

Some Guidelines for Writing an Effective Scholarly Paper

- ***Provide support for your assertions.*** Faculty do not want to see data-free opinion presented as fact. There are three main ways to provide support in a research paper: through data you've analyzed, through citation of earlier, credible empirical research by others, or through tight logical argumentation.
- ***Use qualified language.*** Even when you do provide support for your assertions, it's important to carefully calibrate your language. For example, "Earlier research (Jones, 1985; Smith, 2007) suggests that faculty conflicts arise more often in non-technical academic departments, such as English, than in departments like Civil Engineering" is preferable in a paper to "Because their field is intellectually 'soft' and relatively undefined, English professors fight with each other more than Engineering professors." The gist of the second version is the same, and it certainly has some brute, no-nonsense appeal. Still, it's badly flawed. The first sentence is more sensitive to the fact that research in the social sciences and management is rarely definitive, owing to limited samples, limited abilities to make causal inferences, and so forth. Simply put, knowledge in our field tends to be tentative, and our language needs to reflect that.
- ***Pay careful attention to the organization of your paper.*** In the introduction include a clear description of your topic and of the core components of your paper. The norm for academic writing in our field is to use headers and sub-headers to guide the reader and to indicate the core components of your paper.
- ***Provide an integrated literature review.*** As you review related literature, you should try to avoid a mechanical, annotated-bibliography style that essentially summarizes each study separately and sequentially. Instead, organize the literature review around broader themes or categories that integrate several related works. The review should be an integrated synthesis, not a series of synopses.
- ***Pay attention to faculty expectations.*** Notably, in your courses:
 - Be sure to read the syllabus and pay attention in class regarding the requirements for assignments. For example, if the syllabus suggests an abstract should be provided for your paper, provide it. If the syllabus suggests that you provide a reference list for the works that you cite in your paper, and that the reference list be formatted in a consistent style, be sure to follow those instructions. For us as faculty, it's frustrating to mark papers down for not following guidelines we've provided. It's also frustrating when items cited in your text are missing from the reference list. As mentioned above, we evaluate your assertions and analysis based in part on the studies that you incorporate into your papers.
 - Make sure your paper has an appropriate length. Most faculty give a range or a maximum number of pages for course assignments. Papers that fall well below those cues are highly unlikely to include a sufficient depth of analysis. Papers that far exceed those cues most likely address an overly expansive topic or suffer from verbosity and indiscipline.
 - If the instructor provides model project papers online, take a look at those and make sure that the quality and style of your paper is in line with the quality and style of those earlier, successful efforts.