

# GUIDELINES FOR WRITING A RESEARCH PAPER

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There are four aspects to consider when carrying out research either for academic purposes or for qualification:

- Research proposal i.e. first intentions
- Research plan i.e. research design;
- Research implementation i.e. research on a day-to-day basis;
- Research description i.e. research study/paper/thesis;

All four are interrelated and need not occur sequentially.

A research study is organized around a number of key sections that are interlinked – for the specific organization in chapters, other sections and editing requirements it is advised to look up the relevant university manual or journal guidelines:

## Introduction

This section, which is one of the most important of the study, is aimed at introducing the work in a clear and comprehensive manner.

For this reason, it should start with mapping out the *key issues and concepts* underpinning the work. It is also useful to give an account as to the *motivations* that have led the researcher considering this work.

An introduction must also make explicit the *purpose* of the work i.e., what is the work about; additionally, the *aims and objectives* to be achieved i.e. how will the purpose of the work be attained.

Since the work is aimed at an academic and professional audience, the introduction should also mention the *value* of the study.

Finally, it should contain clear indicators as to the way forward by briefly describing the *other sections* of the study.

Overall, the purpose of the introduction is to *bring the reader to understand the purpose* of the work and how it is organized, and the *reasons* for carrying out this particular research.

## Literature review

This section is aimed at analyzing and synthesizing in a critical fashion the issues, theories and philosophies in the field of management and research, relatively to the purpose of the work only. The theories reviewed will therefore have to be selected.

The review should include in a manner that is succinct, comprehensive and challenging to read, *original or primary sources* and only where this is impossible, secondary sources.

It should also make theoretical parallels and differences as well as highlight fallacies or shortcomings in claims and arguments presented by other researchers; this is crucial for developing one's own theory.

It should be reminded that the purpose of the literature review is to *justify the need for further research* in a particular area.

## Conjecture Development and Research Problem

The next section concerns the development of a *conjecture/theory* that stems directly from the identification of fallacies and shortcomings in current claims, arguments, and theories. It is therefore important to make clear and explicit how the new conjecture/theory stems from such fallacies and shortcomings.

Then, the conjecture/theory should be summarized into a *research question* that subsequently collected data will help answer/falsify/verify.

The research question is then to be detailed into *hypotheses or questions*. It will be a hypothesis when one makes guesses concerning the outcome of the research and thus needs to establish that the hypothesis is verified or falsified. It will be a question when there is need for gathering information in an area where there is little previous research.

Finally, it is necessary to make explicit the *scope of the study*, i.e. what will be included, and the *limitations of the study*, i.e. the restrictions and interdictions will narrow the study in addition to biases and other factors or intervening variables.

Overall, the purpose of this section is to *develop a theoretical basis* for planning and implementing research.

## Methods of Inquiry

This section is aimed at presenting the strategies and methods to collect data so as to answer/falsify/verify the research question/hypothesis.

It is therefore crucial to have first identified the *data required* to answer/falsify/verify the research question and then make explicit the *methods* chosen relative to the necessary data while providing a justification for the methods chosen, with an appropriate rationale in each case.

It is important to adopt a *balanced approach* to methodology, which means use a number of methods and not just one, use both quantitative and qualitative methods, and use both empirical and logical methods, in both a self-directed and other-directed approach.

But since research does not go without problems and surprises, some *prediction* as per the research challenges and problems is to be made, and to suggest means to overcome them.

Finally, it is important to discuss any *philosophical issues* relative to research and to develop *tools for tracking and assessing the research process* itself.

The purpose of this section is then to *select the appropriate research tools* relative to the information that the research needs to have at hand.

### Data Analysis

This sections aims at presenting the data obtained from having used the methods chosen. It is therefore advisable to describe how the *data collection process* occurred, including the challenges, shortcomings, and solutions taken.

Then, based on explicit criteria of selection, data collected should be *selected and tested* so as to only use the information that is relevant – irrelevant information will have to be excluded.

Finally, information collected and selected should be *analyzed to produce the main findings* which should be listed at the end of the section.

All data/information should be presented in a succinct, visual and creative manner.

Therefore, the purpose of this section is to select to *produce findings* from the selected and analyzed information at hand.

### Discussion

This very important chapter aims at using the data analyzed for answering/falsifying/verifying the research question/hypothesis in addition to comparing the findings with those proposed by other researchers.

One should therefore *interpret the main findings* relative to the developed conjecture, and compare these findings with those by other researchers.

The same findings should be used to *identify limitations* of the research design and the conjecture, and to *suggest conjecture corrections and research improvements*.

It should be reminded that this section is different from the previous one: whereas data analysis is aimed at producing findings, the discussion is aimed at *establishing the degree of acceptability of findings* i.e. justifying their acceptability by the academic and scientific communities.

## Conclusion

The concluding section aims at summarizing the main findings, providing suggestions for future work, and identifying issues that require further clarification.

In particular, it is advised to *evaluate the project's overall contribution* to furthering knowledge and practice.

Since a research study is learning experience, it is also expected to *reflect on the research process* as a whole with the help of research tools and to *identify how management practice has improved* as a result of the research.

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