Research writing

In process and purpose, writers understand the research project to be a question-answer or problem-solution genre, mode of inquiry and discovery, and form of amiable argument.

Writing is a critical process involving many skills of reading and writing.

Global level

◦ Writing involves reading, research, and reference to others
◦ Writing involves argument and communication to others

Sentence level

◦ Writing involves style, grammar, punctuation, and mechanics

Presentation

◦ Writing involves document design and formatting
The writing process

Writing is a process resulting in a product.

1. Invention and research (50% of effort)
2. Drafting (10%)
3. Critique (5%)
4. Revision (25%)
5. Editing (10%)

- Avoid over-conflating the stages of the writing process.

Writers draft throughout the writing process.

1. Discovery draft and/or reading notes
2. Development draft
3. Clarification draft
4. Communication draft

✓ “Revision” is not a bad word!
The writing situation

During invention, a writer should assess the writing situation, asking several questions about the topics below to help focus and plan the writing project.

Good readers also understand that writers always respond to situations.

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Who is my **audience**?

Who are my target readers?

- Church audience
- Academic audience
- Disciplinary experts
- Other audience

Audience = standards, such as choice of sources, reasons, evidence, and style of writing.

Audience adjudicates success.

➢ You try: Identify your target readers (and try to get to know them).
NB: Write for your target readers

Write for your target readers, not your professor.

Your professor may be your only reader, but professors don’t read student papers as themselves but from the point of view of situation’s target audience, which knows less than they do.

If you write for the professor, you risk making assumptions that will distort your argument:

- You may fail to explain matters that your professor understands but target readers do not.
- You may fail to anticipate questions and objections that target readers have but your professor won’t.
- You will generally write a paper that is suited for neither your professor nor your target readers.
What is my topic?

Researchers explore their topic, but what are they looking for?

**Questions:** What is interesting, puzzling, or significant about the (given) topic?

**Problems:** What is significant enough to change interpretation, perspective, and/or application?

**Issues:** What are the issues and debates? Where and how do experts disagree?

➢ **You try:** Write down your preliminary topic(s).
What is my research question?

Exploring the topic should culminate in a research question styled as a question.

Do I have a question that my target readers and I care about?

- How does the doctrine of _____ apply to missions in a pluralistic context?
- How does the doctrine of _____ affect cross-cultural communication?
- How does the doctrine of _____ shape the task of church planting in a post-colonial country?
- How does the doctrine of _____ inform the task of cultural accommodation in missions?

❯ You try: Formulate a preliminary research question.

✓ Research questions typically begin with open-ended pronouns: how, why, what applications, etc.

✓ Starting with a question will ensure an inductive process and avoid pitfalls in the ethics of scholarship.
What is my question’s quality?

**Clarity:** Is the research question’s language clear and concrete?

**Scope:** Is the question sufficiently narrow in scope?

**Significance:** Is the question theoretically significant?

**Grounding:** Is the research question grounded with a view to evidence?

➢ **You try:** Revise your preliminary draft research question.

✓ Developing a quality question will keep focus, save time, and result in a quality thesis statement.
What is my argument?

Given my research question, how would I answer it in a hypothesis before in-depth research?

What reasons and evidence would I need to support my hypothesis, my working thesis?

As a reminder, a thesis answers a research question.

“A thesis is often one or more of the following:

- the answer to a question you have posed
- the solution of a problem you have identified
- a statement that takes a position on a debatable topic.”

—Diana Hacker and Nancy Summers, *Rules for Writers, 7e*

➤ You try: Given your hypothesis, list some reasons and evidence you’ll need to support it.
What is the problem?

What debatable issue does my research question address or somehow involve?

Writers need to recognize the problem to create significance.

Thus, a researcher needs two questions:

- Q1: Local, limited, specific question (but so what, why care?)
- Q2: Theoretically or practically significant question (has perceived consequence)

Q1 helps address Q2
Looking for a problem

Problems, Problems, Problems

“If one issue makes or breaks a student research project, it is the quality of the problem that the writer poses. Students with good questions (Turabian, ch. 2) find more useful sources (chs. 3-4), read more thoughtfully, and make better decisions in planning and drafting their papers. Students with not even a question to answer, much less a good problem to solve, are more likely to wander, to pursue dead ends, to write for themselves rather than their readers, and therefore to need more of your [the instructor’s] guidance along the way and more extensive feedback at the end.”

—“Instructor’s Manual for A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations”
What is the **significance**?

How do writers create significance, or motivating coherence?

Good writers frame essays to address not just questions but problems.

- In the introduction, writers show how their specific research question helps address a general problem.
- In the conclusion, they discuss further how their thesis has applications or implications for helping answer a problem that their target readers care about.

**Q1 helps addresses Q2**

➢ **You try:** Identify your topic’s research problem, or find it as you learn and research.
Three key moves

Research writers move from a topic to a research question to a research problem.

**Topic**: Theology applied to missions in a pluralistic context.

**Topic to question**
- How does the doctrine of inerrancy shape missions in a postcolonial context?

**Question to problem**
- **Practical problem**: How can missionaries remain faithful to Scripture, while avoiding both compromised gospels and colonialist impulses, for developing a productive ministry in a postcolonial country?
- **Theoretical problem**: How does one negotiate the accommodation-syncretism axis?
What are the other viewpoints?

How have others answered my question and the related issue?
What is the history of the debate, and what are the opposing viewpoints?

Writers situate their thesis among the viewpoints by writing a brief literature review.

“As a rule, writers prepare readers by describing the prior research that their research will extend, modify, or correct” (Turabian et al., *A Manual for Writers*, §10.1.1).

➤ You try: Name the opposing viewpoints, or find them as you learn and research.

- Systematic theology textbooks are usually organized by question followed by prominent viewpoints.
How do you reply?

“Why is your view best? Why do you think the other perspectives are inadequate?”

How do you reply to target readers’ needs—their questions, objections, or reservations?

In addition to writing a core argument, research writers summarize and enter the conversation about the significant question, developing two important elements of the research essay:

- **Literature view** summarizing opposing viewpoints in the introduction
- **Counterarguments** addressing opposing viewpoints before one’s core argument

Turabian, §5.2
Which sources?

What kinds of sources do my target readers expect me to use? How many?
Who are the voices, theorists, and experts whom I should consult?
Sources should always be recent and relevant.

You try: Name some theorists and experts that your target readers will expect you to consult.
Which constraints?

What limitations do I face with the assigned writing project?
- Time: due dates
- Length requirement
- Access to sources
- Other constraints

➤ You try: Chart a course forward on your master calendar.
Which reviewer?

As a project manager, a writer does some backward planning.

- **Deadline**: When is the due date?
- **Critique**: When should I set a preliminary deadline for sharing my developed draft with someone in my writing group or in the Writing Center? (Aim: Make a revision plan.)
- **Revision**: How much time will I allow to revise the argument toward improvement?
- **Editing**: When should I set aside time to edit and write the clarification draft?

➤ **You try**: Set your preliminary due date.
Key moves

Research writers make several moves that make the writing process more efficient and effective.

1. Moving from a topic to a question
2. Moving from the question to a problem
3. Moving from the problem to sources
4. Moving from hypothesis to thesis
5. Moving from research to amiable argument
6. Answering target readers’ questions and objections
Research plan

After drafting a research question and a research problem, you develop a research plan:

◦ Sketch a hypothesis (a working thesis).
◦ Sketch a list of reasons for supporting the hypothesis.
◦ Sketch the kind of evidence you will need to ground your reasons—the kind of evidence that your target readers expect you to use for credible argument.
◦ Review the whole plan.
◦ Off you go: search for sources with key terms from your research question.

Turabian, §2.3
Assembling evidence

How to assemble reasons and evidence:
  ◦ Sources are “witnesses.”
  ◦ Find the kinds of sources that target readers expect (see Turabian, §3.1).
  ◦ Follow bibliographic trails (record bibliographic records).
  ◦ Look beyond predictable sources.
Engaging sources

Reading notes: When reading, take note of “yes, but” moments when you notice contradictions, inconsistencies, incomplete explanations, and unfounded assumptions.

Be careful: read carefully lest the problem is in your reading rather than the source.

Be an adventurer not a conquistador of sources.
How not to style the thesis

Avoid excessive metadiscourse (writing about my developing writing), for it is redundant and considered poor writing style.

A thesis is not a purpose statement but a proposed answer to the research question.

◦ “The thesis of the paper is why William Carey is the father of modern missions.”
◦ “In this essay, I will discuss a biblical mandate for baptism in missions.”
◦ “The first thing to say is that Paul develops the theme of love his letters to the Corinthians.”
◦ “It is the opinion of this writer that the doctrine has many applications for missions.”

Instead, simply assert a claim that answers the research question, and write it at the end of the introductory paragraph or introductory section, where readers expect to find it.

Turabian, §11.1.7
Styling the thesis

Many research writers, after a brief literature review, start their thesis with a contrastive conjunction, then assert the thesis, and then add a brief advance organizer.

- Many people think that [opposing viewpoint] or that [opposing viewpoint];
- however, a careful study of the case shows that [your thesis statement],
- based on three reasons: [your advance organizer].

Turabian, §10.1
Top two principles of style

1. Make main characters the grammatical subjects of most sentences.
2. Put important actions in verbs (not abstract nouns).

Subject–verb–object
written as
character–action–object

Which sentence do you prefer? Why?

- The Federalists’ argument in regard to the destabilization of the government by direct democracy was based on their belief in the tendency of factions of promote their self-interest at the expense of the common good.
- The Federalists argued that direct democracy destabilized government because they had seen how factions tended to promote self-interest at the expense of the common good.
Turabian/Chicago Style


Part I: Research Writing
- Research writing process (chs. 1-10)
- Sentence style (ch. 11)

Part II: Source Citation
- Reasons for citing sources (ch. 15)
- Footnote citation (chs. 16-17)
- Parenthetical citation of Scripture (§19.5.2)

Part III: Mechanics (chs. 20-25)

Appendix: Paper formatting
Which character traits?

What character traits should readers and writers continually seek to develop?

- **Fairmindedness** (counteracting that people are developmentally egocentric and socio-centric)
- **Intellectual humility** (truth is found in surprising places)
- **Intellectual empathy** (acknowledging and understanding other perspectives)
- **Intellectual perseverance** (keep the train moving!)
Which criteria? (more advanced)

What are my criteria by which I evaluate others’ theses and arrive at my thesis?

Criteria of evaluation take the following forms:

- General principles, models, and exemplars, such as laws or principles of ethics, logic, or interpretation
- Specific characteristics of a supreme example or model
- Foundations in any particular field or discipline

Writers should communicate their evaluation criteria to themselves and target readers.

You try: What criteria will you use to arrive at your answer or position?
What category of question? (advanced)

According to stasis theory, arguments come in four basic categories.

◦ **Conjecture** (a matter of fact): It is true? Is it factual? (Empirical questions)
◦ **Definition** (genus and difference): What is it? What kind?
◦ **Quality** (criticism): What is its quality or accuracy?
◦ **Solution** (proposal): What is the best solution or position?

➢ **You try**: Identify the kind of question you are asking.

 ✓ Determining the stasis will give a sense of clarity and purpose.
Turabian 8 title page, an update or change from prior editions