

Creating a Rough Draft

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WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn how to begin constructing the rough draft of your research paper. Specifically, this lesson will focus on:

1. Structure of a Research Paper

Research papers generally follow the same basic structure:

- An introduction that presents the writer's thesis
- A body section that develops the thesis with supporting points and evidence
- A conclusion that revisits the thesis and suggests future research

Your writing voice will come across most strongly in your introduction and conclusion as you work to attract your readers' interest and establish your thesis.

These sections usually do not cite sources at length. They focus on the big picture, not specific details. In contrast, the body of your paper will cite sources extensively. As you present your ideas, you will support your points with details from your research.

In upcoming lessons, you will get a chance to look at each of these sections in depth. For now, it's important that you get a brief overview of what you will need to do to complete these parts of your paper.

1a. Writing Your Introduction

There are several approaches to writing an introduction, each of which fulfills the same goals. The introduction should get readers' attention, provide background information, and present the writer's thesis.

Many writers like to begin with one of the following catchy openers:

- A surprising fact
- A thought-provoking question
- An attention-grabbing quotation
- A brief anecdote that illustrates a larger concept
- A connection between their topic and their readers' experiences

The next few sentences place the opening in context by presenting background information. From there, the

writer builds toward a thesis, which is traditionally placed at the end of the introduction. Think of your thesis as a signpost that lets readers know in which direction the paper is headed.

Below is a sample introduction from a research paper on a topic in nutrition.

Over the past decade, increasing numbers of Americans have jumped on the low-carb bandwagon. Some studies estimate that approximately 40 million Americans, or about 20 percent of the population, are attempting to restrict their intake of food high in carbohydrates (Sanders and Katz, 2004; Hirsch, 2004). Proponents of low-carb diets say they are not only the most effective way to lose weight, but they also yield health benefits such as lower blood pressure and improved cholesterol levels. Meanwhile, some doctors claim that low-carb diets are overrated and caution that their long-term effects are unknown. Although following a low-carbohydrate diet can benefit some people, these diets are not necessarily the best option for everyone who wants to lose weight or improve their health.

1b. Writing Your Body Paragraphs

The introduction and conclusion function like the frame around a picture. They define and limit your topic and place your research in context.

In the body paragraphs of your paper, you will need to integrate ideas carefully at the paragraph level and at the sentence level. To do this, you will use topic sentences in your paragraphs to make sure readers understand the significance of any facts, details, or quotations you cite.

You will also include sentences that transition between ideas from your research, either within a paragraph or between paragraphs. At the sentence level, you will need to think carefully about how you introduce paraphrased and quoted material.

1c. Writing Your Conclusion

In your introduction, you tell readers where they are headed. In your conclusion, you recap where they have been. For this reason, some writers prefer to write their conclusions soon after they have written their introduction.

However, this method may not work for all writers. Some writers prefer to write their conclusion at the end of the paper, after writing the body paragraphs. No process is absolutely right or absolutely wrong; find the one that best suits you.

No matter when you compose the conclusion, it should sum up your main ideas and revisit your thesis. The conclusion should not simply echo the introduction or rely on bland summary statements, such as “In this paper, I have demonstrated that....”

In fact, avoid repeating your thesis verbatim from the introduction. Restate it in different words that reflect the new perspective gained through your research. That helps keep your ideas fresh for your readers. An effective writer might conclude a paper by asking a new question the research inspired, revisiting an anecdote presented earlier, or reminding readers of how the topic relates to their lives.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that the **structure of a research paper** typically involves an introduction,

body paragraphs with evidence and analysis, and a conclusion. You also learned that **writing your introduction** involves drawing in the reader and setting up your thesis, **writing your body paragraphs** involves using your source material to support your claims, and **writing your conclusion** involves recapping what you've covered and looking toward the future of the topic.

Best of luck in your learning!

Source: This content has been adapted from Lumen Learning's "Creating a Rough Draft for a Research Paper" tutorial.