

Research Writing

Research writing is writing that uses evidence (from journals, books, magazines, the Internet, experts, etc.) to persuade or inform an audience about a particular point.

In academic research writing, emphasis is put on bringing together individual insights and results of thorough investigations. It is a combination of examinations, comparisons and contrasts of documentation and situations to allow new insights into topical issues in your studies. Academic research writing differs from other kinds of research writing projects in different ways including the following three:

- **Thesis:** Academic research projects are organised around a point or a “thesis” that members of the intended audience would not accept as “common sense.” What an audience accepts as “common sense” depends a great deal on the audience, which is one of the many reasons why what “counts” as academic research varies from field to field. But audiences want to learn something new either by being informed about something they knew nothing about before, or by reading a unique interpretation on the issue or the evidence.
- **Evidence:** Academic research projects rely almost exclusively on evidence in order to support their point/thesis. Academic research writers use evidence in order to convince their audiences that the point they are making is right. Of course, all writing uses other means of persuasion—*appeals to emotion, to logic, to the credibility of the author, and so forth*. But the readers of academic research writing projects are likely to be more persuaded by good evidence than by anything else. “Evidence,” the information you use to support your point, includes readings you find in the library (journal and magazine articles, books, newspapers, and many other kinds of documents); materials from the Internet (web pages, information from databases, other Internet-based forums); and information you might be able to gather in other ways (interviews, field research, experiments, and so forth).
- **Citation:** Academic research projects use a detailed citation process in order to demonstrate to their readers where the evidence that supports the writer’s point came from. Unlike most types of “non-academic” research writing, academic research writers provide their readers with a great deal of detail about where they found the evidence they are using to support their point. This process is called citation, or “citing” of evidence. It can sometimes seem intimidating and confusing to writers new to the process of academic research writing, but it is really nothing more than explaining to your reader where your evidence came from.

- **How do you start a research paper?**

Chris Hadley, PhD in Clinical Psychology, responded to this question by saying: "**Reading. Lots of reading.** Research papers typically begin with a review of the relevant literature. **The review provides the context for the current study: why is it needed?** What missing questions is it intended to address? What theories are pertinent?"

- **Steps of the Research Writing Process**

In academia and elsewhere, a research paper can be used for exploring and identifying scientific, technical and societal issues. **The process of writing isn't quite as linear and straight-forward as people might like to think.** Writers generally have to start by coming up with an idea, but they often go back to their original idea and make changes to it after they write several drafts, do some research and get input from others.

That being said, most research projects follow a series of six basic steps.

1. Choose a topic.
2. Plan and schedule time to research and write.
3. Conduct research.
4. Organise research and ideas.
5. Draft your paper.
6. Revise and edit your paper.

Step 1: Choosing a Topic

This stage includes discovering, narrowing, and focusing on a topic that is research-worthy.

Here are some ways to help you narrow the focus of your topic:

- Brainstorm.
- Speak to your supervisor or colleagues about your area of interest.
- Ask a specific research question—a broad, open-ended question that will guide your research—as well as propose a possible answer, or a working thesis.
- You may use your research question and your working thesis to create a research proposal.

NB: In a research proposal, you present your main research question, any related sub-questions you plan to explore and your working thesis.

To increase the chances of you enjoying your research project, try to find a topic that truly interests you. Don't just choose a topic because it sounds great. Whenever possible, choose a good topic that you are interested in and this will make the research and writing process easier.

Activity: Examine the following topics and arrange them in order of how difficult they are in terms of the information needed. Give reasons for your arrangement.

1. Discuss the nature and effects of drought in Namibia.
2. Legalising prostitution: a health hazard cloaked in human rights jargon.
3. Understanding the impact of ARVs: A case study of Southern Africa.

Step 2: Planning and Scheduling

Research projects can take days, weeks, or even months to complete so before you start researching your topic, take time to plan your researching and writing schedule. Creating a schedule is a good way to ensure that you do not end up being overwhelmed by all the work you have to do as the deadline approaches.

During this step of the process, it is also a good idea to plan the resources and organizational tools you will use to keep yourself on track throughout the project.

Use a calendar, flowchart or other organizational tool to help you plan.

Step 3: Conducting the Research - finding, selecting, and reading sources

You will need to look at the following types of sources:

- library catalogue, periodical indexes, bibliographies, suggestions from your instructor
- primary vs. secondary sources
- journals, books other documents

There are two forms of research sources - primary sources and secondary sources. Primary sources provide firsthand information or raw data. For example, surveys, in-person interviews, and historical documents are primary sources. Secondary sources, such as biographies, literary reviews, or magazine articles, include some analysis or interpretation of the information presented. As you conduct research, you must take detailed, careful notes about your discoveries and evaluate the reliability of each source you find.

It is advised that you use as many sources as possible.

Make use of Academic Databases. There are special search engines and academic databases available that search through thousands of peer-reviewed or scientifically published journals, magazines, and books.

Tip: If you find a book or journal that fits your topic perfectly, look at the cited works in the reference list at the end of it and use that list to expand your reading.

Step 4: Organising the Research- categorising, sequencing, and documenting information

This step is very important:

You need to read through your research, take notes on what you think is important, and highlight key facts and phrases making sure to take note of anything that might be relevant to your research.

During this stage, you need to organise your findings and decide which sources to cite in your paper. You will also have an opportunity to evaluate the evidence you have collected and determine whether it supports your thesis or the focus of your paper. You may decide to adjust your thesis or conduct additional research to ensure that your thesis is well-supported.

NB: Remember, your working thesis is not set in stone. You can and should change your working thesis throughout the research writing process if the evidence you find does not support your original thesis. Never try to force evidence to fit your argument.

Step 5: Drafting your Paper

Now you are ready to combine your research findings with your critical analysis of the results in a rough draft. You will incorporate source materials into your paper and discuss each source thoughtfully in relation to your thesis or purpose statement.

When you cite your reference sources, it is important to pay close attention to standard conventions for citing sources in order to avoid plagiarism, or the practice of using someone else's words without acknowledging the source – at NUST we use the APA referencing style.

- **The Writing Process**

After identifying the goal of your paper it is time to work on the content.

Develop your Thesis.

The thesis statement is a 1-2 sentence statement at the beginning of your paper that states the main goal or argument of your paper.

Although you can change the wording of your thesis statement at the end of your research writing process (for your final draft), you must have the main idea at the beginning. Everything you write after the thesis statement, within the body paragraphs will revolve around your thesis, so you need to be clear on where you want to go.

Write the Introduction

In your introduction you must give a clear overview of what the reader should expect in your paper.

- Present relevant background or contextual material.
- Define terms or concepts where applicable.
- Explain the focus and purpose of the paper – detailing research objectives.
- Give an outline of the structure of your paper.

Write the Body

- Build your paper around the points you want to make based on your research objectives.
- Integrate your sources into your discussion.
- Critically incorporate published work rather than merely ‘copying and pasting’.
- Support every statement you make with evidence.
- Do not just list facts; make sure you present them with a critical commentary.
- Avoid having a research paper full of long, direct quotes – the paper is yours so you should write it, presenting your ideas based on your research. Unless you absolutely need a direct quote, paraphrase it.
- Use your cohesive devices to link sentences and sections of the text. Your paper should flow smoothly and logically from one idea to the next.

Write the Conclusion

Your conclusion and recommendations section must give a brief summary of your findings, the implications for those findings and provide recommendations for further study or action.

Step 6: Revising and editing your Paper

In the final step of the research writing process, you will revise and refine your paper. You might reorganize your paper’s structure or revise it for unity and cohesion, ensuring that each element in your paper flows into the next logically and naturally. You will also make sure that your paper uses an appropriate and consistent tone.

- If you edit your own paper, wait a few days before doing so because if you edit it immediately after writing, you will likely miss errors as the material will still be fresh in your mind.
- Do not just use spell check as your only editing tool as it can correct spellings ,but not always detect which spelling is correct in a given situation e.g ' I hear voices' vs ' I here voices'. The blue line that appears because if certain grammatical/language errors are only effective if you know what the line is indicating you should change!
- Do a thorough editing job; do not wait till the last minute to edit because you are guaranteed to have mistakes in your work.
- **Check overall organisation:** check for cohesion and coherence. Make sure your paragraphs have ideas supporting the topic sentence and make sure each paragraph flows into the next.
- **Check for language errors: sentence structure, grammar, appropriate vocabulary, etc**
- **Intext citation and referencing** : make sure there is consistent use of one system (Unless otherwise stated NUST uses the APA referencing system)

Source: <https://writing.wisc.edu/handbook/assignments/planresearchpaper/>

Source: <https://www.wikihow.com/Write-a-Research-Paper>