

Organizing a Research Paper

INTRODUCTION

Ideally, introductions should be written last—*after* you've started to read about your topic, study it, and consider how it works. Strong introductions usually include:

Exigence

What is the event, issue, problem, or thing that you're responding to in your essay? What causes you to write? This can be a personal anecdote, an example that illustrates the larger problem, or some research that establishes the scope of the problem or context for it. Explaining what you're responding to can also lead to naming a research question or a question that your essay hopes to answer.

Big Picture Summary

Big Picture Summary means a glimpse at the conversation you're creating in your essay. What are the perspectives currently? Who's saying what? Who's left out? This should give readers a more specific sense of who you're talking to and what sources you're engaging with. If you're working with several sources, it helps to group them: some scholars believe X, while others argue Y... Currently, scholars in linguistics are divided on topic M..

Your Project

You should also establish your research question, any additional materials you're using, and your argument (thesis). That is, what will you be doing in this paper? And, what have you found from studying this topic?

BODY

The body of a paper progresses through its consideration and evaluation of evidence. However, there are number of strategies for organizing evidence. Each of these organizational methods requires: sorting through your sources/evidence, understanding how they relate to each other (grouping them!), and figuring out what you're going to focus on (perspectives, evidence, points, arguments, methods, etc.). Whether you're writing a research paper or any other type of paper, it helps to have one guiding question the essay is trying to answer; you should ask: how does each piece of evidence answer my guiding question?

Important Context and/or Definitions

Sometimes, we start a research paper by explaining necessary background info, important terms you use, an important theory you use, historical context, or other information that frames your subject.

Different Organizational Strategies for the Body

- Organize by **Perspectives**: Some people say X, whereas others say Y. Explain each side, how they relate, then evaluate/analyze them in relation to your argument/perspective;
- Organize by **Evidence**: evidence that supports your claim versus evidence that complicates it; in this scenario, you could start with the most persuasive or the least and build an argument.
- Organize by **Points**: This means, you've spent time and have come up with three categories, or three important elements of the debate on X, or three possible solutions to problem Y, or

three things that no one is talking about in regards to M. Then each point is like a sub-section that requires synthesizing the sources that are useful for it. (e.g., policy reform at the national level, state level, local level)

- Organize by **Sections**: Sometimes it helps to break your research question into larger sections of a topic. For example, the following questions could each be a section in an essay on language discrimination: What is language discrimination? Why does it happen? Who faces it? What are potential solutions?

CONCLUSION

A strong conclusion does MORE than just restating what you've already said. A strong conclusion *pushes forward* your work in small ways. Here are some moves you might use for your conclusion:

- Return to your thesis and try to consider why your findings are important: what do they help us better understand or do? That is, so what? What are the implications of what you've said? Why should readers care?
- Who would benefit from reading the work you've done? And, how will they benefit?
- What other work (research, solutions, actions, etc.) still needs to be done? Or, are there any limitations to what you have said and done?