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## Tips For Writing An Appropriate Research Paper

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<http://www.ipl.org/div/aplus/quick.htm> *ipl2 is the result of a merger of the Internet Public Library (IPL) and the Librarians' Internet Index (LII). A+ Research & Writing for high school and college students was created by Kathryn L. Schwartz*

1. **Make an appointment with your reference librarian:** Reference librarians are trained to help students organize their research approach and carry out the research. Be sure to let the librarian know exactly what your assignment is, how much time you have to finish it and what you've done so far to get started.
2. **Take an online "short course" on library research:** A quick and easy online tutorial from the Houston Community College System. The tutorial has very specific and helpful instructions on: Steps in the Research Process, The Art of Questioning, The Chain of Information, Interpreting Citations, Access Tools, etc. and good descriptions of the major library reference tools such as dictionaries, encyclopedias, biographical sources.

**The Research Center: A Guide to Using Libraries and Other Information Facilities (Houston CC)** <http://www.hccs.cc.tx.us/system/library/Center.html>

3. **Take on online "short course" about Web research.** A fun tutorial to get you started with Web surfing and searching. Sections on: Scouting the Range, Scoping the Search, Using Your Tools, Starting Points, and Searching with Engines. Handy worksheets accompany each section—for you to print out and use to help structure your search.

How to be a Web Hound (Maricopa CC):

<http://www.mcli.dist.maricopa.edu/webhound/index.html>

4. **Surf to one of the OWLs and bookmark it in your browser.** What's an OWL? An Online Writing Lab, usually provided by a college or university to help students with writing (and research) projects. They have great online "handouts" to help with everything from outlining your paper to where to place a comma! Choose one from our list of OWLs on the Web, or go directly to the big granddaddy of them all at Purdue University (over 100 handouts!). Look over what's there and be ready to go back again as you start the writing process.
5. **Try to find a "model" of the type of paper you're writing.** Look at the links to Common Types of Papers and Papers on Special Subjects to see if there's advice, and perhaps even a model outline, for the specific type of paper you're writing.
6. **Look for a topic at one of these websites:** There are lots of suggestions for topics at the following websites. See if you can get your ideas flowing by browsing them. Some of these sites merely list topics. Others also provide links to resources on their suggested topics.

- [Public Agenda Issue Guides](#)
- [Research Guide on Paper Topics from the University Library at California State University, Long Beach](#)
- [Hot Topics from the University of Louisville's Library's Government Resources Page](#)
- [O'Keefe Library-Best Information on the Net-Hot Paper Topics](#)
- [Term Paper Topics, Idaho State University](#)

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# Overview of your Paper's Structure

- **Introduction**

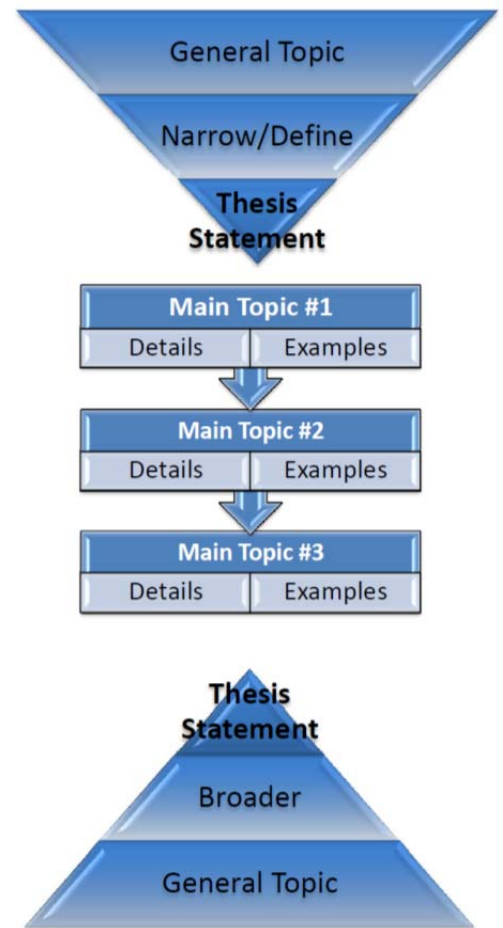
- Introduce the subject
- Define main terms
- End with Thesis Statement

- **Body**

- The real power of your writing
- Likely 4-5 main ideas
- Support your thesis statement with
  - Detailed information
  - Examples or case studies as appropriate

- **Conclusion**

- Restate your thesis in different wording
- Gradually become more broad and general



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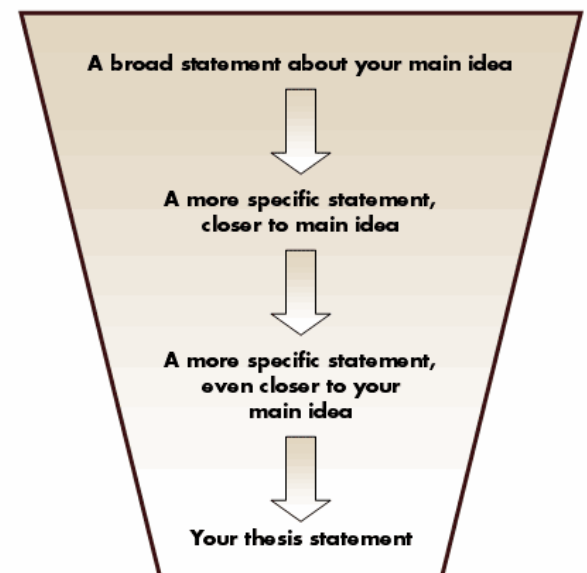
## Strategies for Writing Your Introduction

An introduction is the first paragraph (or paragraphs) of any written work. It should:

- capture your audience's attention.
- give background on your topic.
- develop interest in your topic.
- guide your reader to your [thesis](#).

There is no single right form for an introduction to take, but one common form that many writers use is the top-down model:

- The introduction begins with a broad statement about the main idea. This statement might suggest background or the general category to which the thesis idea belongs.
- The next sentences are more specific, moving closer to the actual thesis of the essay.



- The final sentence of an introduction often contains a fairly specific version of the main idea; it is the [thesis statement](#).

Introductions can have a very few to many sentences, or even be more than one paragraph in length, depending on the length of your essay. In short, the actual number of sentences in an introduction is not important. Though you have been advised to begin with the general, do not start your essay with a bland statement. The first sentence is important; do not waste it on a meaningless generality.

**Any information presented in the introduction must be discussed in the main body of the paper.**

There are three basic ways to write an introduction (none of these is any better than the other):

1. You can write the introduction after you write the body of your essay.
2. You can write the introduction before you write the body of your essay.
3. You can rough out the introduction first and then focus and revise it once you have written your essay.

Many people write a rough draft and from that find out what their purpose really is and what they really believe. Then they revise the focus, language, or order of their introduction. This sequence -- of drafting an introduction and then revising and refining it once the body of the paper is sketched out -- is *very* common.

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## Constructing Your Thesis Statement

Before beginning to write the paper, write the thesis statement. Boil down the main point of your paper to a single statement. You can revise your thesis statement whenever you want to while you are writing your essay. Writers often discover what their real purpose and point is in the process of putting their thoughts into words and then reading what they've written.

**A well-written thesis statement, usually expressed in one sentence, is the most important sentence in your entire paper. A thesis statement has one main point rather than several main points.** It should both summarize the position you will be arguing and set up the pattern of organization you will use in your discussion. A thesis sentence is not a statement of accepted fact; it is the position that needs the proof you will provide in your argument. Your thesis should reflect the full scope of your argument—no more and no less; beware of writing a thesis statement that is too broad to be defended within the scope of your paper. Examples:

A thesis statement is an assertion, not a statement of fact or an observation.

- **Fact or observation:** People use many lawn chemicals.
- **Thesis:** People are poisoning the environment with chemicals merely to keep their lawns clean.

A thesis takes a stand rather than announcing a subject.

- **Announcement:** The thesis of this paper is the difficulty of solving our environmental problems.
- **Thesis:** Solving our environmental problems is more difficult than many environmentalists believe.

A thesis is the main idea, not the title. It must be a complete sentence that explains in some detail what you expect to write about.

- **Title:** Social Security and Old Age.
- **Thesis:** Continuing changes in the Social Security System makes it almost impossible to plan intelligently for one's retirement.

A thesis statement is narrow, rather than broad. If the thesis statement is sufficiently narrow, it can be fully supported.

- **Broad:** The American steel industry has many problems.
- **Narrow:** The primary problem if the American steel industry is the lack of funds to renovate outdated plants and equipment.

A thesis statement is specific rather than vague or general.

- **Vague:** Hemingway's war stories are very good.
- **Specific:** Hemingway's stories helped create a new prose style by employing extensive dialogue, shorter sentences, and strong Anglo-Saxon words.

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## Strategies for Writing a Conclusion

Conclusions are often the most difficult part of an essay to write, and many writers feel that they have nothing left to say after having written the paper. A writer needs to keep in mind that the conclusion is often what a reader remembers best. Your conclusion should be the best part of your paper. A conclusion should:

1. stress the importance of the thesis statement,
2. give the essay a sense of completeness, and
3. leave a final impression on the reader.

**Any information presented in the conclusion must have been discussed in the main body of the paper – this is not the place to introduce new or different data!**

Answer the question "So What?" Show your readers why this paper was important. Show them that your paper was meaningful and useful.

Synthesize, don't summarize: Don't simply repeat things that were in your paper. They have read it. Show them how the points you made and the support and examples you used were not random, but fit together.

Redirect your readers: Give your reader something to think about, perhaps a way to use your paper in the "real" world. If your introduction went from general to specific, make your conclusion go from specific to general. Think globally.

Create a new meaning: You don't have to give new information to create a new meaning. By demonstrating how your ideas work together, you can create a new picture. Often the sum of the paper is worth more than its parts.

## Strategies

**Echoing the introduction:** Echoing your introduction can be a good strategy if it is meant to bring the reader full-circle. If you begin by describing a scenario, you can end with the same scenario as proof that your essay was helpful in creating a new understanding. Example:

### *Introduction*

From the parking lot, I could see the towers of the castle of the Magic Kingdom standing stately against the blue sky. To the right, the tall peak of The Matterhorn rose even higher. From the left, I could hear the jungle sounds of Adventureland. As I entered the gate, Main Street stretched before me with its quaint shops evoking an old-fashioned small town so charming it could never have existed. I was entranced. Disneyland may have been built for children, but it brings out the child in adults.

### *Conclusion*

I thought I would spend a few hours at Disneyland, but here I was at 1:00 A.M., closing time, leaving the front gates with the now dark towers of the Magic Kingdom behind me. I could see tired children, toddling along and struggling to keep their eyes open as best they could. Others slept in their parents' arms as we waited for the parking lot tram that would take us to our cars. My forty-year-old feet ached, and I felt a bit sad to think that in a couple of days I would be leaving California, my vacation over, to go back to my desk. But then I smiled to think that for at least a day I felt ten years old again.

**Challenging the reader:** By issuing a challenge to your readers, you are helping them to redirect the information in the paper, and they may apply it to their own lives. Example:

*Though serving on a jury is not only a civic responsibility but also an interesting experience, many people still view jury duty as a chore that interrupts their jobs and the routine of their daily lives. However, juries are part of America's attempt to be a free and just society. Thus, jury duty challenges us to be interested and responsible citizens.*

**Looking to the future:** Looking to the future can emphasize the importance of your paper or redirect the readers' thought process. It may help them apply the new information to their lives or see things more globally. Example:

*Without well-qualified teachers, schools are little more than buildings and equipment. If higher-paying careers continue to attract the best and the brightest students, there will not only be a shortage of teachers, but the teachers available may not have the best qualifications. Our youth will suffer. And when youth suffers, the future suffers.*

**Posing questions:** Posing questions, either to your readers or in general, may help your readers gain a new perspective on the topic, which they may not have held before reading your conclusion. It may also bring your main ideas together to create a new meaning. Example:

*Campaign advertisements should help us understand the candidate's qualifications and positions on the issues. Instead, most tell us what a boob or knave the opposing candidate is, or they present general images of the candidate as a family person or God-fearing American. Do such advertisements contribute to creating an informed electorate or a people who choose political leaders the same way they choose soft drinks and soap?*

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# Steps to Writing the Paper

## 1. Think about the assignment, the audience, the purpose, and any instructions provided.

- Who is your audience and how will that affect your paper?
- What prior knowledge can you assume the audience has on the topic?
- What style and tone of writing are required by the audience and the assignment—informal, scholarly, first-person reporting, dramatized?

## 2. Prepare an outline

Try to get a "model" outline for the type of paper you're writing, or look at examples of good papers to see how they were organized. Example:

**Introduction:** Statement of the Problem and Thesis Sentence

**Body: Paragraphs 1 and 2:** History of the Problem (Include, perhaps, past attempts at solutions. Work in sources.)

**Body: Paragraphs 3 and 4:** Extent of the Problem (Who is affected? How bad is it? Work in sources.)

**Body: Paragraphs 5 and 6:** Repercussions of the Problem (Work in sources.)

**Body: Paragraphs 7 and 8:** Future solutions (not necessarily your own. More sources.)

**Conclusion:** Summarize your findings (see the guidance below on writing a strong conclusion)

## 3. Write the rough draft. PLEASE, PLEASE, PLEASE, avoid the Seven Deadly Sins of Writing:

### ***The First Deadly Sin: Passive Voice***

In most instances, put the verb in the active voice rather than in the passive voice. Passive voice often produces unclear, wordy sentences, whereas active voice produces generally clearer, more concise sentences.

### ***The Second Deadly Sin: Incorrect Punctuation of Two Independent Clauses***

Writers often combine independent clauses in a single compound sentence to emphasize the relationship between ideas. The punctuation of compound sentences varies depending upon how you connect the clauses.

### ***The Third Deadly Sin: Wordiness***

Concise writing is the key to clear communication. Wordiness obscures your ideas and frustrates your reader. Make your points as succinctly as possible, and move on. Once you start searching for unnecessary words, you will find you can cut many without any loss of meaning. In fact, your writing will be crisper and more appealing.

### ***The Fourth Deadly Sin: Misuse of the Apostrophe***

Use the apostrophe to indicate possession and to mark omitted letters in contractions. Writers often misuse apostrophes when forming plurals and possessives. The basic rule is quite simple: use the apostrophe to indicate possession, not a plural.

### ***The Fifth Deadly Sin: Misplaced and Dangling Modifiers***

Misplaced and dangling modifiers create illogical, even comical, sentences. We confuse our readers if we fail to connect modifiers (words that describe or limit other words) to the words they modify; be sure to place modifiers next to the words they modify.

### ***The Sixth Deadly Sin: Pronoun Problems***

Pronouns are useful as substitutes for nouns, but a poorly chosen pronoun can obscure the meaning of a sentence. Common pronoun errors include unclear pronoun reference, vague subject pronoun and agreement error.

### ***The Seventh Deadly Sin: Committing Pet Peeves***

Learning to write clearly and effectively is a central part of your education. Students are expected to think, write and speak with clarity, understanding and precision." Following is a list of pet peeves you should bear in mind as you aim for "clarity, understanding and precision" in your writing.

<b>Pet Peeve</b>	<b>Example</b>
<i>utilize vs. use</i>	"Descartes <i>utilizes</i> the wax argument to show that we know physical objects with the mind, not the senses."
singular/plural disagreement	"The <i>student</i> finished the essay, only to discover that <i>their</i> printer did not work."
bloated diction	"Once <i>liberty</i> is <i>actualized</i> , justice will <i>burgeon</i> ."
"inflated, imprecise words"	The lifestyles of many individuals were difficult due to what society utilized against them.
misuse of <i>prove/proof</i>	"The results <i>prove</i> that our hypothesis was correct. (A study <i>supports</i> a hypothesis, not <i>proves</i> it.)"
burying the subject	The significance of the study is that there is....
unnecessary subordinate clause and passive voice	There was one factor <i>that was ignored by the "con" side</i> : ....
indefinite antecedent	President Johnson's ignoring of George Ball's Vietnam memo proved disastrous for <i>him</i> . (for whom?)
<i>loose vs. lose</i>	Forecasters fear that stocks will <i>loose</i> value next year.
treating <i>data</i> as singular	The <i>data</i> <i>shows</i> that medication affects ADHD symptoms.
<i>than vs. then</i>	The data indicate that Americans work more hours <i>then</i> Europeans.
vacuous first sentences	Scientists have studied DNA for years.
<i>affect vs. effect</i>	We studied the <i>affect</i> of the angle on acceleration.
<i>less vs. fewer</i>	Bush <i>got less</i> votes than Gore in 2000.
<i>who vs. that, which vs. that</i>	Anyone <i>that</i> disagrees please speak up. Those <i>which</i> cannot do, teach.

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## **Strategies for Eliminating Wordiness**

You can eliminate wordiness by . . .

- Mark sections that you struggled to produce. If you had a hard time getting your ideas down on paper, chances are you included some "false starts" or filler phrases in your writing. Don't worry about fillers when you're writing the first draft, but focus on eliminating unnecessary language in your review. Pay particular attention to sections you struggled to get out.
- Before you start your edit, take a break: get a cup of coffee or work on something else for a while. You need distance to see what language is needed and what's not.

- Learn what wordiness patterns are typical of your writing. Most people tend to fall into two or three patterns of wordiness when they write. Learn what your patterns are, and edit with those patterns in mind.

**Patterns of Wordiness:** As you read the following list, consider which patterns are typical of your writing:

- A. **Omit the filler phrases "it is," "there is," and "there are" at the beginning of sentences; these often delay the sentence's true subject and verb.**
- **Wordy:** It is expensive to upgrade computer systems.
  - **Concise :** Upgrading computer systems is expensive.
- B. **Omit "this" from the beginning of a sentence by joining it to the preceding sentence with a comma.**
- **Wordy:** Chlorofluorocarbons have been banned from aerosols. This has lessened the ozone layer's depletion.
  - **Concise:** Chlorofluorocarbons have been banned from aerosols, lessening the ozone layer's depletion.
- C. **Change "which" or "that" constructions to an "-ing" word.**
- **Wordy:** The committee, which meets monthly, oversees accounting procedures and audits.
  - **Concise:** The committee, meeting monthly, oversees accounting procedures and audits.
- D. **Omit "which" or "that" altogether when possible. *Go on the "which" hunt.***
- **Wordy:** Because the fluid, which was brown and poisonous, was dumped into the river, the company that was negligent had to shut down.
  - **Concise:** Because the brown, poisonous fluid was dumped into the river, the negligent company had to shut down.
- E. **Replace passive verbs with active verbs. In passive constructions, the subject of the sentence is being acted upon; in active constructions, the subject is the actor.**
- **Wordy:** Rain forests are being destroyed by uncontrolled logging.
  - **Concise:** Uncontrolled logging is destroying rain forests.
- F. **Change "is" or "was" when they occur alone to a strong verb.**
- **Wordy:** A new fire curtain is necessary for the stage.
  - **Concise:** The stage needs a new fire curtain.
- G. **Replace "is," "are," "was," "were," or "have + an -ing word" to a simple present or past tense verb.**
- **Wordy:** The South African government was undergoing significant changes.
  - **Concise:** The South African government underwent significant changes.
- H. **Replace "should," "would," or "could" with strong verbs.**
- **Wordy:** The environmental council could see several solutions.
  - **Concise:** The environmental council saw several solutions.
- I. **Substitute strong verbs for "-tion" and "-sion" words whenever possible.**
- **Wordy:** I submitted an application for the job.
  - **Concise:** I applied for the job.
- J. **Replace prepositional phrases with one-word modifiers when possible.** Prepositional phrases, those little relationship words like "of," "from," "after," etc., tend to bring in a lot of "-tion" and "-sion" words too.



- **Wordy:** The President of the Student Senate was in charge of the lobbying against the merger at the Minnesota Congress.
- **Concise:** The Student Senate President oversaw lobbying the Minnesota Congress against the merger.

K. **Use a colon after a statement preceding a sentence of explanation, and leave out the beginning of the next sentence**

- **Wordy:** The theater has three main technical areas. These areas are costumes, scenery, and lighting.
- **Concise:** The theater has three main technical areas: costumes, scenery, and lighting.

L. **Combine two closely related short sentences by omitting part of one.**

- **Wordy:** The director is concerned about problems. Typical problems may occur with lighting, sound, and props.
  - **Concise:** The director is concerned about typical problems with lighting, sound, and props.
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## 4. Cite your references as you go, and cite them properly!

When given a format for citations & references such as APA or Chicago, find the guidance on these styles and set up your reference format BEFORE you start writing.

## 5. Revise and proofread.

This checklist notes some characteristics of writing done in one draft and at the last minute. Watch for these symptoms of hurried writing; your professor will certainly notice them! These are the warning signs of a rushed paper:

- **Not following the assignment:** This is a clue that you didn't spend much time thinking about your work or referring to your assignment sheet (when you read an assignment, use the same tactics you would for analyzing a question on an essay test).
- **Glaring factual errors:** Such errors show that you didn't proofread your paper or that you rushed through your reading and didn't fully understand it. (ex. "Kate Chopin was a British writer..."; "The Civil War took place in the 1820s. . .")
- **Failing to cite sources:** It will look as though you are plagiarizing, which is academic misconduct and grounds for failure or worse sanctions. Carelessness and time constraints are not excuses.
- **Incomplete thesis:** Stating that "A and B are different" is not enough for a thesis statement. You should also include in that statement why or how A & B are different.
- **Conclusion that states what thesis should have:** If the final paragraph states your reasons for contrasting two ideas, for example, then that information should have been included in your thesis statement, not at the end of the paper. A reader needs to have some sense of direction as he or she reads. A thesis at the end of your work indicates that you just discovered your reasons for writing; you could have revised your paper so that it included this important information at the beginning.
- **Thesis isn't followed through in the paper:** If your thesis states that you are going to discuss ideas such as mechanization and technology and you never have a single paragraph about the ideas, then the thesis is inappropriate. You didn't plan your paper

so that you knew what you were going to discuss. Worse yet, you didn't read over your introduction to check that you followed through with the ideas you initially presented.

- **Several paragraphs with nearly identical topic sentences:** You don't know where your paper is going and you didn't read your work.
- **Last page or so is incoherent and sloppy:** In such cases there will be a big difference in language and sentence structure at the end of your work. The end isn't on the level with the paper's beginning. Reading your work aloud is a good way to check for coherence; reading aloud also takes some time and forces you to examine your work more closely than you may if you read silently.
- **Lack of paragraphing at the end of your paper:** You were racing to the end.
- **Incomplete argument:** If you said you were going to discuss four books and you only got around to two of them, you were obviously rushed and didn't plan ahead.
- **Pages of "is/are" verbs and few action verbs:** These are easy to revise; if you can't see them, get a friend to check your work.
- **Agreement problems:** Check to make sure that your tenses don't shift from the present to the past tense - be consistent. Be sure that your subjects and verbs agree.
- **Numerous spelling errors: USE SPELLCHECK.** Spellcheck will not catch all spelling errors. To be sure, read your paper backwards, word for word. Have another person read your essay for small errors.