



WRITING A RESEARCH PAPER

SOC 136 Organized Crime – summer 2018

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AGENDA

1. research paper fundamentals
2. anatomy of a research paper
3. approaches to writing
4. questions



I. FUNDAMENTALS OF RESEARCH PAPERS

RESEARCH QUESTIONS, THESIS STATEMENTS AND MORE!



RESEARCH PAPER FUNDAMENTALS

	Research Paper	NOT a Research Paper
Purpose	answer a research question	explore a topic
Writing Style	clear, extremely direct	rhetorical flourish
Big Idea	stated immediately and repeatedly	saves the big reveal for the end
Organization	highly structured, signposting, roadmaps	meandering arguments, no clear structure
Evidence	systematic, central, carefully evaluated	may be anecdotal or tangential
Progression	develops an argument, supports a conclusion	merely reflects, presents or summarizes

RESEARCH QUESTION

Research papers are guided by a **research question**.

The purpose of a research paper is to provide a rigorous, empirically-supported answer to a (sociological) research question.



Your research question provides two key forms of guidance:

1. **principle of selection:** what information should be included in the paper?
2. **principle of organization:** how should the paper be structured?

Select and structure information in the paper according to what is necessary to convincingly answer your research question.

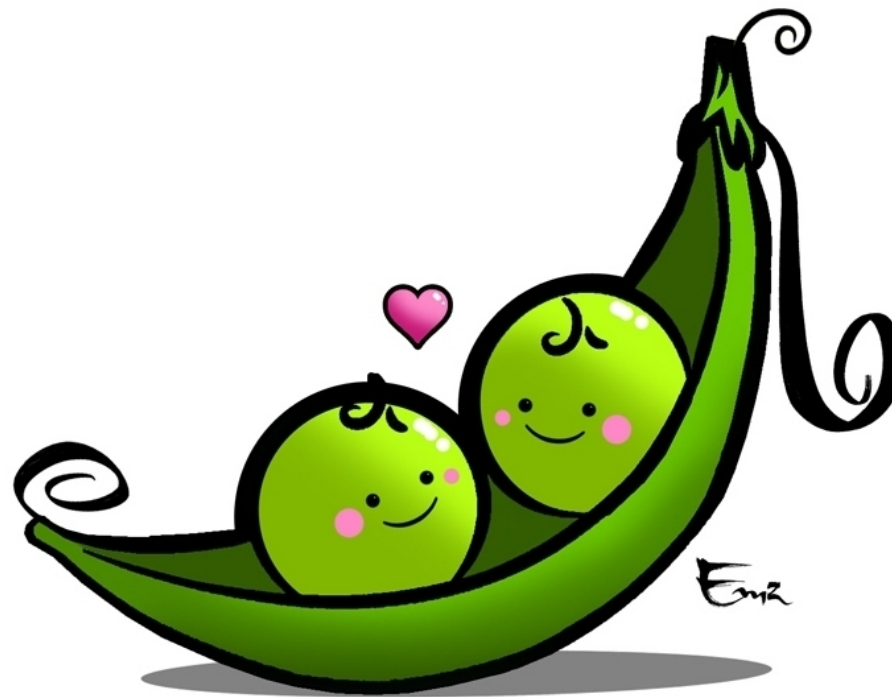
THESIS STATEMENT

A **thesis statement** is the paper's argument in one-sentence.

The thesis statement should be a direct and succinct answer to the research question that clearly summarizes the paper's argument (conclusion, takeaway).



RESEARCH QUESTION & THESIS STATEMENT: PEAS IN A POD



TYPES OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS & THESIS STATEMENTS

WHAT/WHO research questions

- have *enumerable* answers (list)

HOW research questions

- have *process* answers

WHY research questions

- have *casual* answers (“because”)

Q: Who is (what groups are) most likely to enroll in college?

A: Women and high-income high school students are more likely to enroll in college than men and low-income high school students.

Q: How do high school students navigate the college enrollment process?

A: High school students rely on adult mentors and online resources to navigate the college enrollment process.

Q: Why do men aged 30-35 enroll in college?

A: Men aged 30-35 enroll in college predominantly *because* of their desire to support children with their romantic partners.



II. ANATOMY OF A RESEARCH PAPER

OUTLINES, FORMULAS, ETC.



RESEARCH PAPER OUTLINE (10-12 PAGES)

A. Introduction (~1 page)

- state research question and thesis statement
- provide a roadmap for the paper

B. Background (~1-2 pages)

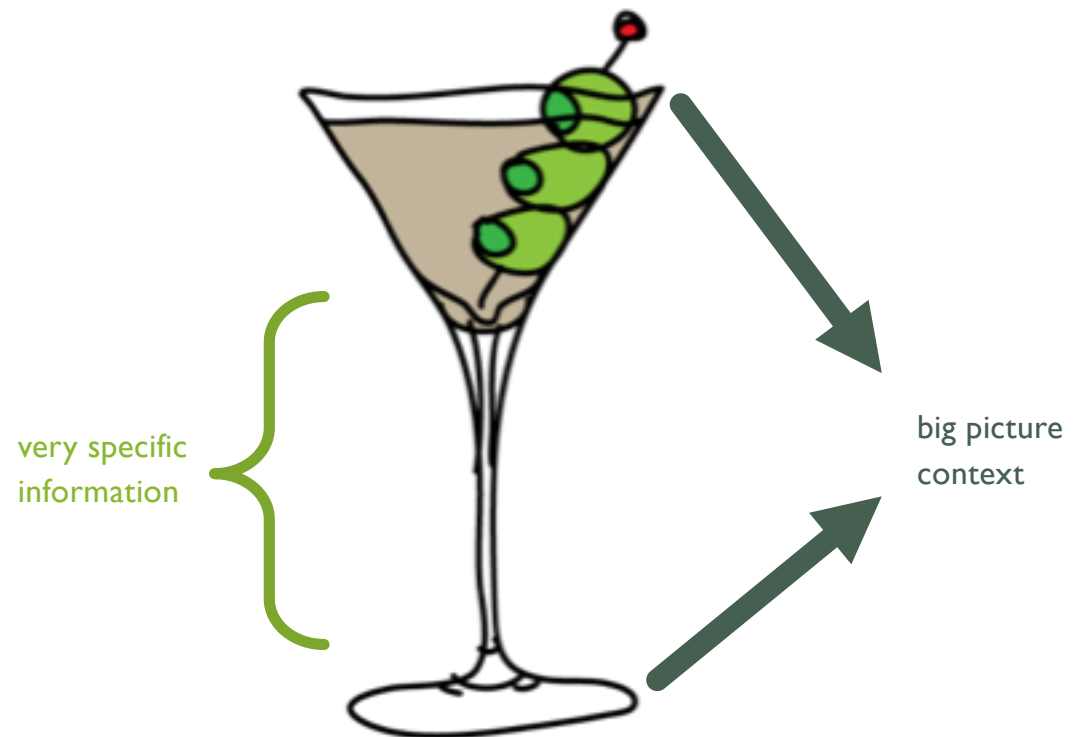
- provide vital background information

C. Body (~8-10 pages)

- present evidence to support thesis
- 2-4 sections (can use subheadings)

D. Conclusion (~1 page)

- re-state research question and thesis statement
- contextualize



A. ONE-PARAGRAPH INTRODUCTION “FORMULA”

1. “Hook” (2-3 sentences)

- get the reader “in the ballpark” of your topic
- suggest the relevance or importance of your topic



could expand
to 1 paragraph

2. Q&A (2 sentences)

- Q: pose research question
- A: state thesis [“*This paper argues...*”]

3. Roadmap (2-3 sentences)

- describe progression of paper [“*This paper will first... Then... Finally...* ”]



could expand
to 1 paragraph

B. BACKGROUND

The background section **sets the stage** with relevant actors and events.



Provide **context** for the **research question**:

- situate research question within *theory* or *academic literature*
- cite *news*, *current events* and *statistics* to demonstrate relevance

Create **understanding** of the **case**:

- give an overview of information the reader will require to understand your paper
- introduce major actors and events that will play a role in developing your argument

C. BODY

1. Create Sections (2-4 subheadings)

- divide your argument into sections of 2-3 pages each
- sections should be congruent with the form of your research question / thesis

Reason X
Reason Y
Reason Z

Process Step 1
Process Step 2
Process Step 3

Primary Factors A, B
Secondary Factors C, D
Debunk Factors X, Y

2. Section Introduction

- start section with an introduction paragraph to explain *how the section answers the research question and supports the thesis*
- provide a roadmap in the introduction paragraph as an overview of the evidence and supporting claims

3. Introduce Paragraph: Topic Sentence

- each paragraph should begin with a topic sentence that answers the question “*what is this paragraph about?*” (“*why am I reading this?*”; “*what’s the main point?*”)

D. CONCLUSION

1. **Re-state** research question and thesis statement; **summarize** your arguments
 - pose the research question again and re-state your thesis statement
 - summarize your arguments

2. **Zoom out**
 - contextualize the research question and findings in the “big picture” of your topic
 - describe limitations of the research question, thesis statement and/or evidence
 - suggest directions for future research



III. APPROACHES TO WRITING

TIPS & METAPHORS



EVALUATING INDIVIDUAL SOURCES: START WITH SYMPATHY

"In studying a philosopher, the right attitude is neither reverence nor contempt, but first a kind of hypothetical sympathy, until it is possible to know what it feels like to believe in his theories, and only then a revival of the critical attitude, which should resemble, as far as possible, the state of mind of a person abandoning opinions which he has hitherto held. Contempt interferes with the first part of this process, and reverence with the second."

—Bertrand Russell, *The History of Western Philosophy*

Sympathetic Questions:

- what is the author's intent or goal for writing?
- what kind of article is the author writing?
 - be aware of genre (e.g. lit. review, theory, empirical)
 - be aware of field (e.g. sociology, health science).
- what knowledge does this article impart?

EVALUATING INDIVIDUAL SOURCES: CRITIQUE

Critical (critique-able) Questions:

- Does the author achieve their stated goal?
 - flawed vs. successful articles
- How far does this author's argument/finding carry?
 - limitations of research, scope conditions
- How does this research fit in the collective enterprise of knowledge?
 - misunderstandings, elisions, opacities
 - possible future directions, extensions

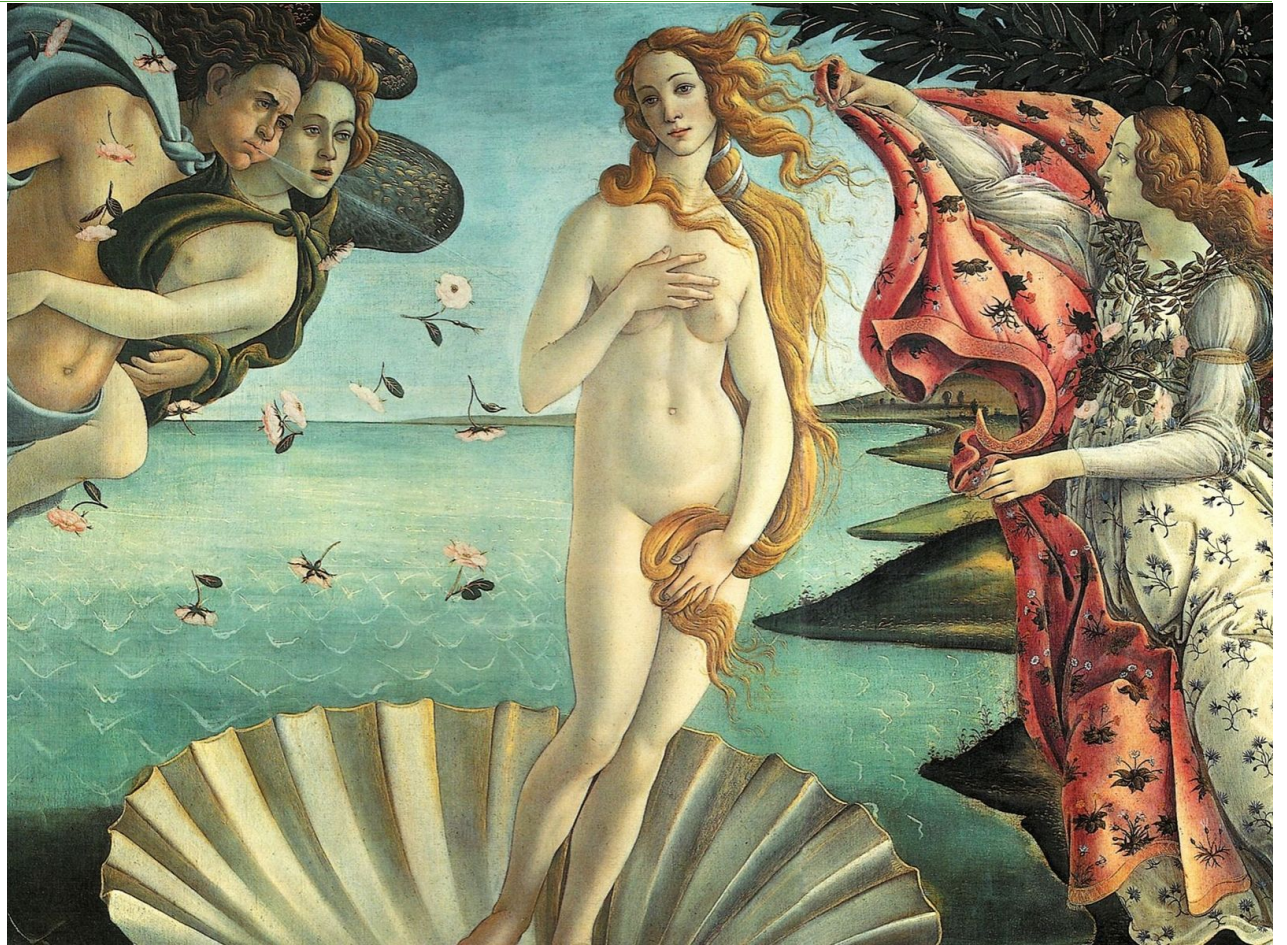
THINK THROUGH COMPLEXITY

A common pitfall is to feel pressured to pick a side or reach a strong conclusion about a complex issue. However, oversimplifying will not strengthen your argument!

Instead, take the reader along as you “think through” the complexity of an issue:

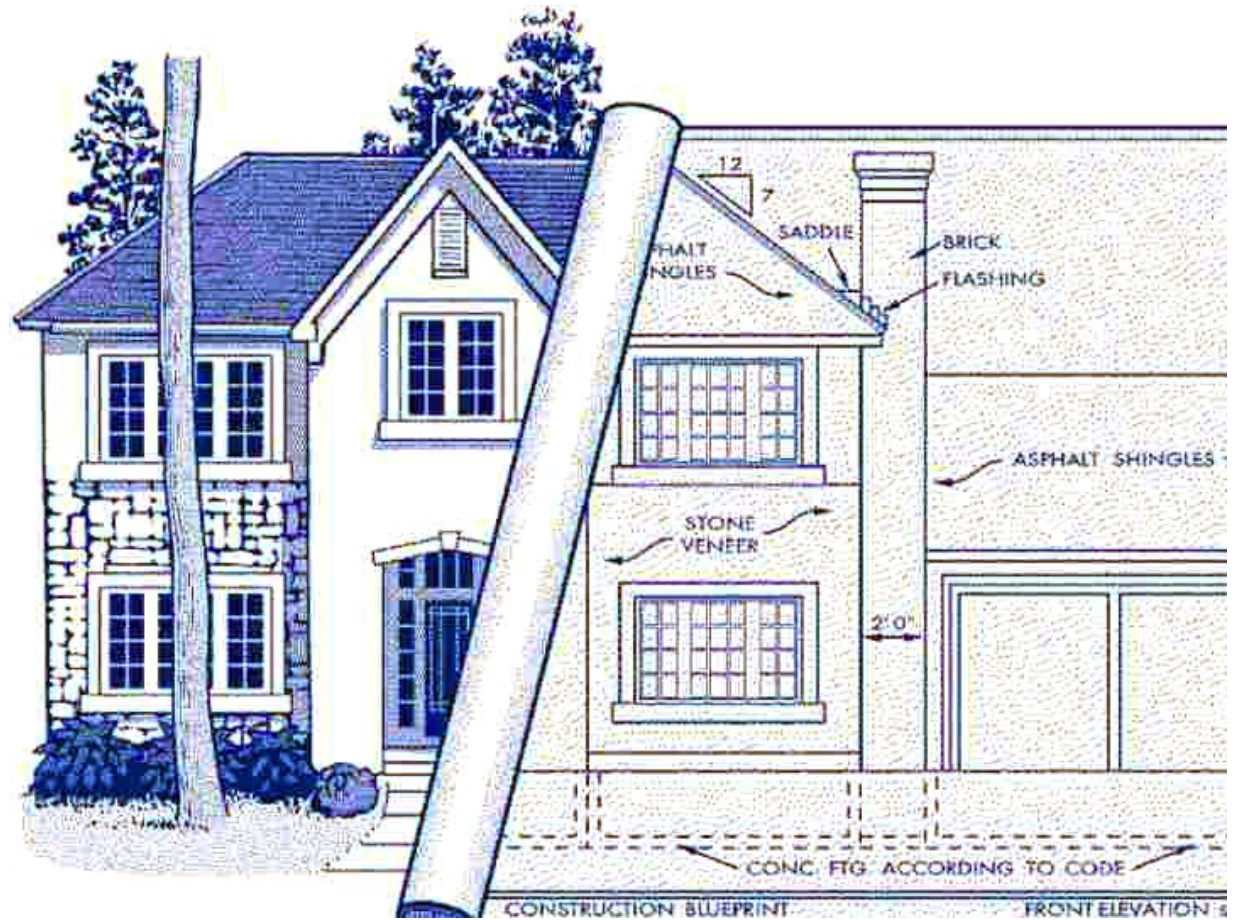
- characterize some of the many positions on the issue
- cite a range of evidence and sources
- clearly display your logic for evaluating evidence and arguments
- map areas of relative certainty and uncertainty

GOOD
WRITING IS
NOT “BORN”
FULLY FORMED



Botticelli, "The Birth of Venus" (1486)

OUTLINES
ARE **NOT**
BLUEPRINTS



PAPERS MAY
NOT HAVE
PREDICTABLE
STAGES OF
DEVELOPMENT



WRITING IS ITERATIVE



ROUND 1



ROUND 2



ROUND 3



ROUND 4



ROUND 5

EXAMPLE: HARRY POTTER

Thesis Research Question: What are J.K. Rowling's most important ideas about society?

Results Chapter Focus: Stratification systems



Truesdale, Beth. "Writing a sociology essay: four genre customs nobody tells you." Sociology Departmental Writing Fellow. Spring 2016.

BEHIND THE SCENES: PARAGRAPH DEVELOPMENT

What does the evidence tell you?

Is there any supporting evidence?

Does the evidence point towards a larger trend?

When Dumbledore awards points after the children encounter Quirrell, he recognizes Hermione's intellectual problem-solving under pressure, the "best chess game that Hogwarts has seen for many a year" played by Ron, and Harry's skill and bravery in fighting Voldemort. Importantly, he also recognizes Neville's bravery in trying to stop Ron, Harry, and Hermione, saying, "It requires great bravery to stand up to our enemies, but even more to stand up to our friends."

The points awarded for the House Cup show what types of skills and behavior help individuals and groups get ahead under this system. Academic prowess, wizarding skills, and bravery are all prized.

Thus, Dumbledore and other "good" characters use the meritocratic stratification system.

STRENGTHEN YOUR ARGUMENT

Topic sentence states the main argument:

The “good” characters in *Harry Potter* use a meritocratic stratification system.

Elaborate and clarify the topic sentence:

The points awarded for the House Cup show what types of skills and behavior help individuals and groups get ahead under this system. Academic prowess, wizarding skills, and bravery are all prized.

Provide evidence, details, quotes as support:

For instance, when Dumbledore awards points after the children encounter Quirrell, he recognizes Hermione’s intellectual problem-solving under pressure, the “best chess game that Hogwarts has seen for many a year” played by Ron, and Harry’s skill and bravery in fighting Voldemort. Importantly, he also recognizes Neville’s bravery in trying to stop Ron, Harry, and Hermione, saying, “It requires great bravery to stand up to our enemies, but even more to stand up to our friends.”

TAKEAWAY

You may develop ideas very differently than you end up arguing them!

- development \neq argument

BE AN INTERIOR
DESIGNER:
PLACE YOUR
BIG PIECES
FIRST AND
FURNISH
AROUND THEM



**AIM IN THE
RIGHT
DIRECTION
AND COURSE
CORRECT**



**TAKE BREAKS
AND GET
PERSPECTIVE**





IV. QUESTIONS?

THANKS FOR YOUR ATTENTION!

