

Example Outline for a Research Paper

TITLE PAGE

- a. Select an informative title.

1. INTRODUCTION

- a. Provides a blueprint for the entire research paper. It is meant to acquaint the reader with the rationale behind the study, with the intention of defending it.
 - State your purpose and focus of the paper
 - State the problem or express it so that the question is implied
- b. Significance of the study. Why is it worth doing in the first place?
- c. The introduction is usually written in present tense.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

- a. What has been written on this topic in the past? Convey to the reader what knowledge and ideas have been established on a topic and what are the strengths and weaknesses.
- b. How your study contributes to the existing literature
- c. Definition of terms

3. HYPOTHESES

- a. What question(s) are you trying to answer and why?
- b. State the hypothesis precisely.
- c. Present background information only as needed in order to support a position. The reader does not want to read everything you know about a subject.

4. DATA COLLECTION AND METHOD OF ANALYSIS

- a. How are you going to answer the questions?
 - Population and sampling
 - Instrument (e.g., a questionnaire, include copy in appendix)
 - Procedure and time frame
 - Assumptions
 - Scope and limitations
- b. This section is usually written in past tense.

5. RESULTS

- a. Present and illustrate your findings. Make this section a completely objective report of the results, and save all interpretation for the discussion.
- b. You should use tables, charts, and graphs only when you are sure they will enlighten your readers rather than confuse them.

- c. The rule of thumb for presenting a graphic is first to introduce it by name, show it, and then interpret it.
- d. Do not confuse figures with tables - there is a difference.
- e. Either place figures and tables within the text of the result, or include them in the back of the report (following Literature Cited) - do one or the other
- f. Each figure and table must be sufficiently complete that it could stand on its own, separate from text
- g. The results section is usually written in past tense.

6. DISCUSSION

- a. Provide an interpretation of your results and support for all of your conclusions.
- b. The distinction between the results section and the discussion section is not always so clear-cut. Some evaluation and commentary on your data may be appropriate and even necessary.
- c. The significance of findings should be clearly described.
- d. Decide if each hypothesis is supported, rejected, or if you cannot make a decision with confidence. Do not simply dismiss a study or part of a study as "inconclusive."
- e. Try to offer alternative explanations if reasonable alternatives exist.
- f. One study will not answer an overall question, so keeping the big picture in mind, where do you go next? The best studies open up new avenues of research. What questions remain?
- g. The discussion section is usually written in present tense.

7. CONCLUSION

- a. Summary (of what you did and found)
- b. Discussion (explanation of findings - why do you think you found what you did?)
- c. Recommendations (based on your findings)
- d. The conclusions and recommendations section is usually written in present tense.

REFERENCES

- a. Properly document sources of all of your information. (See discussion in the Guide to Writing Citations Section.) Websites are inappropriate as primary sources. List all literature cited in your paper, in alphabetical order, by first author.

APPENDIX