

Methods of Writing Research Papers

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Lecture Eight

Conducting Field Research

Each discipline has different expectations in its methods of inquiry and presentation. This topic provides a variety of field research techniques:

- a) Investigating local sources
- b) Investigating government documents
- c) Researching within a discipline
- d) Developing a survey or questionnaire
- e) Conducting experiments, tests, and observation

The human species is distinguished by its ability to examine the world systematically and to create pioneers for the millennium, such as computer technicians, microsurgions, and nuclear engineers. Through field research you may become one of them.

Field research refers, in general, to any studies conducted outside the library, such as digging at an archeology site, measuring a sinkhole fault, observing student behavior at a parking lot, or surveying a selected group with a questionnaire. This type of work may provide valuable information, and you should consider it as a worthy ingredient in your research plans. Therefore, converse with people by letter or e-mail, and if time permits it, conduct personal one-on-one interviews or use a

questionnaire. Watch television specials, visit the courthouse archives, and conduct research by observation under the guidance of an instructor.

Set up your field research in an objective manner in order to control subjective feelings. Although you may have strong personal feelings about your topic, look objectively for viable evidence. All writers get deeply involved in their subject, but they must couple that involvement with the skill of detachment. What are the facts? What conclusions do they support? Conduct the test, get results, and then discuss their implications.

Talk to people who have experience with your subject. Personal interviews can elicit valuable in-depth information. Interviews provide information that few others will have. Look to organizations for knowledgeable experts. For example, if writing on folklore, you might contact the county historian, a senior citizens' organization, or the local historical society. If necessary, post a notice soliciting help: "I am writing a study of local folklore. Wanted: People who have a knowledge of regional tales." Another way to accomplish this task is to join an e-mail discussion group to invite commentary from a group interested in the same topic.