Genre of the Academic Research Essay

Research writers develop and communicate an argument: a problem-solution genre, mode of inquiry, and writing process, seeking to answer a research question plus involved issue, or research problem. Writers propose a thesis-as-solution supported by good reasons and grounding evidence by analyzing primary sources and learning from secondary sources. A research essay has four sections (ICCC is the acronym), adjusted and organized according to topic and target readers’ needs. Writers introduce the essay with a typical form to frame it for significance: specifying the research question and involved issue, summarizing the differing viewpoints on the issue, and asserting a thesis-as-solution followed by a brief list of reasons for recommending the thesis. Writers also define the key terms of their question and involved issue. This lesson outlines the research essay’s four sections and typical features with reference to two reliable manuals in the Chicago Guides to Writing.

### Introduction

Research writers frame their research essays with all or most of the following expected features:

1. **Prelude** focuses attention with a significant quotation, statistic, anecdote, or question. Writers also report relevant background information to aid target readers’ understanding of the topic.
2. **Research question** articulates a specific significant question that target readers care about.
3. **Research problem** develops **significance** by recognizing an **issue** that one must negotiate to answer the research question, such as an interpretive difficulty or a flaw or gap in prior research.
4. **Literature review** surveys major answers to the research problem, for “as a rule, writers prepare readers by describing the prior research that their research will extend, modify, or correct.”
5. **Thesis-as-solution or position** asserts an answer to the research question and research problem.
6. **Advance organizer** often follows, mapping briefly the main reasons for accepting the thesis.


### Brief review of critical literature

Writers summarize **scholarly opinion** early in the introduction that both summarizes and categorizes prior research—the differing positions or viewpoints on the issue—naming the major representative voices in the scholarly debate. Afterwards, writers assert their thesis to situate it among and against the other positions. Ethical writers represent other perspectives as fairly and accurately as possible.

- The lack of an opposing viewpoint indicates that one does not have a significant thesis.

* A Manual for Writers 6.2.2; The Craft of Research 12.2.1.

### Counter-arguments

In the counterargument section, writers respond to differing viewpoints: showing common ground, acknowledging insights, and writing succinct **counterarguments** focusing on oversights and fallacies. Counterarguments, also called rebuttals or rejoinders, responding to target readers’ questions, concerns, and reservations as well as distinguish one’s argument to show its significance.

- Counterarguments come before the core argument when writing to academic target readers.

* A Manual for Writers 5.4.3; The Craft of Research 10.4.

### Core argument

The essay body consists of a **core argument** that should extend, modify, or correct prior research or argue a **position**. A brief introduction should specify the main point and define key terms (if not already defined). Then writers provide three or more paragraphs, or subsections, organized by importance or chronology. The core argument should make a case by offering relevant **reasons** and **evidence** for readers to accept the thesis. Evidence consists of interpreted facts and examples from **primary sources** and testimony and insights from recent, relevant, and reliable **secondary sources**.

* A Manual for Writers 6.2 and 3.1; The Craft of Research 12.2 and 9.

### Body paragraphs

After a brief introduction to the core argument, writers start the first of several body paragraphs. Body paragraphs are typically organized according to four expected parts, starting with transitions:

- **Transition** is a signal word or phrase (e.g., first, second, similarly, however) indicating addition, contrast, or a logical relationship to other paragraphs to create links of cohesion and coherence.
- **Topic sentence** is a “telling” statement that asserts one reason or sub-claim for believing the thesis; in a short, clear sentence, it specifies one supporting reason from the advance organizer.
- **Development sentences** are “proving” statements giving sufficient evidence (facts, examples, insights, expert testimony) for supporting the topic sentence, which in turn supports the thesis.
- **Concluding sentence** is a synthesis statement that wraps up the paragraph.

* A Manual for Writers 6.2.8; The Craft of Research 12.2.3.

### Conclusion

The conclusion frames an argument for **significance and coherence**, often reasserting the main features of the introduction in reverse order, but also developing significance by drawing out applications, implications, new perspectives, and closing with a strong image, emotion, or insight.

* A Manual for Writers, 10.2; The Craft of Research, 16.6.

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