

**MASTER 2 THEORETICAL COURSE**

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Instructor: Pr. N'GUESSAN Kouadio Germain  
E-mail : [nguessankouadiogermain@gmail.com](mailto:nguessankouadiogermain@gmail.com)

# The Research Paper

## **Introduction**

### **Choosing a topic**

1. Getting ideas for a topic
2. Limiting the topic
3. Rough outline for a research paper

### **Using quotations**

1. Incorporating quotations
2. Mechanics of quoting
3. Avoiding plagiarism

### **Academic writing style**

1. Using formal language
2. objecting

## **Introduction**

Writing a research paper is a step-by-step process. It consists in taking the researcher gradually and logically toward the actual preparation of the topic he/she undertakes to work on. However, it remains a very fascinating exercise because it gives the researcher the opportunity to show his/her mastery of the field he/she investigates. The more the researcher knows about his/her field of interest, the more he/she will be likely to write a good paper. The first step in this step-by-step process is the choice of the topic.

## **Choosing a topic**

The first step in preparing to write a research paper is to choose a topic. When choosing a topic, there are three main points to consider:

a) Your topic should be interesting to you. And because you will spend a great deal of time on your paper, it is important your topic be interesting enough to maintain your enthusiasm all along the period of writing. If you choose a topic in which you are not interested, you can get bored working on it and consequently write a weak paper.

b) Your topic should be interesting to your instructor. As a partner in the paper you are writing, your instructor must also be interested in the topic you have decided to work on. In the same way you may get bored seeing the same movie(s) or reading the same book(s) many times, teachers can get bored reading research papers about the same topics over and over. It is therefore good "teacher-psychology" to try to find a topic that your teacher will find fresh and interesting.

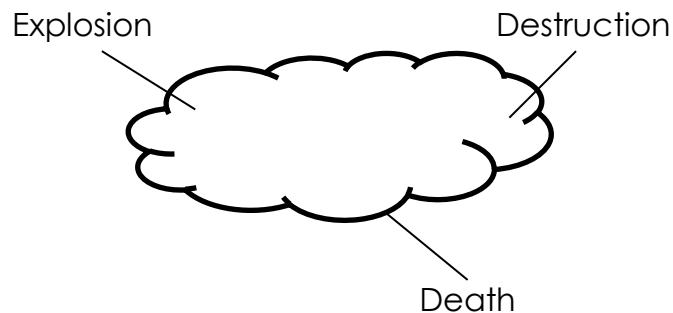
c) There are several topics that are especially popular for research papers and should therefore be avoided. Some of these are: music, abortion, education, suicide, etc. As a matter of fact, some teachers forbid their students to choose certain topics for their papers. It is a good idea to ask your instructor if there are any topics you should avoid for your research paper.

### **1. Getting ideas for a topic**

Because you may have many ideas in your mind while choosing a topic, it is interesting to make a list. This should contain potential topics that are rather general so that when you choose one, you can explore many different ways of limiting your choice. If you have difficulty finding a topic, investigate your library where you can get ideas for interesting topics, for example, from magazine articles, periodical indexes. Looking at the subject headings of in a periodical index can give you a large selection of topics from which you can choose.

## 2. Limiting the topic

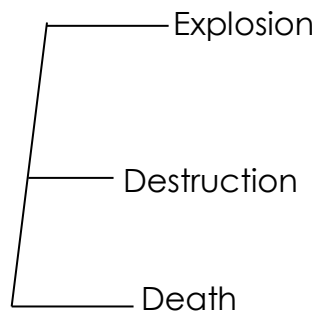
When you write a research paper, you must plan to cover all the major points that relate to your topic within length specified by your teacher. Limiting your topic will bring you to another step closer to making your topic fit the assignment. Also, limiting your topic means making it more specific by dividing it into parts. Consider the topic of **war** as an example. Truly, it is quite impossible to write about all the major points related to war in a 1,000 word research paper. The illustration in Figure 1, called a "spray chart" shows some of the possible limitations of the topic of war.



**FIGURE 1: A spray chart**

### Brainstorming

A helpful technique in limiting your topic is **brainstorming** which means thinking of many ideas as fast as you can. We use brainstorming to help think of ways to limit the topic we are working on. We can use a spray chart like in Figure 1 to write down the results of our brainstorming or we can use a "line chart" like in Figure 2 below.



**FIGURE 2: A line chart**

To brainstorm, sit down with several sheets of blank paper in front of you. Write down your general topic on the first sheet and use some kind of chart to write down your ideas. Work as fast as you can and do not make any judgments about how good or bad your ideas are. Avoid choosing a topic you are unfamiliar with. After you have had a brainstorm session or have done some

investigating in the library, choose the limited topics that seem most interesting to you. Choose at least two limited topics because you do not know yet whether or not you can find suitable sources.

### **3. Focusing your topic**

If you have two or more source lists, first decide which limited topic you want to work with. Thereafter, limit your topic further. This is called *focusing your topic*. Know that your topic must be focused enough so that you will be able to discuss all the main ideas of it in the length of the paper assigned. The process of focusing the topic is similar to the process of limiting the topic. However, in focusing your topic, you may have to make it several “steps” more specific. After you have made a list of possible focused topics, consider how many of the sources on your preliminary source list are related to each focused topic. For longer paper, you should have more sources available for a focused topic than for a shorter paper.

### **4. Rough outline for a research paper**

An outline is a graphic representation of the sections and main ideas of a piece of writing. A rough outline is the first plan for a research paper and is usually prepared before taking notes. A rough outline for a research paper is not a detailed outline that lists every piece of information you plan to include in your paper. Rather it lists the points you think you will include in the main body section(s) of your paper. It is not necessary to include the introduction and conclusion points in your rough outline. A rough outline generally consists of two levels: the Roman numerals are used to indicate the major sections of the paper: introduction, main body section(s), and conclusion. Capital letters represent the main ideas that you think you will include in each main body section. For a short research paper, the capital letter level should represent approximately one paragraph. For longer papers, the capital letters will represent subsections consisting of several paragraphs.

Ex: ROUGH OUTLINE FOR A SHORT RESEARCH PAPER

- I. Introduction
- II. First main body section
  - A. 1<sup>st</sup> main idea (approximately 1 paragraph)
  - B. 2<sup>nd</sup> main idea (approximately 1 paragraph)
  - C. 3<sup>rd</sup> main idea (approximately 1 paragraph)
- III. Second main body section
  - A.
  - B.
  - C.
- IV. Third main body section
  - A.
  - B.

C.

## V. Conclusion

To make a rough outline for a research paper, first consider the focused topic you have chosen and the title you have written. Decide how many body sections you will need and think of headings to represent them. After assigning Roman numerals to these main body sections, consider what you think the main ideas supporting each section will be. Write them down under the appropriate Roman numeral headings assigning capital letters to them.

### Using quotations

It is not necessary to use quotations within a research paper. However, if you decide to use them the number you use should be strictly limited. The reason is that a good research paper is a synthesis of information from sources, which is expressed through the writer's own words. A good research paper is not a collection of quotations. Once you have selected the quotations you want to use in your paper, you must observe several conventions for combining them smoothly with the rest of your paper, and for using a particular system of punctuation and arranging them.

#### 1. Incorporating quotations

The following conventions must be observed to smoothly incorporate quotations:

a. *Quotations should support your points, not make them for you.* The reason for this convention is that you must write a research paper which presents the information you have learned in your own way. You can observe this convention by refraining from using a quotation as a main idea in a paragraph. The information in the quotation should be such that it can be used to support a main idea. But support does not mean repetition. As such, the quotation should not repeat the same information stated in the main idea.

b. *A quotation should be placed along with the point it supports and should be logically linked with the development of that point.* It should be placed as closely as possible to the point it supports so that a reader can see the relationship between the two. Though it should not repeat information presented previously, it must contain information that contributes to the logical development of ideas in your paragraph.

c. *A quotation should be joined with the structure of your own text by a linking phrase.* A linking phrase serves two purposes: it identifies the source of the quotation and it explicitly states the relationship between your idea and the information in the quote. It is important to identify the source of the quotation in order to establish that the "speaker" is an authority on the topic.

The second purpose of the linking phrase is a characteristic of good writing style. The use of a linking phrase allows the reader to anticipate the information that will be included in the quotation, thus making the reading of your paper much easier.

## **2. Mechanics of quoting**

The mechanics of quoting refers to the physical arrangements of a quote, and the punctuation used to identify it as a quote. In a research paper, the mechanics of quotation depends on the length of the quote. There are two types of quotations: short quotes and long quotes. A short quotation is one consisted of five typewritten lines, approximately 50-60 words. It should be enclosed in quotation marks and should be run in with the text of your paper.

### **Example:**

When Simone De Beauvoir asserts that “One is not born but becomes a woman,” she wants to point out that the designations man and woman are social constructs rather than biological ones.

Quotations must be copied down exactly as they appear in the original source, that is to say, exactly in the same words and punctuations. However, in some instances, you may find that you need to use only a part of a sentence or the first and third sentence of a paragraph. In that case, you may omit unnecessary parts of a quote if you are sure that by doing so you do not change the meaning of the original source. You may indicate that you have omitted words, phrases, or sentences from a quotation by using ellipsis marks, that is to say three dots in a row, as in the following example:

### ***Original source:***

“Although researches show that efforts are being made by rubber producing countries to ensure high quality product and increase world production, it will take several years before the demand can be satisfied”

### ***Quote with ellipsis:***

“Although researches show that efforts are being made by rubber producing countries ..., it will take several years before the demand can be satisfied”

The words, phrases or sentences to omit from a quotation should be those that contain nonessential details. Omitting essential information can result in in changing the meaning of the original source as in the following example:

“Although researches show that efforts are being made by rubber producing countries ... the demand can be satisfied”

Long quotations are those that are more than five lines. They are set off from the rest of the paper by increasing the size of the margin on both sides of the quoted material and by single-spacing the lines. They are not enclosed in quotation marks.

**Example:**

Sethe explains how Nan told her about the way her mother got rid of all the babies she conceived with white people:

She told Sethe that her mother and Nan were together from the sea. Both were taken up many times by the crew. 'She threw them all away but you. The one from the crew she threw away in the island. The others from more whites she also threw away. Without names, she threw them. You she gave the name of the black man. She put her arms around him. The others she did not put her arms around. Never. Never. Telling you, small girl Sethe.'

Notice that the first of the sentence which introduces the quotation is separated from the quote. Also, this introductory phrase ends with a colon (:)

**3. Avoiding plagiarism**

In writing a research paper, you use information from other sources, which are almost always in a written form. The way in which the authors have expressed both the information and their own ideas is their own property. This is, their own choice of words and phrases and the ordering of these words and phrases are considered to be their personal property. Taking the ideas of someone else and using them as if they were your own is dishonesty academically known as *plagiarism*.

Plagiarism, in fact, is a sort of stealing because if you copy a sentence, a phrase or an unusual word from a source and use it without acknowledging its author, you are stealing from that author. If you plagiarize in your paper, the consequences can range from an uncomfortable discussion with your instructor to the failure of an exam or in very serious cases, to expulsion from the university. A good way to avoid plagiarizing is to paraphrase. If in your paper you feel tempted to plagiarize, remember two things: if your instructor is familiar with your style of writing; a teacher will be much more sympathetic to an original paper containing some language weaknesses than to a sophisticated paper containing plagiarism.

The most kind of plagiarism is outright copying, which occurs when you quote the exact words of the source without using quotation marks and without acknowledging that it is a quotation. Even copying a source by just changing one or two words here and there is plagiarism and therefore unacceptable.



## Academic writing style

The academic writing must be formal and objective.

### 1. Using formal language

The research paper is the most formal kind of academic activity students are required to complete and the language that they use in writing it must be suitable to the formality of the assignment.

Although teachers agree on the characteristics of formal English, there are several accepted conventions of language use to follow when writing a research paper. The following are some of the general guidelines to help use formal language when writing a research paper:

- a. Do not use contracted forms of verbs (e.g. doesn't, it's, shouldn't, etc.)
- b. Avoid two-word verbs, especially those that have one-word synonyms (e.g. bring up, look over, etc.)
- c. Do not use slang expressions or colloquial expressions. A good dictionary will help you identify these (e.g. blow off, kid, etc.)
- d. Avoid the use of "a lot of"; use the more formal equivalent of "a great deal of," "a large number of," or "many."
- e. Make your word choices as accurate as possible. Words like "thing" and "way" should be avoided in favor of more precise terms.
- f. Avoid the use of the dash (–) as a punctuation mark. If your sentence is properly composed, a comma, colon, or semicolon can be substituted.

#### **Example:**

Rewrite the following sentences so that each is more formally expressed

- Managing an elementary classroom is tough, but it can be done
- Some of them start to cry, laugh, and talk a lot.

### 2. Objecting

Another quality of academic writing is objectivity. This is to focus on the information itself, not on the writer of the information, nor on the reader. For this reason, most research papers must be written in the third person, that is, the subjects of the sentences are third person subjects: he, she, it, one, they, or appropriate noun phrases.

#### **Example:**

"If you are obese, you can reduce weight by exercising regularly."

This sentence focuses attention on the reader, not on the information presented. It can be rewritten in different ways to make it more objective.

Exercising regularly when one is obese can reduce weight.  
Someone who is obese can reduce weight by exercising regularly.

Another area related to objectivity is the matter of putting your own opinion into your paper. Generally, phrases such as “I think that...” and “in my opinion...” are not used in research papers. Not only does their use violate the rule about objectivity, but also their use violates the purpose of writing a research paper. Personal opinions should be expressed in the form of assertions that function as the main idea of the paper.

### 3. Bibliography Models

The bibliography is an important element of your research paper. It contains the sources from which you took your information. It also serves as materials for the readers of your paper as they can also need them for personal purposes. A bibliography is presented in several models:

#### Books

a. One author

Lewis, Norman. *How to Read Better and Faster*. New York: T. Y. Crowell, 1978

b. Two authors

Monty, R.A., et al. *Eye Movements and Psychological Processes*. Hillsdale, N. J.: Erlbaum, 1976

#### Periodical Articles

a. One author

Dubois, Betty Lou. “The Uses of Slides in Biometrical Speeches.” *ESP Journal*, 1. Fall 1980, pp. 45-60.

b. Two or more authors

Kerr, G.L., et al. “Distribution Pattern of Home Lawn Sprinklers.” *Transactions of ASAE*, 23, March/April 1980, pp. 387-392

- **Note:** The abbreviation “et al” means “and others”

Kerr, G.L., L.O. Pochop, J. Borelli, and A.D. Anderson. “Distribution Pattern of Home Lawn Sprinklers.” *Transactions of ASAE*, 23, March/April 1980, pp. 387-392

c. No author

"An Unemployment Wallop." *Time*. 115, May 12, 1980, pp. 45-46

## Newspaper Articles

a. One or more authors

Kotulack, Ron. "Acid Rain Turning Lakes into 'Deserts'." *Chicago Tribune*, March 23, 1962, sect. 1, p. 1, col. 1, et passim

- **Note:** the abbreviation "et passim" means that something is continued on latter pages, but not consecutively. It is the equivalent of "+" symbol used in periodical indexes. It can be in bibliography entries for newspaper articles as a substitute for listing all of the pages on which the article appears.

b. No author

"Dissidents Conceal Bones in Kremlin." *Chicago Tribune*, March 23, 1982, Sect. 1, p. 1, col. 2.

## Bibliography

Hamp-Lyons, Lis and Courter Keren Berry. *Research Matters*. Rowley, London, Tokyo: Newbury House Publishers, Inc. 1984.

Pirie, David B. *How to Write Critical Essays: A guide for students of literature*. London and New York: Routledge. 1985.

Savage, Alice and Patricia Mayer, *Effective Writing 2: The Short Essay*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005

Hogue, Ann, *First Steps in Academic Writing, Second Edition*, New York: Longman

Klages, Mary, *Key Terms in Literary Theory*, New York, Continuum International Publishing Group, 2012

Zemach E. Dorothy and Carlos Islam, *Paragraph Writing: From Sentence to Paragraph, Teacher's Guide*, Oxford: Macmillan, 2005