



SUGGESTED OUTLINE FOR A RESEARCH PAPER

(Adapted from Bill REIMER 1995/04/10)

The following is a suggested outline for writing your research paper. It is not meant to be followed precisely. Adapt it to the demands of your specific topic and approach. Your objective should be to communicate clearly and concisely.

1. INTRODUCTION

Give a clear statement of the problem you are discussing. Make clear why it is important and how it relates to broader sociological issues. Outline what you will be doing in your paper. Use non-sexist language throughout the paper (see Eichler and Lapointe, 1985).

2. THEORETICAL APPROACH AND LITERATURE REVIEW

This section should include the following:

- a statement of the problem you wish to investigate
- the general question you wish to answer
- a discussion of the way in which the problem has been addressed and/or the question has been answered in the literature
- a critique of the literature with respect to the problem you have identified. This critique should be made in terms of:
 - the logic of the arguments proposed by various authors
 - the appropriateness of the arguments for the problem they (and you have identified)
 - the extent of empirical support which they have provided for their claims
- a specific research proposition or propositions on which you will focus. This will most likely be drawn from the review of the literature provided above and must be justified in terms of that previous discussion.

3. METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

This section should include the following:

- an elaboration of your specific research proposition identified above. This includes
 - definitions of the key concepts
 - discussion of the theoretical justification (rationale) for the relationship(s) proposed
- the operationalization of the research proposition
- a discussion and justification of the research design. This should be made with respect to the theoretical context of the research problem as previously discussed along with any pragmatic considerations which may play a part in your choice of research design
- a discussion of sampling decisions and the implications they have for the generalizability of the findings
- special problems of research design

4. PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH RESULTS

Describe your results. Are they different from what you had expected, or did they meet your predictions? How do they compare with earlier work? How reliable are your results? How generalizable are they?

5. INTERPRETATION/ANALYSIS OF YOUR RESULTS

Discuss the theoretical interpretations of your results. When doing so, make reference to the earlier theoretical discussion on which the research is based. What does the research imply about the answer to your research question? What new research questions emerge from the research?

6. CONCLUSIONS

Summarize your findings and your analyses. Identify problems and weaknesses of the research. What conclusions or implications can you draw from your results for future research and/or for program policy?

7. LIST OF REFERENCES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

List the materials consulted in preparation for this paper as well as the references cited.

Format and Style

BIBLIOGRAPHY: Material should be listed alphabetically by author in the following format. Book titles must be capitalized or underlined and articles should appear in quotation marks. Some examples follow:

Adam, Barry D.

1981 "Stigma and employability." The Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology 18(2):216-221.

Becker, L. and C. Gustafson

1976 Encounter with Sociology: The Term Paper. San Francisco: Boyd and Fraser.

Eichler, Margrit and Jeanne Lapointe

1985 On the Treatment of the Sexes in Research. Ottawa: Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

James, Barbara

1982 "Breaking the hold: women against rape." Pp. 68-75 in Fitzgerald, Guberman and Wolfe (eds), Still Ain't Satisfied: Canadian Feminism Today. Toronto: The Women's Press.

Lowman, John, M.A. Jackson, T.S. Palys and S. Gavign (eds)

1986 Regulating Sex. Burnaby, B.C.: Simon Fraser University School of Criminology.

Northey, Margot and Lorne Tepperman

1986 Making Sense in the Social Sciences: a student's guide to research, writing, and style. Toronto: Oxford University Press.

REFERENCES: References are used after quotations, after general references to particular ideas, and after general references to ideas or works. References, identifying author's surname, year of publication, and pagination, should be enclosed in parentheses and included in the text at each citation, e.g. (Shaver, 1985:499). If the author's name appears in the text, do not include it in the reference. Distinguish plural references to an author for a given year by letters, e.g. (Reiss, 1986a:89). Multiple references should be enclosed in a single pair of parentheses and separated by semi-colons, e.g. (Badgley, 1984; Reiss, 1981; Yegidis, 1986). The enclosed references are listed in alphabetical order.

FOOTNOTES: Footnotes, which are to be used for comments rather than citation, should be listed at the bottom of the page or at the end of the paper (just before the Bibliography).

STYLE TIPS:

1. Don't use third person for yourself.
eg. "One could ...", "This author feels ..."

This gives a false sense of distance from the material. Instead, simply state the claim. Since you are writing the paper, we can assume that it is yours unless you indicate otherwise. If there is no other way, you can use the first person formulation.

2. Avoid inappropriate anthropomorphization of non-human concepts. e.g. society, Marxism, etc.
3. Avoid imprecise statements

e.g. Instead of "The respondents were influenced by the length of the questionnaire.", use "Five respondents complained that the questionnaire was too long."

e.g. "Instead of accepting stereotypical labels, many gays may react differently. They may avoid the stigma of homosexuality by a denial of it, they may conceal or lie about their..."

In this case, the word "may" is used to suggest that a relationship exists, yet no evidence is provided that it does, and no evidence is given regarding the extent to which it does.

This use is okay so long as it involves only speculation or the development of ideas about a phenomenon. However, it is often used in situations which suggest that the relationships are found, and that they are found to a considerable extent.

4. Use detailed rather than general accounts where possible.

e.g. Instead of "The respondent refused the questionnaire because she didn't approve of it.", use "The respondent refused the questionnaire because she objected to answering "prying" questions about her religion."

5. Use the active, rather than the passive voice.

e.g. Instead of "The student was observed copying figures from his shirt pocket.", use "The student copied figures from his shirt pocket."

6. Avoid wordiness.

e.g. Instead of "I mailed out 250 questionnaires and most of them were sent to students in their third year who were living in residence.", use "I sent 175 of the 250 questionnaires to third year students in residence."

DISCUSSING TABLES

These are some suggestions for writing the results of table analysis in a prose form.

1. Do not discuss all the information in all the tables. Conduct a thorough examination of all the tables, but select from them (or construct) only those which highlight the most important results.
2. Include only the tables to which you refer in the text.
3. Present the tables in a form which reflects the prose.
 - provide tables which highlight the comparisons which you make in the prose
 - use the same names for the variables in the table and the prose
 - collapse the categories in the tables to reflect the comparisons you discuss in the prose
 - remove redundant information from the tables
 - consider ways in which the information in tables can be combined
4. Number your tables and refer to these table numbers in the text.
5. When discussing each table in the text, use the following format:
 - state what you expect to find in the table, and why
 - state what you found (making reference to the labels and numbers in the table)
 - state the implications of the findings for your original expectation
6. Make the tables follow the logic of the text, not the other way around.
7. Here are some examples for the format of tables.

- Table with two variables:

Education for Males by Father's Income

Son's Education	Father's Income	
	\$10,000 or more	Less than \$10,000
university	51.7%	12.5%
no university	48.3	87.5
	(700)	(800)

- Table with three variables:

Level of Participation by Community Size and Marital Status

Level of Participation	Large Community		Small Community	
	Married	Widowed	Married	Widowed
	High	50%	30%	30%
Medium	30	30	30	30
Low	20	40	40	20
	(800)	(300)	(100)	(200)

- Table with three variables (dependent variable is binary):

Percent Agree to Free Beer by Sex and Income

	Male	Female
High Income	32.4%	43.2%
Medium Income	44.5	37.8
Low Income	47.8	32.6
	(324)	(267)

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON DOING AND WRITING RESEARCH PAPERS
SEE THE TEXTS BY BECKER AND GUSTAFSON (1976) AND NORTHEY AND
TEPPERMAN (1986) CITED ABOVE.