

Writing Academic Research Papers in Your Business Classes

In your business classes, you may be assigned business memos or reports to write, as described in the last section of this Guide, however, you will often write academic research papers much like those you would write in a non-business class (e.g., history class, psychology class).

Although there is no consensus regarding what an outstanding research paper is like, there are strategies that can be used to organize your paper in a clear, logical, and coherent way. Good writing not only helps you receive a better grade from your professors but also helps you get promoted in your future career. The following are some important elements a good research paper should have.

1. A compelling and debatable claim in the introduction

In the introductory section of your paper, it is important to present the main point of your thesis (e.g. “Argentina is a good place to invest now because [insert your claim/position/point here].” You should also summarize the principal supporting arguments and the conclusion of the argument that you will present in the main body of the paper. However, details are saved for the body where you provide full analysis, evaluation, and synthesis to support your claims.

A well organized introduction gives readers information about the structure and content of the paper. It lets them know what to expect. The main point or the contribution of your paper should not be a surprise left for the end of the document. Remember, you’re writing for the business community, which values clear, objective, concise, and organized documents.

2. Literature review

Few of us are likely to write a ground-breaking research paper in today’s highly complex and specialized world. A good literature review not only provides the background information on your research topic but also serves as the starting point to develop your own hypothesis by pointing to the gap in existing research. The trick is to choose the most relevant books and articles for your project and summarize them from a critical perspective. You need to acknowledge the findings made by other researchers, describe the underlying connection to the existing work, and place your own contribution within the context of the most current research. For more details, please consult “How to Conduct a Literature Review” at TCNJ library:

<http://www.tcnj.edu/~library/research/guides/HowtoConductaLiteratureReview.htm>

3. Paragraph structure and development of ideas

Each paragraph in the main body of your paper needs to have a topic sentence, which is typically one of the arguments that supports your thesis. The topic sentence is important because it relates the facts meaningfully for readers and proves that you understand how these facts are connected. The topic sentence doesn't need to be the first sentence, but the readers need to be able to recognize that sentence and know where it occurs in the paragraph. For example, a paragraph might use a series of details to lead up to the topic idea in the last sentence. Or, two or three sentences of details could lead to the topic idea in the middle of the paragraph, followed by additional details, as long as those details support the topic sentence.

When editing your paragraphs, be sure that you have synthesized your ideas to show how they are linked to the thesis, and be sure that you are clear and concise. Your audience needs to understand why each paragraph is included in your paper. Ask yourself if all sentences in the paragraph are necessary to develop the idea completely, or if any sentences can be eliminated. Also, ask yourself if there are gaps in logic where another sentence is needed to advance the idea or clarify your position.

In addition, well organized papers have logical transitions between paragraphs as well as within paragraphs. These transitions help your audience understand the relationships of your ideas and the direction of your paper. Transitions meaningfully show where you've been and where you're going. Statements such as "As for other economic situations in Argentina" or "Turning to the unemployment picture in Argentina" are useful transitions because they prepare your audience for a new but related topic.

Furthermore, the transition between two paragraphs may come at the end of the first paragraph or at the beginning of the second. It may be the topic sentence or it may be a sentence that precedes the topic sentence. A transition may be used to signal to the audience that you are continuing your thought or expanding your argument (using words such as *moreover*, *in addition*, *similarly*, *also*, or *furthermore*). Or, you might need a transition to let the audience know you are changing direction or presenting information or arguments that are contrary to those you have presented in the previous paragraph or sentence (using words such as *in contrast*, *however*, *but*, or *on the other hand*). *Therefore*, *thus*, and *as a result* are transition words that signal to the audience cause and effect or that you are drawing a conclusion from the information you have just presented. No matter what type of transition you use, it is critical to provide a logical flow from one idea to the next.

4. Analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information to support your idea

In a research paper, it is important to provide ample, relevant, concrete, and persuasive evidence to support your idea. In particular, you need to synthesize information and arguments from multiple reliable sources, evaluate them fairly, and analyze them critically.

Please note that analysis, evaluation, and synthesis are critical components in the process of writing. Simple description of a fact is important, but analysis, evaluation, and synthesis give *meaning* to the facts and details that you provide in your paper. Just a list of facts or other people's opinions, does not present your argument. You **must** explain the meaning of your facts and statistics clearly. Through careful analysis, evaluation, and synthesis you prove to your readers that you understand what the facts mean and that you are able to draw conclusions from them.

First of all, analysis is the process of dividing a whole issue into different parts so that each of them can be examined. When you analyze an issue, you may look for patterns and trends; compare and contrast two subjects, or calculate statistics to offer more insights. It is important to analyze an issue from different angles.

Second, when you evaluate facts, you are ascertaining their value or meaning. You present and defend opinions by making judgments about information, validity of ideas, or quality of work based on a set of criteria. You explain to the audience how each fact fits into your argument and explain what idea or claim is supported by that fact.

Finally, to synthesize information, you are combining your observations, analyses and evaluations to form a new, complex product for readers or to propose an alternative solution to a problem. Synthesis is the process of linking all of your facts, analysis, and evaluations together to present your claim. It is not done at the end of the paper but is woven throughout the whole paper in order to present a smooth and seamless document. In other words, you need to synthesize the large amount of information you have gathered and the analysis and evaluation you have offered into a thesis statement. Therefore, analysis, evaluation, and synthesis are intrinsically linked together in the process of writing a paper.

5. Conclusion

A good research paper should finish with a good conclusion. The conclusion is where you summarize the main points of your thesis and present your own recommendations. It is where you may acknowledge the caveats that apply to your conclusion and suggest future research venues. Remember, no new information is presented in the conclusion! In the conclusion, you should wrap all ideas into a short summary so that readers can take away the main arguments and ideas.

6. Principles of wording, phrasing, tone, and other elements of business writing

An outstanding paper must have good control of language, which includes effective word choice, correct tone, and superior facility with the conventions of standard written English (i.e. grammar, usage, and mechanics). For more details, please read *Elements of Business Writing* by Blake and Bly (1991).