

Lesson Plan: How to Begin Writing a Research Paper

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Lesson: How to Begin Writing a Research Paper

Timeframe: approximately 60 minutes

Target Audience: This lesson is intended for students in the Health Science and Recreation Department who must take HS1 (Understanding Your Health), a required course for Health Science majors. In addition, all students who must fulfill General Education area E¹ will benefit from this lesson plan.

Materials Needed: CD, timer, laptop, tape, CD player, pre-printed images, blank piece of paper for each student, and “How to Begin Writing a Research Paper” PowerPoint handout with slides from the lesson plan

Objectives: After the lesson the students will be able to

- understand the primary purpose of an academic research paper.
- know ways to get started with the writing process.
- understand barriers associated with writing a research paper.
- be able to start writing a research paper.

Background: All Health Science students must take HS1 (Understanding Your Health), and any student who needs to fulfill area E in the general education requirements may take this class. Freshmen to seniors as well as transfer students and Open University students take this class. There are no prerequisites for this course. Students in HS 1 study broad factors (physiological, socio/cultural, and psychological) that affect health across the lifespan. This lesson focuses on one of the assignments in the writing sequence for this class. The assignment is to write a research paper to investigate the multiple factors that influence the healthy well-being of individuals living in a particular community at risk. Students select a health topic of interest (HIV, stress, cancer, etc.) and examine why this health issue is more of a problem in the particular community at risk compared to others. Students must address the **problem** by describing the health problem of interest. Students must identify the **community at risk** for this health problem. Students must identify **health statistics** and address how the rates of disease or the health conditions differ for the population compared to the overall U.S. population. Students will then discuss any **influencing social factors** such as culture, race/ethnicity, immigration, gender, disability, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic status. Lastly, students will provide **recommendations** for how the health problem can be alleviated.

This lesson provides students a framework to begin writing a research paper.

¹ At San José State University, “Human Understanding and Development” is area E of the General Education program. Every student who is fulfilling his or her GE requirements at SJSU must take one of the course options offered in area E.

Introduction to Lesson [5 minutes]:

- 1) Show the title of the lesson plan on PowerPoint slide number one. **[2 minutes]**
 - Play the YouTube video at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JZxpGj5SIbs> to show a humorous cartoon version of how to begin to write an essay (or a research paper) according to Spongebob.
 - Laugh and relate to the obstacles that many people face (including Spongebob) when asked to write an essay.

The instructor says, “The previous lesson was about APA formatting for research writing. We learned how to use specific formatting guidelines, how to cite in the body of the text, and how to write a reference page. Today we will learn how to begin to write a research paper.”

- 2) Show the list of objectives on slide two. **[3 minutes]**
 - Understand the primary purpose of an academic research paper.
 - Know three ways to get started with the writing process.
 - Understand the common barriers when writing a research paper.
 - Be able to start writing a research paper.

Procedure [60 minutes]:

Step 1: Begin the lesson plan with an image [3 minutes]

Show the third slide of the PowerPoint presentation with a picture of stacked books and an apple on the top of the book that is titled “Education.” Begin to discuss the significance of the apple as a very powerful fruit. (“An apple a day keeps the doctor away.”) Explain that the apple signifies the power and control over the stack of books. That can be visualized as a student writing a research paper in an organized, structured, and concise package (just like an apple).

Step 2: Review the steps for beginning to write a research paper [15 minutes]

- a. Show the fourth slide and discuss what an academic paper is and how it relates to students who are considered part of an academic community. **[3 minutes]**
- b. Show the fifth slide and verbalize the “nuts and bolts” of getting started with writing a research paper by knowing the requirements of the assignment. Explain the importance of knowing all the requirements prior to writing the research paper. Use an example of building a house. All of the requirements for building a house are needed before you can begin (e.g., wood, nails, screws, blue prints, etc.). Explain that it is just like starting a research paper: you need to know the requirements before getting started. **[2 minutes]**
 1. Know when the paper is due.
 2. Know how long the paper must be.
 3. Know how many sources are needed.
 4. Know the required format.

- c. Explain the sixth slide about time management and discuss ways to have enough time to write the assignment. Talk about scheduling time for writing a research paper. It is an important part of the process for writing a research paper. **[2 minutes]**
1. Pencil in time for the assignment, understanding it could take weeks from start to finish.
 2. Avoid the pitfalls of procrastination by beginning when the professor hands out the assignment.
 3. Keep the workplace free of distractions.
- d. On slide seven show the YouTube video <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4P785j15Tzk> on procrastination written by Lev Yilmaz. Discuss time management as an integral part of writing a research paper. **[3 minutes]**
- e. Have a three-minute open discussion about the video. Ask if anyone has experienced any of these obstacles and what did they do to overcome these barriers. Brainstorm on the dry erase board ways to overcome procrastination (e.g., get errands done first, keep the workplace free of distractions, have set times devoted to writing, eat before you write, turn off cell phone, etc.). **[3 minutes]**
- f. Explain the eighth slide **[2 minutes]** on how to select a topic by
1. picking a topic of interest,
 2. deciding what you know and do not know about this topic,
 3. deciding if the topic belongs in a subcategory,
 4. and determining if the topic is too narrow (no research) or too broad (too much research).
- For example, if the category is heart disease, how might you go about narrowing that category into a subcategory or even a topic? One way is to talk it out.

Step 3: Complete paired activity [15 minutes]



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Topic: heart disease among older men

a. **Introduction to activity [4 minutes]**

This is an activity to see if the students can narrow a broad category into a well-defined topic. Explain the activity by using this example. If a professor wants a student to write a research paper about heart disease (very broad), is there a way to narrow it down? Show students the image of the printed image of the heart. Next, ask them what they know (perhaps that older people die from heart attacks). Then, ask them to see if there is a connection from personal experience (maybe their grandfather died from heart disease). Show the printed image of the older man. Show the images together and explain that the broad category of heart disease has

now been narrowed into a specific topic (cardiovascular disease among older men). Show the ninth slide and explain that doing a keyword search on heart disease can generate over 350,000 articles. Discuss how they might decide to narrow a topic even further by looking at occupation or ethnicity. Explain that narrowing a well-defined topic is a great way to begin gathering very specific data. Use the image of the funnel to explain how to take a broad category and narrow it down just like a funnel.

b. Paired Activity [11 minutes]

1. Display and review the tenth and eleventh slides (for directions).
2. For this activity, you are going to be paired up.
3. Once paired, two images will be handed to each person.
4. The images will be covered with post-it notes.
5. Without looking at your image, you will tape the paper image just below your neck (on top of your chest).
6. Once your image is taped on to your chest carefully, remove the post-it note that is covering the image, but make sure the image is still taped to you. Remember you cannot see your own image; however, you will be able to see your partner's image.
7. Explain that each pair will get a broad category (cancer, alcoholism, mental health, or weight issues). Explain that the two images for each pair should be put together to create one narrow topic. Begin to ask your partner questions about the image that is taped to your chest. You can ask anything you want. "Am I a person?" "Am I a symbol?" etc. Your partner will answer your questions in any manner to help you guess your image. Both of you can take turns asking questions going back and forth until you both guess the correct image.
8. If your partner guesses the correct image, have your partner take it off so that both of you can view the image.
9. Your partner may still not know his or her image, so have that partner keep on asking questions until you get the correct image.
10. Once you both have guessed the correct image, notice that a topic can be formed from your particular category. For example, from the images we took a broad category such as mental health and narrowed it to postpartum depression.
11. Explain that each person had half of the narrowed topic and by putting the two images together it formed a narrow topic.
12. Once all pairs are done, debrief the activity by asking each student to sum up his or her experience in a few sentences. Was it hard to guess the image? What is easy to guess the image? Did you find ways to ask questions to narrow a category into a topic?

Step 4: Gather data [4 minutes]

- a. Show the twelfth slide on how to find credible resources. **[4 minutes]**
 1. Start with your textbook.
 2. Explore the library using books, journals, and on-line databases.

3. Use keyword searches to find articles on the topic/subject. Use specific databases related to your topic. (e.g., If you are writing about health, use a health database to start and see how many articles come up in your search results.)
4. Search the web carefully. The most credible sites belong to universities (.edu), the government (.gov), and well-known organizations (.org).
5. Contact a librarian who can provide guidance during your search if you still need help with how to use databases or how to locate journal articles.

Step 5: Begin the Writing Process [10 minutes]

- a. Show the thirteenth slide and explain the six journalistic words to help begin a framework for the writing project. **[4 minutes]**
 1. Who? [Who is most affected by the problem/issue?]
 2. What? [What is the problem/issue?]
 3. Where? [Where is the problem/issue occurring?]
 4. When? [When is this problem/issue occurring?]
 5. Why? [Why is this problem/issue happening?]
 6. How? [How serious is this problem/issue?]

- b. Show the fourteenth slide on nutshelling. This is a tool to put ideas together with the main concepts in a clear, concise format or in a nutshell. Begin to introduce the concept of barriers to writing the first sentence. **[3 minutes]**
 1. Explain the main components in a few sentences or in a “nutshell.”
 2. Once you have gathered all the information, begin to nutshell the main ideas.
 3. This process will help lead to an outline.

- c. Explain the fifteenth and sixteenth slides of overcoming writer’s block by providing practical tips. **[3 minutes]**
 1. Free-write for five minutes.
 2. Carry a small size note pad.
 3. Record ideas using a cell phone.
 4. Tell your ideas to someone.
 5. Get moving and exercising which often gives new life to a writing project.
 6. Start writing in the middle part of the assignment or an area of interest just to get the flow of writing started.

Step 6: Complete individual activity [12 minutes]

- a. Display the seventeenth slide, “Freewriting Activity.”
 1. Hand out blank pieces of paper.
 2. Play peaceful, calming spa-type music to help relax the mind.

3. Explain that the students should not worry about spelling, grammar, or punctuation. Explain if they get stuck to write “I am stuck” or anything else that comes to mind as long as they keep writing without any pauses for the full five minutes.
4. Set a timer for five minutes and start activity.
5. Allow the students time to complete the writing.
6. Debrief and ask “how was that for you?” Ask if anyone would like to share their writing. Discuss how freewriting can be used as a tool if one experiences writer’s block. Once the words (any words) are written, it is easier to begin the actual writing process.

Closure/Evaluation [4 minutes]:

- a. Show the eighteenth slide and recap the main points. Use the analogy of the house again and explain how the house went from plain wood to a framed house.
 1. Managing your time is necessary when beginning a research project.
 2. Understanding procrastination and ways to avoid it helps with getting started.
 3. Narrowing a category is important to get a well-defined researchable topic.
 4. Understanding how to overcome writer’s block helps the writing process begin.
- b. Show the nineteenth slide and explain why it is important to end on a positive note. Writing can be difficult for many people, not for just students. Always praise the “e” in effort.
 1. Turn in paper on time with a smile.
 2. Show your parents your work.
 3. Have fun during the process.
 4. Be proud of your accomplishments.

Lesson Analysis: While in college writing a research paper is essential for any student. Often students do not know how to begin the process and become easily overwhelmed when a research writing project is assigned. Within this lesson plan, I help students to understand and avoid procrastination by identifying ways to help with time management. I give steps on how to break down a broad category into a workable, well-defined topic by using visual images. I discuss ways to gather data and to overcome writer’s block by completing a freewriting exercise. This lesson can provide the student ways to break down an assignment into easier steps that make it more doable. It also helps students understand and overcome the common barriers with planning and writing a research paper.

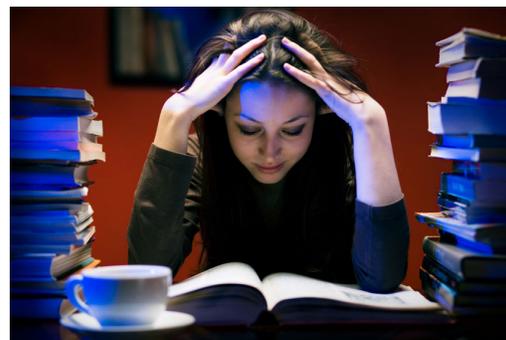
Because this lesson is intended for a general education course, there are students in the class from freshman to seniors. For upper-division students, this lesson may present redundant information.

Images for paired activity (from Google search)



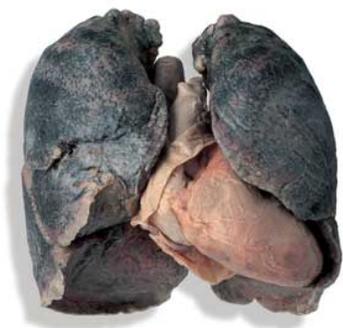
Category: Mental Health

Topic: Postpartum Depression



Category: Alcoholism

Topic: College Students and Binge Drinking



Category: Cancer

Topic: College Students and Binge Drinking



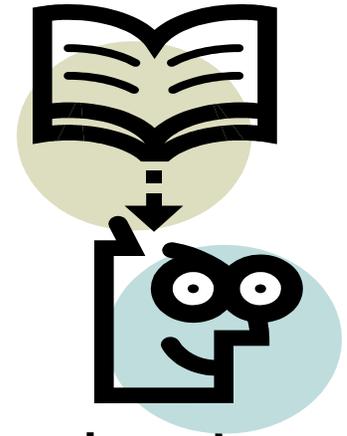
www.AsVector.com



Category: Weight

Topic: Childhood Obesity

How to Begin Writing a Research Paper

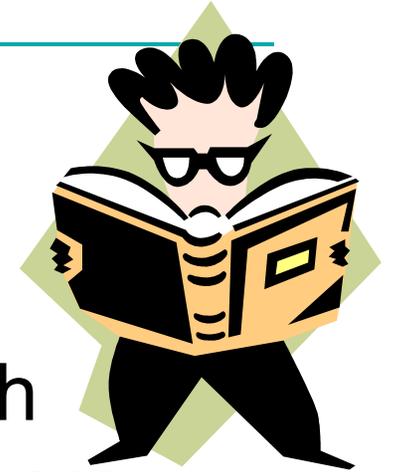


Objectives:

- Understand the primary purpose of academic writing.
- Know three ways to get started with the writing process.
- Understand the steps in writing a research paper.
- Be able to write a research paper.



Academic writing ...



- is written for scholars by scholars (which includes you). As a college student you are part of a community of scholars.
 - is centered on topics that are of interest in the academic community.
 - provides the audience with an informed argument (what is *known* about the topic and what *you* think about it).
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Getting Started (step one)

Reviewing the Assignment



Read the assignment thoroughly and clarify any questions. Ask the following questions:

- ❑ When is the assignment due?
 - ❑ How long does the paper have to be?
 - ❑ How many sources are needed?
 - ❑ What is the required format?
-

Getting Started (step two)

Managing your Time

- ❑ Clear your schedule and “pencil in” time to write, research, and revise your paper. This process can take weeks from start to finish.
- ❑ Avoid procrastination by starting when guidelines are given.
- ❑ Keep your workplace in order and free from distractions.



Procrastination

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4P785j15Tzk>

Getting Started (step three)

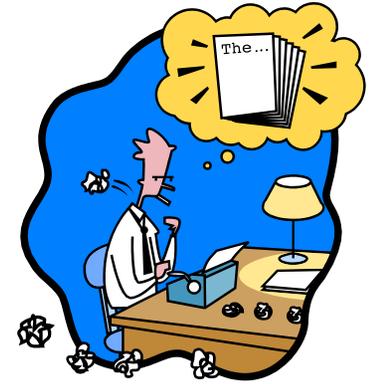
Selecting a Topic

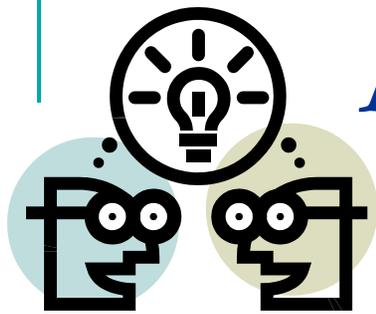
- Pick a topic of *interest* to you.
- Decide what you know about this topic and what you do not know.
- Determine if your topic belongs to any subcategory.
- Determine if your topic is too narrow (no research) or too broad (too much research).
- Think about the topic by exploring these questions. The goal is to come up with a *new* perspective on the topic.



Helping with Writer's Block

- Freewrite for five minutes.
- Tell your ideas to someone.
- Record ideas using your cell phone.
- Carry a small sized notebook with you.
- Get moving! Sometimes getting out of the chair and taking a walk sparks new ideas.
- Start in the middle of the writing project or an area that interests you more. Later come back to write the introduction.





Activity #1: Freewriting

- Write for five minutes non-stop.
 - Continue writing even if you run out the words to write; say “I ran out of words to write...” and keep writing.
 - Do not worry about grammar, spelling, or punctuation.
 - Write as much as you can in a short amount of time.
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Finding Credible Background Information



- Start with your textbook.
 - Explore the library using books, journals, and online databases.
 - Use keyword searching to find articles on topics/ subjects, and if you need help getting started, ask a librarian.
 - Search the web carefully. The most reliable sites belong to the government (.gov), universities (.edu), and well-known organizations (.org).
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Nutshelling the Information

- Nutshelling is the process of explaining the main components in a few sentences or “*in a nutshell.*”
 - Once you have gathered all the information needed, begin to “nutshell” the main ideas.
 - This process will help you to form an outline.
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Six Journalistic Questions



Begin to answer these questions within the context of your paper.

1. Who? [Who is most affected by the problem/issue?]
2. What? [What is the problem/issue?]
3. Where? [Where is the problem/issue occurring?]
4. When? [When is this problem/issue occurring?]
5. Why? [Why is this problem/issue happening?]
6. How? [How serious is this problem/issue?]



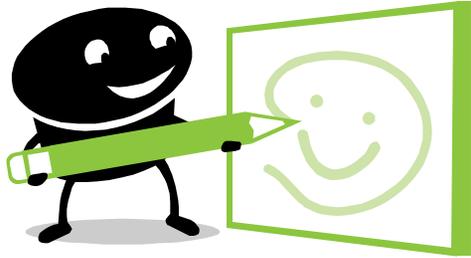
Proofreading: The Human Way

- Give yourself plenty of time to proofread.
 - Read every word out loud.
 - Put your work down and take a break.
Coming back with a new perspective will often give you fresh ideas.
 - Read it to someone else.
 - Have others read your paper.
 - Use the on-campus Writing Center to strengthen your writing!
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Activity #2: Practice

- Practice reading out loud.
 - Practice fixing common mistakes.
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Final Thoughts

- Turn in your paper with a smile.
 - Show your parents your work.
 - Have fun during the process.
 - Be proud of your accomplishments.
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