

Methods of Writing Research Papers

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3rd Stage

Lecture Five

Organizing Ideas and Setting Goals

The beginning steps in the research project can sometimes seem haphazard. After the initial search to narrow your topic and confirm the availability of sources, you should organize your ideas so that reading and notetaking will relate directly to your specific needs. This topic provides ideas for charting the direction of your research.

1. Using a Basic Order to Chart the Course of Your Work

Your finished paper should trace the issues, defend and support a thesis, and provide dynamic progression of issues and concepts that point forward to the conclusion. The paper should provide these elements:

- a) Identification of the problem or issue
- b) A review of the literature on the topic
- c) Your thesis or hypothesis
- d) Analysis of the issues
- e) Presentation of evidence
- f) Interpretation and discussion of the findings

In every case, you must generate the dynamics of the paper by (1) building anticipation in the introduction, (2) investigating the issues in the body, and (3) providing a final judgment. In this way, you will satisfy the demands of the academic reader, who will expect you to:

- a) Examine a problem
- b) Cite pertinent literature on it
- c) Offer your ideas and interpretation of it

All three are necessary in almost every instance. Consequently, your early organization will determine, in part, the success of your research paper.

b. Using Your Research Proposal to Direct Your Notetaking

Your research proposal, if you developed one, introduces issues worthy of research.

c. Listing Key Terms and Phrases to Set Directions for Notetaking

Follow two fairly simple steps: (1) Jot down ideas or words in a rough list, and (2) expand the list to show a hierarchy of major and minor ideas. Student Norman Berkowitz started listing items that are affected by and depend on the world's water supply.

d. Writing a Rough Outline

As early as possible, organize your key terminology in a brief outline, arranging the words and phrases in an ordered sequence, as shown in this next example. Jamie Johnston began research in the matter of prehistoric wars. He soon jotted down this rough outline:

Prehistoric wars
 Evidence of weapons
 Evidence from skeletal remains
 Evidence of soldiers and fortresses
Reasons for early fighting

Resources

Slaves, concubines, and sacrificial victims

Gold, silver, bronze, copper

Revenge

Defend honor