

Bracken Business Communications Clinic

Parts of a Research Paper

Research papers typically consist of a number of parts. This brief paper summarizes the main sections that would normally be found in such a paper, but does not include all, and follows American Psychological Association (APA) structure as defined in section two of its sixth edition publication manual “Manuscript Structure and Content” (2010). The focus of this paper is on the structure itself and not the specific layout and format (e.g., font, font size, centering of titles, paging structure, and so on; and these formatting directions can be found in the different sections of the APA manual).

Title

Indicates the problem or issue addressed by the paper briefly and clearly.

Author’s Name

Abstract

Summarizes the content and approach of the paper succinctly and comprehensively. It provides a synopsis by introducing the subject and the specific research question, providing a statement regarding methodology and giving a general statement about the results and the findings. Abstract and body content will vary with a report of an empirical study having different abstract elements than a meta-analysis, theory-oriented paper, methodological paper, or case study.

Introduction

Introduces the topic and provides basic background information. It provides the purpose and specific focus of the paper and sets up the justification for the research.

Literature Review

Describes past important research and how it relates to the paper’s research problem. The review should examine the major theories related to the topic, their contribution, and include all relevant findings from reliable sources such as peer-reviewed journal articles. The APA includes this as part of the introduction (“Describe relevant scholarship”), but in many cases this will be a separate section.

Method

Designates in detail the research design and methodology used to complete to the study. A good guideline to follow is that readers should be provided with enough detail to replicate the study.

(Continued)

Results

Summarizes the research data and analysis conducted. How the results are presented will depend upon whether the research study was quantitative or qualitative in nature. This section should focus only on results that are directly related to the research or the problem. Graphs and tables should only be used when there is too much data to efficiently include it within the text. The section should present the results, but not discuss their significance.

Discussion

Discusses the results and the implications on the field, as well as other fields. The hypothesis should be answered and validated by the interpretation of the results. The discussion section should also assess how the results relate to previous research mentioned in the literature review, any cautions about the findings, and potential for future research.

Contribution

Describes what this paper does to add to the field of study. While this is not designated as a separate section by the APA and may be included in the discussion section, oftentimes the contribution may be included as a separate, stand-alone section.

Conclusion

Summarizes the content and approach and reiterates the results, contribution, and potential areas for future research.

References

Lists alphabetically all the academic sources of information utilized in the paper. These references must match and support the in-text citations used in the paper.

Appendices and Supplemental Materials

Contains materials supporting a paper's content but that are not an integral part of the narrative. Appendices contain material that is brief and can be presented in text or tabular form. Supplements contain, or direct readers to, more lengthy material that may be found online or in other sources (e.g., audio or video clips, very large tables, detailed medical protocols, and other similar content).