

(Almost) Everything You Need to Know to Write a Research Paper

A Student's Guide

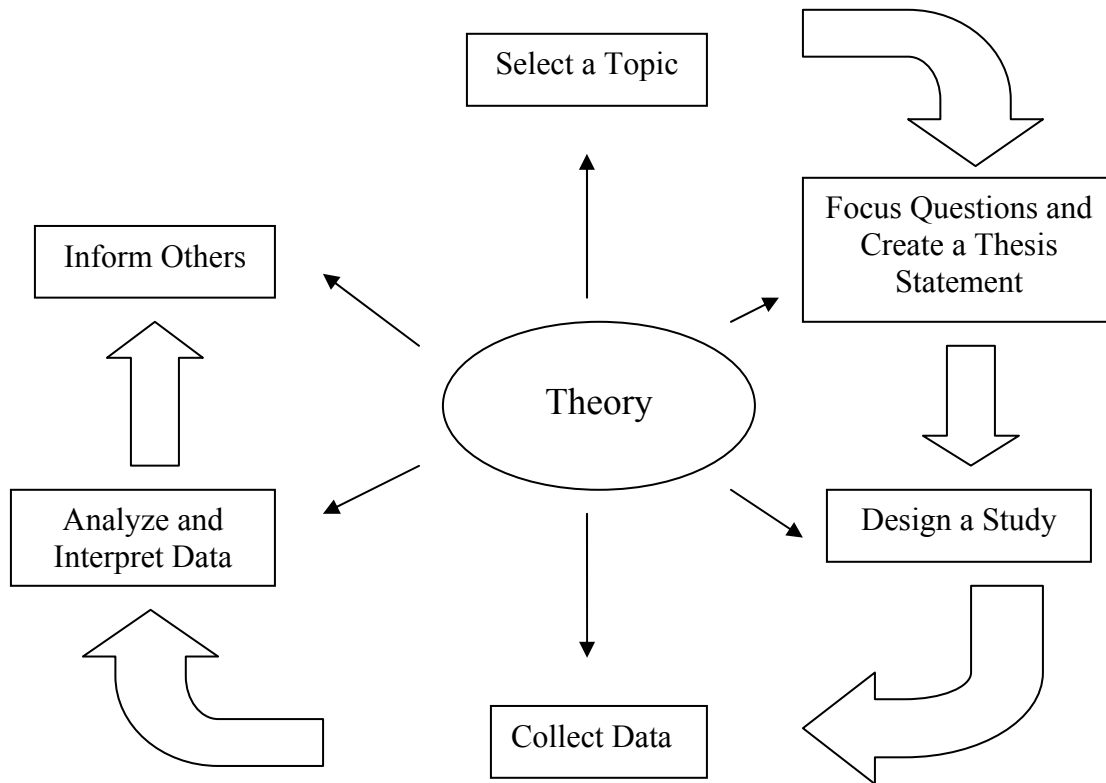
Second Edition

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Knowing how to write (and how to write well!) is one of the most important skills that any student can learn. Sadly, often it is a skill which is overlooked or devalued. It is through writing that we communicate ideas about the social world. It is thorough writing that we pass on knowledge. And, significantly, it is through writing that we convince others of our opinions. More than almost any other skill that students learn in college, becoming a strong, clear, and persuasive writer is a key to success in any field. Whether you want to be an academic or not, learning how to write will take you far in any career.

This guide is intended to be just that, a brief reference guidebook to better understand what goes into writing a strong research paper. Becoming a good writer is something that any student can, and should, work on throughout his or her college career. After all, writing is a skill and one that is only learned through practice. However, knowing how to write a research paper which includes methodological pursuits beyond simple a literature review requires a slightly different know-how. What follows clearly explains each of the components of a research paper and provides helpful hints in how to approach these sections.

RESEARCH PAPER PROCESS AND OUTLINE



Your research paper should be reflective of this entire process. Generally speaking, the sections of a research paper should be ordered as indicated below, and the sections should incorporate discussion of these steps.

1. Introduction
2. Methodology
3. Discussion
4. Conclusion
5. Work Cited
6. Appendices

THE FOLLOWING SECTIONS DESCRIBE THESE ESSENTIALS PARTS OF THE RESEARCH PAPER.

INTRODUCTION

An introduction is one of the most important elements of any essay because it is what will draw the reader into the essay, what will make the reader intrigued enough to continue reading to the end of the essay. Thus, it is very important that the introduction fulfill all of its major functions. First of all, it is a frame for the essay. It ‘sets up’ the topic about which you are writing by leading the reader away from his or her immediate thoughts and problems and into your ideas about the selected topic. An introduction is important because it should draw the readers in and make them excited to read the rest of your paper.

Your introduction should clearly introduce the topic and lay out the area of inquiry that you are going to explore. Think of the introduction as a roadmap for the rest of the paper, that is, tell the reader what to expect. An effective introduction will include a thesis statement, which is a short sentence or two that succinctly states your argument and the aims of your paper.

A good thesis statement is clear and concise. It will designate a specific relationship among the variables in your study. Therefore, an example of a good thesis statement would be: This research seeks to explore whether the incidence of crystal methamphetamine use among college students age 18-22 is greater in private or public educational institutions. A poor thesis statement is too vague – How prominent is child abuse? – or asks a question that is not empirically verifiable – Is capital punishment justifiable?

Suggestions:

- ◆ Try writing your introduction last. You may think that you have to write your introduction first, but that isn’t necessarily true and isn’t always the most effective way to craft a good introduction. I always say, how do you introduce something that you haven’t written yet?
- ◆ Don’t be afraid to write a tentative introduction first and then change it later. Some people find that they need to write some kind of introduction in order to get the writing process started. However, don’t forget to go back after you have written the rest of your paper and re-work the introduction to make it introduce the essay that you have written.
- ◆ An introduction doesn’t have to be one paragraph, and, with a longer research paper like this one, shouldn’t be only one paragraph. Think of this as an introductory section.
- ◆ Make sure that your thesis statement clearly delineates a specific and testable relationship among particular variables.

METHODOLOGY

In this section, you will clearly describe the methods you used in your research. You should describe the process that you went through to get access to the data, the methods you used, why you chose them, their strengths and weaknesses and any other information relevant to the project.

The following are a series of questions you should think about:

- Did you have to ask anyone's permission to collect the data?
- How did you gain permission?
- What methods are you using? Observation, questionnaire, qualitative interview?
- Why did you choose to use these methods?
- What sample size did you decide on? Why did you choose this sample size?
- How did you select your sample?
- What was participation rate on interviews, that is of the people you asked to be interviewed, how many said yes and how many said no?
- Where did you conduct your interviews? Why did you choose that spot?
- What, if any, ethical issues surrounded your choice of methods?
- Did your physical, gender or socio-economic characteristics make a difference to your collection of data. For example, in my own research in England with young offenders I found that being relatively young, female and American made the juveniles more likely to trust me and be open and honest with me in their answers.
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of your research?
- Did you encounter any larger obstacles or frustrations during the research process?
- Likewise, are there examples of how well your research went?

Suggestions:

- ◆ You need to address specific issues in this section but don't be afraid to make this section a narrative of your field experience.
- ◆ Don't be afraid to acknowledge weaknesses in your methods. Sometimes they are inevitable and it is better to show that you have thought about it rather than just ignoring it and hoping no one notices.

DISCUSSION

The discussion section comprises the main body of your paper. In this section, you should bring together your library research and your own data collection in a thorough and critical analysis of the topic. You should examine and discuss your thesis statement and your research aims. The discussion section is also the place where you should interpret the result of your own research in light what is already known about the subject. Integrated into your discussion should be a review of the literature on the topic (See the Literature Review section at the end of this handout). How has your own data supported or disproved other research in the area? Does your research suggest any holes or gaps in current research? You should consider what the next logical step of this research would be. What might you do next if you were to continue this research?

Suggestions:

- ◆ Be selective. Select only the most important points in each source to highlight in the review of the literature.
- ◆ Be critical. Don't just summarize authors' arguments.
- ◆ Keep your own voice. While a review of the literature presents others' ideas, your voice should remain front and center. After all, this is YOUR discussion section. Don't give your personal opinion on every article but find a way to maintain your tone and authorship over this section.
- ◆ Breakdown your discussion section with different sub-headings. This makes it easier for the reader to follow your arguments and clearly delineates when a shift in your argument takes place.

CONCLUSION

Just as your introduction acts as a bridge that transports your readers from their own lives into your paper, the conclusion can provide a bridge that helps your readers make a transition back, bringing with them an understanding of why the subject of your paper matters to the larger world. Your conclusion gives the reader something to take away with them.

This section provides you with the opportunity to reflect upon your research findings. You should draw together all the threads of your argument and synthesize succinctly. Think about these points: What is the significance of this research? Why should we care about this topic? What are the broader implications? Ultimately, I should be able to read only the introduction and the conclusion and have a clear understanding of your principal arguments and conclusions.

Suggestions:

- ◆ So What? If you're stuck and feel like your conclusion isn't saying anything interesting, ask yourself, so what? Why should anybody care about this topic? What are the implications of your argument?
- ◆ Return to the theme(s) from the introduction. This strategy brings the reader full circle.
- ◆ Synthesize; don't summarize. Don't simply repeat things that were in your paper. Instead, show the reader how all the points in your paper fit together. Think of it as the last piece of a jigsaw puzzle which completes the picture.
- ◆ The conclusion is NOT the place to introduce new ideas or arguments.

DO'S AND DON'TS OF WRITING

Do

- 1) Link your paragraphs together. When one paragraph ends and another begins, the ideas should flow smoothly from one paragraph to the next.
- 2) Put any methods you used, such as an interview schedule or questionnaire, in an appendix so that any who reads the paper can see exactly what you asked.
- 3) Be sure to put in references to your sources appropriately. For EVERY idea that you use from another source, you should put in a reference. My motto is: When in doubt, cite. That way, anyone who likes what you are talking about can go and find the original source to do more reading on the topic.
- 4) It is ok to use non-scholarly literature in your paper, such as newspapers, magazines, references to tv or movies. If a subject is particularly topical to the moment, using such references can strengthen your argument. However, beware. These should be used very judiciously. The strength of an academic paper comes from analysis of scholarly work.

DON'T

- 1) Use strong wording. Be careful very about the claims that you decide to make. Watch out for use of words like "Always" and "Never".
- 2) Be careful about over-stating the strength of your data. A sample of 15 questionnaires does not mean that you have "proved" anything. Rather, your research suggests that ...
- 3) Anecdotes can be used in a research paper and, under certain circumstances if used correctly, can be very powerful. However, don't go overboard. For example, don't start your research paper with a poem.
- 4) Don't use colloquial words and phrases. These words and sayings are fine for everyday conversation but have no place in a formal piece of writing.

EXAMPLES

SAMPLE THESIS STATEMENT AND RESEARCH AIMS

This paper explores the recent introduction of restorative justice into the youth justice system. It examines the historical and political context from which current youth justice policies have emerged and aims to evaluate how this new system is functioning ‘on the ground’ several years after being implemented. Specifically, the primary aim of the research is to investigate final warnings and referral orders and to ask whether these forms of restorative justice achieve their goals.

- I. To examine how young people and their families experience final warnings:
 - Which types of offences result in a final warning?
 - How many warnings result in intervention programmes?
 - How do youths and their families perceive the process of receiving a warning and participating in the subsequent intervention programmes?
 - To what extent do warnings embody and maintain restorative justice principles?
 - To what extent do juveniles and their families consider both the process and any outcomes to be supportive and reintegrative and to what extent punitive or stigmatising?
 - How do structural factors, especially limited resources, impact on the delivery of warnings and, therefore, on young people’s experiences of both processes and outcomes?

- II. To investigate how young people and their families experience referral orders:
 - Which types of offences result in a referral order?
 - Who is asked to join the Youth Offender Panel and who actually joins?
 - What do youths and their families think about the composition of the panel?
 - How do the members of the YOPs interact with each other and with the juveniles who are given referral orders?
 - To what extent do panel members actively use restorative and reintegrative language and gestures?

- To what extent do juveniles and their families consider both the process and any outcomes to be supportive and reintegrative and to what extent punitive or stigmatising?
- How do structural factors, especially limited resources, impact on the delivery of referral orders and, therefore, on young people's experiences of both processes and outcomes?

III. To explore the process of defining and reacting to youths perceived to be 'at risk' in order to consider the potentials and pitfalls of early intervention measures:

- How do YOT officers identify youths 'at risk'?
- Once a young person is defined as 'at risk,' how do YOT officers respond?
- What support is provided to 'at risk' youths and their families?
- How do youths defined as 'at risk' experience the criminal justice response?
- Do changes occur within the culture of the YOTs as a result of the introduction and implementation of these initiatives?

SAMPLE INTRODUCTIONS

The Good Introduction: The following is an example of a good introduction. It immediately draws the reader into the topic through the use of a short, edited anecdote. It then moves into a broad discussion of perceptions of deviance, thereby indicating that this paper will be about how society perceives deviance. The final paragraph clearly lays out the aims of the paper. The thesis statement is the first sentence of the last paragraph. The author then uses the rest of the paragraph to give us more detail about what is to come; this is essentially the roadmap.

March 1, 1989: a group of teenage boys from the quiet suburb of Glen Ridge in New Jersey, America, gang raped a retarded girl using a broom and a bat in the basement of one of their homes. This horrific act of brutality was committed not by “delinquents” or “criminals” but rather by the most popular athletes in the school, the heroes of the town. Although rumours spread quickly, no one saw it necessary to report the incident for three weeks. By the time the crime came to the attention of the police, more than forty people at Glen Ridge High were aware of the attack - including the principal, the school social worker and at least eight other adults in the school. Eventually brought to trial, the judge decided that the harm done to this girl weighed less heavily than the future of these “super-stars” and the grief of their families. Although each of them was sentenced to a maximum of 15 years in prison, the judge let the boys go free on bail until an as yet definite date in the future when their appeals are decided. He reasoned that their behaviour on March 1 was an unfortunate anomaly in the otherwise placid adolescence of typical teenage males. This judgement was not an exceptional case (Lefkowitz 1998).

What is fascinating about this incident is not the fact that the crime was committed by those who would appear least likely to commit a crime, as crime is more prevalent among all tiers of society than many people believe. Rather, what is of interest is the response of the community, the school, the criminal justice system and the media. People were reluctant to accept that these “good boys” were rapists. They were popular, rich, handsome, not the typical picture of gang rapists. Therein lies the key to understanding the response to this case.

Society has preconceived conceptions of who is a trouble-maker, a deviant, a criminal. These notions of deviance are a social construction as it is not simply the breaking of a rule which constitutes deviance. Indeed, most everyone in society breaks

the law at some point in time, and many occasionally engage in deviant behaviours. What is important is how society perceives such behaviour because it is these perceptions, and not necessarily the actions themselves, which determine whether an act within a particular context is wrong. As Derek Chadee comments, “Perceptions are the solid facts of reality” (Chadee 2001, p. 10). Had the gang rape in Glen Ridge been committed by boys on society’s margins, boys who more easily fit a delinquent profile, most likely the community and the criminal justice system would have responded differently.

This paper seeks to examine the relationship between malleable perceptions of juvenile delinquency, actual behaviour and the responses of society, in particular the criminal justice system and the media. The United Kingdom and the United States are the central focus of examination as there are many similarities in the manner in which the two countries perceive and address deviance. What is of special interest is that this topic has not been thoroughly explored for the last two decades. The most recent research ranges from the mid 1970s to the early 1980s. Why exactly this topic has disappeared off the academic agenda is not entirely clear. Nevertheless, this paper attempts to re-examine the argument utilizing recent research and popular endeavours to categorize deviance. A small sample of newspaper articles, which whilst not necessarily representative, will be drawn on to illustrate the argument that deviance is not absolute but rather selectively applied.

The Bad Introduction: The following is an example of a bad introduction. The anecdote does not have a focus and therefore makes no sense to the reader. All we can gather from this introduction is that the author is interested in Amendment 15 because her cousin is a drug user. We are never told what Amendment 15 is. There is no thesis statement. There is no roadmap as to the issues that will be discussed in the paper. We know that the author’s research involved ‘talking to some people’ but we are not told what type of interviews these were or how many were done. In the end, we are left simply wondering what this author is talking about.

Living on the street for the last year taking crack doesn’t make a clear state of mind. They may have been the smartest in their year but when crack gets into you everything changes. Clearly, there is a problem here and many may never recognize it.

Those who use to have a good job, who cared about how they looked going to work every day, they now get excited about finding a warm place to sleep. It's hard to imagine.

Once she was picked up on drug possession and when released was given a place in a treatment facility. Finally, she was on the way to sobriety. Thanks to Amendment 15, she was able to get sober. Too bad she wasn't ready. Since she had to be sober to stay at the treatment facility, she left and was again sent to jail. When she was released, she had no shoes and no money and no one to call. So much stress made her want to find a little place to hide. But with the help of a relative, she was able to go back to a treatment facility. This time she stayed a few months before the urge to use crack took her over again. It is hard to watch this happen. This is someone I love. This is my cousin.

Once I realized what was happening, it made me think about Amendment 15 and how it worked. How was it that drug treatment centers could be so different? Was it down to luck or the draw or was it more? Should you get help from one place but not another? This is why I chose to do my research project on the role of probation in drug offenders lives. I wanted to explore what went wrong with my cousin's experience. For my research, I gathered literature and interviewed lots of people.

SAMPLE CONCLUSIONS

The Good Conclusion: The following is an example of a solid conclusion. While the conclusion is not quite as strong as the introduction it is paired with above, it is still a fine example. Once again, this author tells us most everything we really need to know in the last paragraph. His overall conclusion: deviance is socially constructed; it is constructed in a way which is biased towards those in the upper classes. Throughout this example, the author makes references back to arguments and discussions throughout the main body of the paper. For example, ‘the Saints and the Roughnecks’ is a reference to a journal article of the same name by William Chambliss which the author has discussed in detail. The author suggests that the social construction of deviance is perpetuated by the police and media, both discussion sections in the main body of his paper. The author moreover tries to bring the paper full circle by making reference back to the initial story told at the beginning of the introduction. My only critique of this conclusion is that the author needs to more clearly synthesize the primary arguments of his paper. Again, we should be able to read only the introduction and conclusion of the paper and have a good grasp of the author’s primary arguments.

Howard Becker, the well known labelling theorist, suggests, “Social groups create deviance by making the rules whose infraction constitutes deviance and by applying those rules to particular people and labelling them as outsiders” (Becker 1963, p. 9). Not every infraction of the rules is considered deviance but rather the violation of rules by “particular people.” Many people assume that laws are immutable and use the violations of these laws to persecute those who break them. This behaviour constitutes selective persecution of a minority of those who violate laws. In fact, we are all in truth criminals to some degree as most every member of society has probably violated at least one rule.

It is a well known tradition at many universities around the world, especially at the most prestigious institutions like X University, for students to occasionally engage in ‘delinquent behaviour.’ However, as illustrated in the examination of the media, this behaviour is construed as a tension release or as amusing pranks. At this university, the police tend to stay away from the campus and our own security forces consistently overlooked any “delinquent” behaviour they see. In fact, they sometimes even warn the students if other enforcement agencies which might not be so lenient are nearby. Furthermore, most of the delinquent behaviour which needs to be addressed is dealt with not by the police but rather by an internal committee within the university, freeing the students from the consequences those outside the university must face. As Dennis Chapman keenly comments, “Universities have in them individuals whose behaviour in

other circumstances would be an offence” (Chapman 1973, p. 24). The differential manner in which we approach the behaviour of boys from varying social classes is no different than any other “ism,” such as racism or sexism.

The fact that these processes are working on juveniles is especially paramount because their effects will have long term significance. Juveniles generally do not have fully formulated opinions of either life or themselves. They are still growing into who they will become, and there are consequences to the manner in which society treats them. As evidenced by the Saints and the Roughnecks, the utilization of police discretion with the boys was important because it not only reinforced the community’s perception of the boys but also their self perception. What resulted was a self-fulfilling spiral as the boys grew into their already prescribed role.

Ultimately, deviance is constructed. It is constructed in a manner which singles out a faction of the population. What society believes it knows or thinks is true is indeed not necessarily true. Society “knows” the stereotypes, the pictures manifested through the dominance of a particular ideology perpetuated through social institutions like the police and the media. What emerges from these sources is that those of lower socio-economic status are deviants, criminals. How can we believe that such behaviour constitutes egalitarian treatment under the law? By stepping outside of our socialized frame of reference, even if for a moment, it becomes apparent that the “bad boys” are not necessarily as bad as society tends to believe but rather are in many ways no different from those held up to be the elite, such as the stars of Glen Ridge High School.

The Bad Conclusion: The following is an example of a bad conclusion. Like the introduction, this conclusion makes little sense. We still don’t know what Amendment 15 is, and we still have no idea what the author’s central arguments are. The author tries to introduce new ideas by suggesting how he would approach the research differently if he were to do it again. This should be a more detailed and thorough discussion with should take place in the main body of the paper. The author does try to revisit the anecdote from the introduction and bring the paper full circle, but we are still left wondering what he is talking about.

This research was particularly interesting to me. My cousin, who inspired this project, means everything to me. Researching this Amendment and how it is actually

administered makes me understand how Amendment 15 failed to help my cousin and why she is still addicted to drugs today. While I cannot help her, I did find the answer.

My paper revealed that there are more problems with Amendment 15 than I thought. If I were to study this subject again, I would focus on other things like transportation, assessment, and treatment methods. My research emphasizes some of the problems with Amendment 15 and some of the ways it can be improved. I discovered in my research that Amendment 15 is a good idea and can help lots of people if administered properly. There will always be criminals and drug addicts. We can't fix everyone with this program but we can make a difference with some people if we make it work correctly.

FORMATTING AND DOCUMENTING YOUR RESEARCH PAPER

IN-TEXT QUOTATIONS

When quoting an author in your paper, if you are only quoting a short sentence or two, simply keep writing with your normal format and put quotation marks around the sentences. However, if you are quoting longer sentences or paragraphs, you should not use quotation marks. Instead, your quotation should be single spaced, indented on both sides, and a smaller font than the rest of your paper. The example below shows both styles of quotation.

According to the Home Office, of central importance to the referral order process is the recruitment of panel members who are “properly representative of the community they intend to serve” (Home Office 2000b, para. 1.4). The government believes that a representative panel is needed to achieve restorative justice goals:

A key objective of the introduction of youth offender panels is to engage local communities directly with preventing offending by young people ... The intention is that youth offender panels should be distanced far less from offenders and their families than might be the case with a panel solely of practitioners.

(Home Office 2000b, para. 1.2)

CITATIONS

When in doubt, cite. You should cite all ideas that you get from your sources in your literature review. The citations should be in text, contained within parentheses, after the sentence but before the period, and should state the author’s last name, the year of the publication and the page number where the references come from: (Author Year, page number). In the following example, the Author is Roche, the year of publication is 2003 and the page where the reference comes from is page 97.

It is important that restorative justice’s community volunteer population reflect the natural diversity of both the community and young offenders, including but not limited to race, class and socio-economic standing. Hence, some restorative programmes – the Toronto Community Council and the Vancouver Restorative Justice Programme - make

particular efforts to select community participants who are of the same cultural and racial background as the offenders (Roche 2003, p 97).

FOOTNOTES

Footnotes are points of elaboration or documentation that you provide in conjunction with the body of the research paper. They can be a good way to put into your paper extra information which is of interest to someone reading about the topic but which is not directly vital to the argument you are making in the main body of the paper. Footnotes are referenced with a number in the text and the number corresponds with a note that appears at the bottom of the page. All word processing programs have an automated footnote tab. See the following example below.

Beyond heavy sensationalist reporting of certain youth crimes, several other factors had combined to produce the 1990s moral panics about youth crime. There was growing opinion, fuelled by the media and supported by many politicians (not only those in the Conservative Party), that liberal policies regarding young offenders had become too lenient. Public concern was bolstered by a House of Commons Home Affairs Select Committee inquiry into youth crime in 1992-1993¹ which also led to highly publicized claims by special interest groups, such as police organizations, about youth crime and persistent young offenders² (Cavadino and Dignan 2002, p 299).

¹ In Autumn of 1992, the House of Commons Home Affairs Committee (HAC) announced that it would be enquiring into issues surrounding juvenile offenders and particularly persistent offenders, explaining “We decided on this inquiry both because of public concern about the level of juvenile crime in particular, and because of the apparent inability of the criminal justice system to deal adequately with it.” (HAC 1993).

² For example, the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) presented evidence which challenged the belief that there had been a decline in juvenile offending throughout the 1980s. ACPO argued that taking into consideration the decline in the juvenile population, the general increase in crime, and reduced rates of detection, the 1980s had actually witnessed a 54 per cent rise in youth crime (Newburn 1996, p 71).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

All books, chapters or articles you mention in your paper, including in the footnotes, should be cited in the bibliography. You should reference your sources as follows:

For Books:

Author's Name. (Year) *Title*, Location of Publication: Printing Press.

For Edited Collection Books:

Author's Name. (Year) 'Title of Chapter in Book' in Editor's Name (ed) *Title of Book*, Location of Publication: Printing Press, pages of chapter.

For Journals:

Author's Name. (Year) 'Title of Article' *Title of Journal*, volume(number), pages.

The following examples demonstrate:

AUDIT COMMISSION. (1996) *Misspent Youth*, London: Audit Commission.

ARBER, S. (1993) 'The Research Process' in N Gilbert (ed) *Researching Social Life*, London: SAGE, pp 32-51.

BLAGG, H. (1997) 'A Just Measure of Shame? Aboriginal Youth and Conferencing in Australia,' *British Journal of Criminology*, 37(4), pp 481-506.

DAVIES H, NUTLEY S, and SMITH P. (2000) 'Introducing Evidence-based Policy and Practice in Public Service' in H Davies, S Nutley & P Smith (eds) *What Works? Evidence-based Policy and Practice in Public Service*, Bristol: The Policy Press, pp 1-11.

ERIKSON, K. (1966) *Wayward Puritans*, London: Collier MacMillan Publishers.

FINDING THE LITERATURE

WHAT IS A LITERATURE REVIEW?

A crucial element of all research is the review of relevant literature. A literature review is a comprehensive survey of publications and information on a specific topic. The end result of a literature search is a list of references which cover the body of work on the selected topic. There are good reasons for spending time and effort on a review of the literature before embarking on a research project. These reasons include:

- To increase your breadth of knowledge of your subject area
- To provide the intellectual context for your own work, enabling you to position your project relative to other work
 - To carry on from where others have already reached
 - To identify opposing views
 - Reviewing the field allows you to build on the platform of existing knowledge and ideas
- To identify gaps in the literature
- To identify methods that could be relevant to your project

When conducting a literature search and review, keep in mind a list of questions about each source which will sharpen your analytical skills and help you keep an objective outlook on your material.

- What were the authors trying to discover?
- Why is this piece of research important?
- What was measured?
- What information do you have on the sample?
- How was the data collected?
- What were the results?
- What do the authors conclude and to what do they attribute their findings?
- Can you accept the findings as true?
- How can you apply these findings to your own work?

You should focus on those published works which are central to the area you have chosen to research and to the development of your argument. The literature review is intended to

provide the reader with a solid overview of the significant literature that has been published in the field about which you are writing. You are not expected to be an expert in the area of your research; you are expected to review what is written in that field.

A literature review is usually organized around ideas, not the sources themselves. This means that you will not just simply list your sources and go into detail about each one of them. As you read widely but selectively in your topic area, consider instead what themes or issues connect your sources together. Do they present one or different solutions? How well do they present the material? Is there a raging debate in the field?

STATISTICAL DATA

This guide lists a few comprehensive statistical resources that are good starting points, tools for searching by topic, and examples of specialized collections of data.

STATISTICAL ABSTRACT OF THE UNITED STATES

The single best data source for beginning a search. Published by the U.S. Census Bureau, it is an annual compilation of data on a wide variety of topics. Most data has been collected by U.S. government agencies but it also includes authoritative data from other sources as well as core data on other countries and international comparison tables. The Statistical Abstract is extensively footnoted and so it may be used to identify more detailed sources of information or to learn who collects the statistics of interest.

Internet version: <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/> [Requires Adobe Acrobat Reader] Tables are also searchable in LexisNexis Statistical

CALIFORNIA STATISTICAL ABSTRACT

Annual since 1958.

Internet version: <http://www.dof.ca.gov/html/fs%5Fdata/stat%2Dabs/sa%5Fhome.htm> [Requires Adobe Acrobat Reader] Ref Stacks HN 60 .C68

CALIFORNIA CRIMINAL JUSTICE STATISTICS CENTER

The California Attorney General has the duty to collect, analyze and report statistical data, which provide valid measures of crime and the criminal justice process to government and the citizens of California. This site contains more than 5,000 statistical tables, 59 reports, 29 publications, links to federal, state and local agency statistics and links of other criminal statistics services.

<http://ag.ca.gov/cjsc/index.php>

CQ'S [CONGRESSIONAL QUARTERLY'S] STATE FACT FINDER

Annual since 1993. Includes rankings and quality of life data.

COUNTY AND CITY EXTRA : ANNUAL METRO, CITY, AND COUNTY DATA BOOK

Annual since 1992. Includes a wide variety of socio-economic data and is more current than the printed County and City Data Book from the U.S. Census.

For online data check [State and County QuickFacts](#) from the Census Bureau. Latest year at Ref and Govt Desk. Ref Stacks Call numbers vary.

MCCORMACK'S GUIDES [to SF Bay Area counties]

Annual since 1991, these guides contain information on: school rankings, home prices, rents, recreation, weather, city, profiles, jobs, statistics, crime rates and more for Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Napa, Sacramento, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Solano, and Sonoma counties. Reference stack call numbers may vary. California Almanac and Trivia Guide located at the Government Desk. Latest year in Reference.

SEARCHING FOR DATA: DATABASES AND INTERNET SITES

Use these online resources to search for statistical data by topic. In most cases, the search leads directly to statistical tables which may be downloaded or printed. Sources marked SFSU users only are accessible from any computer on campus; from off-campus, SFSU users must enter their name, SFSU ID number and Library PIN.

LEXISNEXIS ACADEMIC

This database is primarily used to locate news articles and legal sources but data is included in the **Reference** option on the opening menu. Four of the **Reference** options are "Country Profiles," "Polls & Surveys," "State Profiles" and "World Almanac." There is a LexisNexis Academic Basic Search Commands guide that provides searching tips. Connect to: LexisNexis Academic SFSU users only.

LEXISNEXIS STATISTICAL

Citations to statistical data from government agencies, international governmental organizations, research institutes and some commercial publishers; many records include links to fulltext sources online. Three search options appear on the opening page. Use "Power Tables" to search tables directly. Use "Abstracts" to search for summaries of entire documents. Use "Links" to locate statistical web sites. Copies of many items are also available in Government Publications. Check LexisNexis Statistical: Locating Sources for detailed advice. Connect to: LexisNexis Statistical SFSU users only.

RAND CALIFORNIA

Find statistical data from more than 80 databases covering business & economics, population & demographics, education, quality of life measures, health, socioeconomic, government finance, and politics & public opinion. Much of the data is available at the national, state, county, city, and zip code levels. Connect to: RAND California SFSU users only

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN DOCUMENTS CENTER. STATISTICAL RESOURCES ON THE WEB

Award winning and comprehensive Internet site. You may locate links by broad categories, subject indexes, or site search tool. Includes non-government data sites. Connect to: <http://www.lib.umich.edu/govdocs/stats.html>

CRIMINAL JUSTICE WEBSITES

The following websites contain masses of information which pertain specifically to issues of crime and justice.

Department of Justice: <http://www.usdoj.gov/>

DOJ Bureau of Justice Statistics: <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/>

National Institute of Justice: <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij/>

FBI Uniform Crime Reports: <http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/ucr.htm>

DATABASES

When using databases, the search terms that you choose to use are of the utmost importance. Be aware of the terms you are using and if you do not get the results you want try to think of other similar search terms.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE PERIODICALS

CJP provides cover-to-cover access for 45 criminal justice journals frequently consulted by professionals, plus complete abstracts for over 100 additional titles... Publications in CJP focus primarily on practical issues in crime prevention and deterrence, juvenile delinquency, police issues, and courtroom procedures, but users will find a number of highly respected theoretical journals as well.

ACADEMIC SEARCH PREMIER

Academic Search Premier, designed specifically for academic institutions, is the world's largest scholarly, multi-disciplinary full text database containing full text for nearly 4,650

serials, including more than 3,600 peer-reviewed publications. In addition to the full text, this database offers indexing and abstracts for more than 8,200 journals in the collection.

GENERAL INTERNET RESEARCH

Internet research can be a good way to obtain information but be wary of the site that you view. Not all internet information is created equal.

Whose Website is it? Is it an official government website or that of a well-know reputable organization? It is operated and maintained by a private group that has a special purpose or motive for having the site? It is likely that much of the information on specialist site may be biased.

It is a reputable site? Today just about anyone with a computer and a telephone can launch and maintain a website. When considering using information taken from a website, be cautious and consider the credibility of the site and who is operating it. If you cannot verify that the site is reliable, do not use that information.

Is the material dated? You should check to see how frequently the website is updated. If the materials have not been updated recently, you may want to question how reliable the source is.

Can the information be corroborated? Sometimes the material you find on the web seems odd or unusual and further investigation suggests that it may not be truthful. When this happens, do not use it! Often when you undertake a search using an Internet search engine, you get many hits. Do not use only the first ones you find. Carefully check a number of comparable sites to ensure the information is comparable. If you there are glaring contradictions or discrepancies, you should be very cautious about using this information.