

Choosing A Good Topic for Writing a Research Paper

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ABSTRACT: Understanding of this writing is to learn about the research process. The first step in research process is choosing a topic which should be interesting to you and also to your instructor. After choosing the topic, it is often useful to write the title of your research paper, but all nouns, adjectives, pronouns, verbs, adverbs and long preposition should begin with capital letter in writing a title.

The second step is to narrow down the topic. The third step is a source list for preparing a good topic to have a good source list. There is a preliminary source list that focuses a topic. The fourth step of research process is finding information about a topic. The last step is to arrange the order of topics. When you take notes from different sources for different topics, you should consider the arrangement of them. Evaluate the important ideas, think about the sequence of ideas on your final list and outline.

Outline is the method of gathering and organizing information and ideas before you write them in sentences and paragraph form. Making a rough outline is the preparation of limiting and focusing a topic. The next point is writing a final outline; it will serve as a guideline for writing a rough draft of your paper. Analyzing rough outline is the next step after making the rough outline. Another step is the introduction to your paper, to make it a guide to the content and structure of the paper. Also, the body (text of the paper) is the part that you spend most of the time on. In case of need, you can write suggestions. The last step of the research process is conclusion. A good conclusion is the logical outcome of all that has been said earlier.

KEYWORDS: Research paper, Topic, Outline, Rough outline, Final outline.

INTRODUCTION

As you have studied the preliminary writing skills for research and the use of the library, for finding useful sources of information for your research paper, you should be ready to learn the research paper process. The same step-by-step approach will be used in this article, taking you gradually and logically toward the actual preparation of a short and simple research paper. The need and importance of the topic is considerable.

In research paper assignments, the length of the paper that the teacher wants are often specified. It may be expressed in term of either as a total number of words or as a total number of pages. If your assignment is given in terms of a total number of words, this number is likely to be a rounded-off figure, such as 1000 words or 1200 to 1400 words. If your assignment is given in terms of a total number of pages, your teacher is probably referring to the number of typed pages of the final copy of the paper. This figure is usually based on an average of 200-250 words per a typed page. In introduction, research method, findings, discussion, conclusion and acknowledgments are considerable.

OBJECTIVES

- It should be comprehensive for writing a paper.
- A topic should be appropriate for the length of the paper.
- It is a good skill to develop a topic.

1. Choosing a Good Topic

Topic is a subject which is discussed, written about or studied. The first step in preparing to write a research paper is to select a topic. In some courses, you may have an almost unrestricted choice of topics for your paper. In other courses, your teacher may ask you to select a topic from a list, or may assign you a topic. When you have a choice of topics, there are three general points to be considered:

i) Your topic should be interesting to you. Because you will spend a great deal of time

working on your paper, it is important that your topic should be interesting enough, so that you can maintain your enthusiasm over a period of time. If you choose a topic that is not interesting to you very much, you will most likely become bored working on your paper. This situation can lead to a weak paper.

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ii) Your topic should be interesting to your instructor. Because he will have to prepare and teach different lessons, he has to try to look for such teaching materials that students can find them easy.

iii) Your topic should be complete from the point of any aspects.

Mattix (2003) has stated that your research topic should be provocative, worthwhile, and challenging. This paper will offer you the opportunity to learn and to draw a conclusion. Avoid a rehash of a topic you covered at high school or one well-covered in a single source. As you mull over choices, consider these three important questions:

- Can you find a topic that stirs your curiosity?
- Is the topic significant?
- Can you locate conclusive support: data, studies, and expert opinion?

For example, if several of your family members have the same health problem, you might investigate the cause;

1. Consult the related doctor.
2. Have a look over books and go through journals and magazines.
3. Complete your information to achieve the conclusion.

Glencoe (2001) has stated that one of your first decisions is what to write about. Try to find a topic that interesting to you, one that you really want to learn about. Also, keep in mind how much information will be manageable to accomplish your research paper. If the topic is very broad, you will have too much information and too many ideas to cover. On the other hand, if the topic is very narrow, you will not be able to uncover enough material.

2. Writing a Title

After choosing a focused topic, it is often helpful to write the title of your paper before you do any further work. Writing the title helps you make the final decision about which sources on your source list are the most useful and also helps you plan the organization of your paper.

There are three major areas you must consider in writing title for a research paper:

1. The form of the title.
2. The accuracy of word choices.
3. Grammar.

Spatt (2010) said that titles of academic research papers are generally written in the form of Noun phrases. There are several patterns of noun phrases that are used. The examples below show common patterns:

"Recent Development in Scientific Methods of Earthquake Prediction"

"Predicting Earthquakes"

"Earthquakes Prediction: Animal Behavior in Sensing Earthquakes"

The first pattern uses a string of nouns in a title. The second shows the use of the gerund in a title. The third shows the use of a two-part title, in which a general noun phrase is used in the first part and is followed by a phrase stating a particular aspect of the general term. These titles are all formal in style and are appropriate for research papers of all levels. Somewhat

less formal in style are titles presented in the form of questions: for example, "Can Animal Behavior Predict Earthquakes?" Titles in the form of questions should be avoided, especially in upper-level courses and graduate courses.

They use their own system of printing the titles of books on catalog cards. In library format, only the first word of the title and proper nouns are capitalized, and a period is placed at the end of the title, unless another punctuation mark such as an exclamation point (!) or question mark (?) is part of the title. It is acceptable for you to use the library format for writing titles when you are jotting down on slips of paper for your own use. However, when you write titles of books for other people to see, such as in homework assignments and compositions, follow the traditional format for writing titles.

Traditional title format involves capitalization and punctuation. When writing the title of a book, you should begin certain words with capital letters. The following list indicates which words in a title should begin with a capital:

1. The first word in a title always begin with a capital letter.
2. All nouns, pronouns, verbs, adverbs, adjectives, and "long" prepositions should begin with capital letters.
3. A "long" preposition is generally considered to be one that is five or more letters long, such as "between."

The following shows the library format and the traditional format for writing the titles of books.

Library format

The struggle for the third world
The computer services
Giant corporations
Challenge to freedom

Traditional format

The Struggle for the Third World
The Computer Services
Giant Corporation
Challenge to Freedom

When you present a list of the sources or references you have used in a research paper, or when you mention the title of a book in a composition, use the traditional format for writing book titles. It is best to develop the habit of using this format as you complete any paper.

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According to Hamp (1984), if you write a research paper, you must plan to cover all major points that are related to your topic, within the word or page length specified by your teacher. The process of limiting your topic will bring you another step closer to make your topic fit the assignment.

a. Preliminary Source List

After you have decided on one or two limited topics, you must find out how many and what kinds of sources are available for your topic in your library. To help you remember what you have found, as well as to avoid repeated efforts, make a *preliminary source list*. This is a list of all the sources you can find that are about your limited topic(s).

b. Focusing Your Topic

1. If you have two or more source lists, you must first decide which limited topic you want to work with. Look at your preliminary source lists. Does one list have more sources than the other? If so, you should probably choose the limited topic for which you have the most sources.

2. There should be at least ten sources on your source list, at this point fifteen or twenty sources would be better. If you do not have this many sources on your source list, continue to search for more sources in the library, or select another limited topic and compile a new source list.

3. After you choose the limited topic and corresponding source, it is time to limit your topic further. This further limitation is called focusing your topic. Focusing your topic is necessary to make your topic "fit" the assignment your teacher has given to you. The length of the research paper you have been assigned, and the level of the course for which it is being written, will be determined how much more specific your topic must be, therefore, focusing

4. Finding Information on Your Topic

Once you have a topic, you need to decide on your paper's central idea - the idea that will guide your thinking and your selection of research questions in your learning log, write three to seven research questions, each question focusing on one aspect of the topic. Ask and use the (five Ws) the why's, what's, and how's about your topic (for example, "Why was it considered important? What effect did it have? How did it come into being?")

As you find answers, you will have new questions. Feel free to modify your central idea as you learn more about the topic.

Regarding developing a list of topics, Spatt (2010) has explained that once you have all your notes in a computer file (or on cards or a pad), you need to organize them into a plan for your research paper. It means, by Author, by Subject, or by Title.

5. Arranging the Order of Topics

When you have taken notes on different sources for various topics, you should consider the sequence of arrangement. Follow the points below:

1. Evaluate your inventory list of important ideas.
2. Think about the sequence of ideas on your final list and the possible strategies for organizing your essay.
3. Arrange your list of topics in a sequence that has meaning for you, carries out your strategy, and develops your thesis in a clear direction.

5. OUTLINE

Outline is a method of gathering and organizing information and ideas before you write them in sentences and paragraph form. To apply this definition, we have to discuss firstly about the topic below.

5.1. Making a Rough Outline

As a result of limiting and focusing your topic, you have already begun to organize your approach to your topic. However, before you begin taking notes, it is necessary to formulate a definite plan which will enable you to take notes efficiently. The outline form is the one traditionally used for planning the parts of a formal paper.

Hamp and Berry (1984) stated that 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. As you take notes from your sources, you can make adjustment, revision, and additions in the rough outline. When you are ready to write your paper, you can prepare a final outline.

5.2. Writing a Final Outline

After considering the needs of your audience, the purpose of the research paper assignment, the conventions of research paper format, and the information you have available on your note cards, you are ready to prepare a final outline to write your research paper.

5.3. Analyzing a Final Outline

After you prepared a final outline and wrote a statement of your topic, you must analyze them both to determine that your plan is logical and balanced. One of the problems in your planning a research paper is the problem of balance. Balance in a research paper means that each main body section contains approximately the same amount of information. If you have one section of your paper

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that contains very detailed and specific information, while the other sections contain relatively general information, your paper is probably unbalanced. Likewise, if one section contains a larger or a smaller amount of information than the other sections, your paper is probably unbalanced.

Another area of analysis is logic. Read your title and your statement of your topic. Do they match? Read the main body headings in your outline. Do they match your statement of topic and your title? Read the main idea headings in each main body section. Do they directly support the idea expressed in the heading? Make any necessary adjustments in your final outline as a result of answering the questions.

5.4. Traditional Outline Structure

There are two kinds of outlines commonly used in preparation for writing the sentence outline and the topic outline. In a sentence outline, complete sentences are used to represent the important ideas. In a topic outline, short phrases are used. Unless your teacher requests a sentence outline, you can prepare topic outlines.

In the example outlines that follow, you can see that the ideas in the Roman numeral phrases for the paragraph outline are more specific than the Roman numeral phrases for the research paper outline.

5.5. Rough Outline for Research Paper

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 of your paper. It is not necessary to include the introduction and conclusion points in your rough outline.

Rough outline usually consists of two levels, the Roman numeral level and the capital letter level. Roman numerals are used to indicate major sections of the paper: introduction, main body section and conclusion. Capital letters represent main ideas you will include in each main body section. For a short research paper, the capital letter level should represent approximately one paragraph. For longer paper, the capital letters will represent subsections considering of several paragraphs.

C. CONCLUSION

To make rough outline for a research paper, first consider the focused topic you have chosen and the title you have written. If you are unfamiliar with the topic, read through your major sources to get an idea of the kind of information if you have available and the order in which it is presented within the sources.

D. PRELIMINARY DRAFT

For a preliminary draft, there is a particular technical procedure to consider. You can prepare a complete draft of your research paper, consisting of the following parts:

1. COVER PAGE

A cover page for an academic paper has no purpose other than to give your work an efficient and neat look and to help your instructor keep track of all the papers; he or she must deal with. Write the title of your paper in the center of the page. See below:

2. TITLE

The title should be a phrase (not a complete sentence) that informs your reader about the content of the paper. It should not be too long, and it should not be so short because it will seem too vague. If you want to, you can add a subtitle after a colon.

3. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Acknowledgment is a way of giving credit or props. *Acknowledgment* lets you know who contributed or did work on something. If you look at the acknowledgment section of a book, it tells you who helped the author: writers give acknowledgment to editors, agents, friends, family, teachers, people they interviewed, and anyone else who helped them while writing.

In acknowledgment, one thanks his/her guide instructor, advisor, supervisor and those who helped you in preparing and completing your paper. Example:

I would like to thank all my instructors who helped me a lot in providing this (monograph). Also, special thanks go to my advisor/instructor..... who never hesitated any cooperation in preparing this monograph. I wish him/her/them more success in his/her/ their future life.

4. ABSTRACT

Abstract is a summary of the main ideas of an article or a report. Abstract is written for the potentially interested reader. While writing it, keep in mind that most readers read the abstract before they read the paper.

An abstract is a 100-to-120-word paragraph/s that provides readers with a quick overview of your paper/essay. It should express your main idea and your key points; it might also briefly suggest any implications or applications of the research you discuss in the paper.

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5. PREFACE

Preface means to explain the scope of the book beforehand. It generally covers the story of how the book came into being, or how the idea for the book was developed. This is often followed by things. In other words, it contains information written by the author to provide the reader with significant information or background on the contents. In preface consider the following:

- * The scope of the book.
- * How and where you found the information.
- * Any problem you encountered in providing them.

6. INTRODUCTION

Introduction is a part of the book that gives general idea of what is to follow or why you want to do that. It is considered the most important part of a paper.

In introduction, consider the following:

- * Keep it brief (usually one page)
- * Start it with sentence to get the reader's attention.
- * Mention the problem and justification.
- * Use the references inside the text.
- * Mention the purpose and research question or hypothesis.

7. BODY (TEXT OF THE PAPER)

As stated previously, the text of the paper (introduction, body, and conclusion) is the part that you spend the most time on it. This is what more people refer to as "composing a paper" writing many pages of coherent text. In fact, the composing process really starts as soon as you are given the task and begin your search for a topic.

The largest single part of the paper is the body, which consists of supporting information or arguments relevant to the main idea expressing the thesis statement. Whereas, in a short paper, the introduction and conclusion may be just one paragraph, the body is composed of many paragraphs.

8. CONCLUSION

Conclusion is an academic convention in a research paper. Conclusion is usually a simple, short restatement of the ideas of your paper. Without conclusion, it would be strong to an English-speaking person as telephone conversation that stops without a "good bye." Conclusion to your paper is necessary to show that your discussion is finished.

9. SUGGESTIONS

If you make a suggestion, you put forward an idea or plan for someone to think about. Suggestion is something that a person says which implies that something is the case. For example:

We reject any suggestions that the weak students might be supported by the teacher.

10. REFERENCES

Reference is a citation or a list of books you have studied for your research paper to get information from. In other words, the original sources that you have used for your research paper, copied some words or sentences and pasted them in your own paper for the purpose to prove the research paper.

A citation is a formal reference to a published or unpublished source that you consulted and obtained information from while writing your research paper. The way in which you document your sources depends on the writing style manual your professor wants you to use for the class [e.g., APA, MLA, Chicago, etc.], but some disciplines have their own citation method [e.g., law]. The reference list should be written in alphabetical order. In Afghanistan the Ministry of Higher Education uses the (APA) style in their academic papers.

11. BIBLIOGRAPHY

A list of the books and articles that have been used by someone when writing a particular research paper, book or article. A bibliography is an alphabetical listing of all the sources you used in preparing your research paper. It should include the sources you take note from as well as those you read for background purposes. In other words, a bibliography is just the list of the sources that you study to collect information from, but not quoting anything from the original source.

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