLUSION

What remain are the introductory and concluding paragraphs. Introductory paragraphs are about 5% of a student’s research paper word count. It presents the main

topic; explains the academic problem and tells the reader what to expect in the rest of the paper. It is adjusted to suit the style of the research paper. The concluding paragraph summarizes the purpose of the research paper. If students are not satisfied with the title or the central idea, then they can rephrase them if they wish or change the wording.

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НАВЧАННЯ НАПИСАННЯ НАУКОВОЇ СТАТТІ

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У статті викладено методика поетапного навчання студентів написання наукової статті або дослідницької роботи. Авторами доведено важливість формування у студентів навичок планування, структурування, написання та форматування наукової статті або дослідницької роботи. Такі на-

вички передбачають набуття вміння розбивати текст на абзаци, враховувати довжину абзаців тощо. Важливим також автори вважають навчання студентів аргументовано викладати матеріал дослідження, наводити ілюстрації, приклади, правильного оформлення цитат, формулювання висновків, оформлення списку літератури.

Стаття містить методичні рекомендації, щодо правильного написання наукової статті, де теоретичний матеріал широко підкріплюється ілюстраціями та прикладами. Стиль та оформлення статті відповідає вимогам до написання наукових статей.

Ключові слова: науково-дослідна робота, контур, розробка абзацу, цитати, бібліографія.

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