How Do I Write an Abstract?

Academic Librarians’ Perspectives on Dispensing Qualitative and Topical How-To Advice

Ruth Wallach
University of Southern California
Los Angeles, USA
Premise:

Academic librarians have an informational and/or disciplinary expertise to provide qualitative advice on:

- What kind of information is appropriate;
- How to evaluate and contextualize retrieved information
- *How to use information to produce research results*

Prada Saffiano Lux
Double Handle Mini Satchel

Merona Mini Satchel Handbag
Organizing Your Social Sciences Research Paper

The purpose of this guide is to provide advice on how to develop and organize a research paper in the social sciences.

Purpose of Guide

This guide is intended to help you organize and write a quality research paper for any class in the social sciences. Also included are recommendations regarding how to manage specific course assignments. Note that, if you have specific questions about how to write a research paper, you should always seek advice from your professor before you begin. Specific requirements stated by your professor will always supersede instructions provided in these general guidelines.

Additional Help

USC Writing Center

Should you need personal assistance, be sure to make an appointment to meet with an experienced writer in the USC Writing Center to go over your paper. The Writing Center also conducts helpful, small-group workshops for students on a wide range of writing skills. Each week there are two or more different one-hour workshops offered at various times.
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URL: http://libguides.usc.edu/writingguide
Academic writing refers to a particular style of expression that scholars use to define the boundaries of their disciplines and their areas of expertise. Characteristics of academic writing include a formal tone, use of the third-person rather than first-person perspective (usually), a clear focus on the research problem under investigation, and precise word choice. Like the specialist languages adopted in other professions such as law, academic writing is designed to convey agreed meaning about complex ideas for a group of scholarly experts.

Importance of Good Academic Writing

I. The Big Picture
Unlike fiction or journalistic writing, the overall structure of academic writing is formal and logical. It must be cohesive and possess a logical flow of ideas, which means that the various parts are connected to form a unified whole. There should be links between sentences and paragraphs so the reader is able to follow your argument.

II. The Tone
Throughout your paper, it is important that you present the arguments of others fairly and with an appropriate tone. When presenting a position or argument that you disagree with, describe this argument accurately and without loaded or biased language. In academic writing, the author is expected to investigate the research problem from an authoritative point of view. You should, therefore, confidently state the strengths of your arguments using language that is neutral, not confrontational or dismissive.

III. The Language
Clear use of language is essential in academic writing. Well-structured paragraphs and clear topic sentences enable a reader to follow your line of thinking without difficulty. Your language should be concise, formal, and express precisely what you want it to mean. Avoid vague expressions that are not specific and precise enough for the reader to derive exact meaning [they, "we," "people," "the organization," etc] abbreviations like "i.e." [in other words], e.g. "[for example], and contractions, such as, "don't," "Isn't," etc.

IV. Academic Conventions
Citing sources in the body of your paper and providing a list of references are very important aspects of academic writing. It is essential to always acknowledge the source of any ideas, research findings, or data that you have used in your paper. To do otherwise is considered plagiarism.

V. Evidence-Based Arguments
Your assignments often ask you to express your own point of view on research problems you are discussing. However, what is valued in academic writing is that your opinions are based on a sound understanding of the pertinent body of knowledge in academic debates that are currently being debated in your discipline. You need to support your opinion with evidence from academic sources. It should be an objective position presented as a logical argument. The quality of your evidence will determine the strength of your argument. The challenge is to convince the reader of the validity of your opinion through a well-documented, coherent, and logically structured piece of writing.

VI. Thesis-Driven Analysis
The writing is "thesis-driven," meaning that the starting point is a particular perspective, idea, or "thesis" on the chosen research problem, such as, establishing, proving, or disproving solutions to the questions posed for the topic. In contrast, simply describing a topic without the research questions does not qualify as "academic writing."

VII. Complexity and Higher-Order Thinking
Interviews

• What kind of qualitative advice, if any, do librarians provide?

• Do librarians feel comfortable giving qualitative advice?

• Do librarians consider themselves an authority? Local or global?
Interviews conducted in early 2014 with librarian colleagues in:

Professional education:
  • communication arts and journalism
  • social work

Basic and applied sciences:
  • chemistry
  • computer sciences

Social sciences:
  • American history
  • political science and international relations
Themes
Librarian Qualifications

- **Chemistry**: undergraduate degree in chemistry.
- **Computer science**: scientists refer each other to other scientists, not to librarians.
- **Political Science/International Relations**: PhD in a social sciences field.
- **American studies**: no relevant disciplinary degree. Expertise based on experience. Being a generalist is important.
- **Communications and journalism**: knowledge and ability to appropriately communicate with the researcher.
- **Social work**: graduate degree in social sciences is useful; experience with info needs is paramount.
Role of Librarian within Research Process

- **Chemistry**: undergraduate students use librarian as path of least resistance. Graduate students need help finding specific resources that their institution does not have.
- **Computer Sciences**: Undergraduate students use Google; graduate studies are laboratory and product driven.
- **Political Science/International Relations**: undergraduate students use Google; graduates students need specialized resources and consult librarian. Students ask for help in specialized writing.
- **American studies**: undergraduates want digital information or change topic; graduate students need help with specialized writing and topic conception. All need help with understanding where information resides and in what format.
- **Communications and journalism**: coach, trainer, therapist.
- **Social work**: give advice on where information resides and in what format.
Proactive/Reactive

- Chemistry: reactive.
- Computer Science: reactive.
- Political Science/International Relations: both.
- American studies: both.
- Communications and journalism: both, try to be proactive.
- Social work: both, try to be proactive.
Local and Global Authority

• **Chemistry**: Very uncomfortable with stating something that is broadly available.

• **Computer Science**: Unsure.

• **Political Science/International Relations**: Public-ness is part of the philosophy of creating a library guide.

• **American Studies**: No difference between being local authority and global authority.

• **Communications and Journalism**: Importance of global exchange of information.

• **Social work**: Public-ness means something is findable and can reduce the number of basic questions.
Additionally

• *Social Sciences and Applied Social Sciences*: Librarians mediate badly or rigidly designed research assignments

• *Sciences and Applied Sciences*: Librarians’ function is to ensure that students know how to get to the correct resource.

• Undergraduate students generally don’t want to do the legwork of research; graduate students are often more willing.
The Purpose of this guide

The purpose of this guide is to provide you with information on some elements that go into researching and writing arts and humanities papers and theses. Because there is no unified structure to research and methodology in the arts and in the humanities, this guide provides general norms and suggestions, but is not comprehensive. Requirements and advice given to you by your faculty and/or committee members takes precedence and supersedes recommendations and instructions provided in this guide.

Help with the Writing Process:

If you need help with the process of writing, such as composition, grammar, or syntax, please consult with the USC Writing Center. The Center offers a variety of assistance to help students at any stage of the writing process.