

Research Papers

Research papers are very common in public health writing. They represent a culmination of systematic investigation of a topic in order to establish facts and reach conclusions. A research paper may include [literature reviews](#), presentation of data and analysis, critical thinking, integration and explanation (51). Research papers are not simply a regurgitation of the research, nor are they an interpretation of just one source (51). Instead, they offer critical thought and draw conclusions from many sources.

Topics and Problem Statements

The first step in writing a research paper is selecting a topic and developing it into a problem or purpose statement. While individual courses may dictate a range of topics, you are often at liberty to choose your own topic to research. It is important to select a topic for which an adequate amount of documentation exists. Avoid selecting a topic or population in which little is known, as this may limit your analysis or interpretations. For example, a student once tried to write a paper on alternative treatment of infertility in Egypt, but found there was little published literature on the topic and so she could not adequately explore the issues or draw conclusions.

Regardless of the topic, the problem statement or research question should be very clear and mentioned in the introduction of the paper.

Below is a five-step process for analyzing problems (52), which can be applied to writing a problem statement:

- Define the central conflict or key issue (e.g. convey the conflict between too goods—how to encourage greater medication adherence while respecting patient autonomy)
- Place the problem in a larger context (e.g. look for a larger concern you and your reader share, that greater medication adherence could increase health outcomes and reduce disease transmission)
- Make the problem definition more operational (e.g. which medications, which population etc.)
- Identify major subissues and how they may fit into the hierarchy as parts of the larger problem

Research

You should include literature from peer-reviewed journals whenever possible. Depending on the topic, there may be a dearth of peer-reviewed research. In these instances, it is generally acceptable to review secondary source documents (such as newspaper articles) from reputable sources.

For tips on references, check out the Writing Guide, Section IV: [Finding and Using References](#).

Components

Research papers typically include the following components:

- **Introduction.** Establish why the topic is important and include a clear research question. Take a stand on the topic and form a problem statement or arguable thesis.

- **Body.** Build the arguments of the thesis in the body of the paper. This may include strengthening arguments with corroborating research, or weakening arguments with critiquing research.
 - Note: Depending on the type of research paper, this section may include a Methods section and a Results section.
- **Conclusion.** Remind the audience of the strongest arguments, and reemphasize how these arguments strengthen or weaken the central thesis.
- **References.** Acknowledge the sources used to write the paper.