
Elements of a Successful Research Paper

Introduction

Writing a successful research paper is not easy work. There are no shortcuts to be taken as one sits down to choose a topic, conduct research, determine methodology, organize (and outline) thoughts, form arguments or interpretations, cite sources, write the first draft, and, finally, apply the necessary revisions.

But there's no need to be anxious with a research paper assignment! With a good understanding of the elements of a successful research paper, the process can be made a whole lot easier and simpler.

A Successful Research Paper is a SMART one

A successful research paper fulfills the objective of increasing readers' knowledge of a given subject. It also accurately, concisely, and comprehensively relays unbiased information on that subject: information that, of course, must include valid evidence to support the premise.

SMART is a good way to remember the fundamentals of research paper writing, and to help prepare an author in writing a successful research paper.

- **Specific:** A research paper should be specific. It should maintain its focus on the given subject of research - answering a specific research question - and not be inconsistent or aimless as to convey information or make claims on other, unrelated topics or subjects.
- **Measurable:** A research paper must contain specific, proven research, and cites all research sources and related literature.
- **Attainable:** A research paper must provide a thesis statement, one that answers the research question and contributes to the knowledge of the given subject. It can't propose to answer a question that doesn't relate to real life or isn't based on an existing body of knowledge.
- **Realistic:** A research paper is objective and realistic. Should it be made to present interpretations, arguments, or evaluations, then it should do so based on valid evidence from reliable sources.
- **Time:** A research paper cannot be written without the researcher knowing the limits, timeframes, and focus of the required work. Without the writer / researcher stating the scope and limitations of the research paper, it is likely that the thesis statement will be

hampered by an inability to answer the given research question or focus on the given research subject.

Components of a Research Paper

It's also important for the writer / researcher to pay attention to the essential components of a research paper. While there are no templates for writing it, there are standard components of which one may do well to have a good understanding.

- **Title:** The title page, with the alignment of the actual title of the paper typically centered.
- **Table of contents (with page numbers for each section)**
- **Introduction:** This component provides the context and a situational analysis of the research topic at hand. Ideally, this is also where the research question and hypothesis are stated. It is important to explain why the research subject was chosen, and what the relevance or rationale is of undertaking research on the subject. (This is your opportunity to show your reasons and passion, too!)
- **Methodology:** This part states and explains the process by which data, results, and evidence are collected, organized, and analyzed. If the methodology of the research paper is based on previous research literature, make sure that such literature is still valid and up-to-date. Research founded on outdated or disapproved material weakens credibility and makes proving something successfully so much more difficult.
- **Results and Discussion:** This is where you logically follow through from the methodology and findings; with a smooth transition to reporting, analyzing, discussing, and substantiating the results. While research papers are an academic endeavor, it's important to write in a way that captures and sustains the attention of the reader. This can be done by using several techniques, including: tables / graphs, quotations, illustrations, examples, words of emphasis ("indeed," "of course," "truly"), and additional supporting evidence. When using quotations, remember to do so accurately and to cite the source of the quotation in the references section.
- **Conclusion:** This summarizes the results and major findings. Do not, however, include in the conclusion anything that hasn't been brought up in the results and discussion components.
- **References / Bibliography:** This component cites all the references made in the paper to other research studies and

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sources of information, be it by way of testimony, statistics, direct quotes, and paraphrased information. It is vital that every reference is recorded: doing so adds credibility and discipline to the paper.