

Writing a Course Paper

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CAPELLA UNIVERSITY

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Creating Major Sections of the Course Paper

Title

The title should provide enough information to allow the reader to predict the general contents of the paper. The title should describe the paper's main topic, concepts, theories, issues discussed, and, in some cases, the relationships between the concepts or theories.

The title should be as specific as possible without being too long. Avoid redundant statements such as "A Study of..."

Original

Cultural differences between Chinese and American business people.

Revised

Cultural differences between Chinese and American business people: The contract pre-negotiation stage.

Abstract or Executive Summary

The abstract or executive summary tells the reader what is in the paper. (The reader will often decide whether to read the paper based on the abstract or executive summary.) The abstract or executive summary provides brief descriptions of the position statement, topic, or hypothesis; supporting evidence; results; and conclusion.

The abstract or executive summary must be very concise and yet provide a coherent and accurate description of the contents of the paper. Note in the "revised" abstract below that a topic sentence is placed at the beginning and a logical flow of ideas is presented.

Original

Troubleshooting manufacturing machines is a difficult task for operators to do. There are many examples of corporate training programs that fail to effectively train operators to troubleshoot. In fact, most corporations do not even know that training programs should be evaluated using the criteria of the rate of skill acquisition, the transfer of training, and long-term retention. There are many approaches to training for troubleshooting skills such as accelerated learning (Sanders, 1997) and the cognitive psychology approach of Lesgold (1999). In this paper the two approaches were compared. The cognitive psychology approach was found to be best on all three criteria. Empirical studies of the approaches were used to compare the approaches.

Revised

Published research studies were compared to determine the effectiveness of two training methods used to teach machine operators how to troubleshoot manufacturing equipment. The methods are (a) Sanders' (1997) accelerated

learning and (b) Lesgold's (1999) work in cognitive psychology. Three categories of effectiveness were examined: 1) the rate of skill acquisition, 2) transfer of training, and 3) long-term skill retention. The analyses indicate that the cognitive psychology method is the most effective in all three areas. The cost-effectiveness of each method is also briefly addressed.

See the style guidelines for your degree program to determine the maximum number of words in the abstract and the location of the abstract or executive summary in the paper.

Headings

Headings briefly describe the topic to be discussed in the following section of the paper. They also clarify the structure of the paper for the reader.

In some style guidelines, the rules for the form of the headings and their location are complex. See the style guidelines for your degree program to determine the maximum number of headings permitted and where the headings should be placed in the paper.

Introduction

The introduction tells the reader what the paper is about. It includes a statement of the problem being addressed, the position being defended, or the writer's hypothesis.

The introduction is composed of a number of components. The components used and the order of presentation depends on the purpose of the paper.

Here are typical components of an introduction:

1. The *position statement*, the *thesis*, or the *hypothesis* describes the writer's main position.
2. The *purpose* outlines the objective of the paper.
3. The *background* provides the reader with general information that is needed to understand the content of the paper.
4. The *approach* describes the process or methodology the author used to achieve the *purpose*. This usually includes an activity such as analyzing or comparing.

If you have problems writing the introduction, send your work to [Smarthinking](#) for evaluation by a tutor. Be sure to indicate your specific writing goals.

Position Statement, Thesis, or Hypothesis

A course paper must have a clear purpose or goal. This goal may be expressed as a position statement, thesis, or hypothesis. Describe the goal in the introduction so the reader knows what to expect.

The position statement, thesis, or hypothesis typically determines the organization of the introduction. For example, if the reader is unfamiliar with your topic, you may need to present background information before you can clearly state your own position. The background information will help the reader place the topic in a larger context and lead to greater comprehension.

If you are defending a position, you may begin the introduction with a statement of the position. This should be followed by material that helps the reader understand the origins of the position and why it is important.

If you have difficulty defining your paper's purpose or goal you need to do more thinking about the paper.

Supporting Evidence

Personal opinion is not sufficient to support a point that you want to make in your paper. You must base the assertions that you make on the work of others and these assertions must be supported by references.

Original

It is plainly evident that American tax policy constrains the growth of small businesses.

Revised

Feldman's (1998) analysis indicates that American tax policy constrains the growth of small businesses.

See the style guidelines for your degree program to determine how to present references in a course paper.

Conclusion

If your paper presents a clear thesis statement followed by well-organized supporting evidence in the body, the conclusions should be obvious to the reader. Nonetheless, your conclusions need to be stated explicitly for your reader. When you write your conclusion, keep in mind that one paper cannot produce universal truths. State the limits of your conclusions and point out what additional research needs to be done.

Original

This paper clearly proves that the size of the trade deficit has a positive correlation with fluctuations in consumer confidence.

Revised

This paper provides evidence that the size of the trade deficit has a positive correlation with fluctuations in consumer confidence. Future statistical studies of the National Bureau of Economic Research data will help clarify this relationship.

Tables, Graphs, and Figures

Tables, graphs, and figures should be used to help the reader understand information presented in the text. Figures do not need to be limited to the presentation of information; they may also be used to stimulate interest in a topic.

See the style guidelines for your degree program to determine the how tables, graphs, and figures should be presented in a paper.

Writing Fundamentals for the Course Paper

Maintaining Academic Integrity

Whenever you use someone else's ideas, you must acknowledge them in your citations and references. At Capella University, the concept of academic integrity extends to copyright and trademark violations. Plagiarism may lead to disciplinary action or dismissal.

To learn more about this topic, see the Academic Honesty policy in iGuide.

Maintaining Objectivity

The tone of the language used in your course paper should be passionate and persuasive, but not emotional or judgmental. Your writing should be courteous, tactful, and respectful.

Original

Skinner's (1988) work on utopian societies is inhumane and a crime against humanity.

Revised

Skinner's (1988) work on utopian societies must be questioned because he avoids discussing the important ethical issues related to the concept of "reinforcement."

Using Third Person

Most academic writing is in the third person. Although "the researcher" or "the writer" is technically in the third person, it still refers to an implied first person. Writing in the first person draws attention to the person doing the action; writing in the third person draws attention to the actions themselves. Note in the example below that the revised version emphasizes what happened in the classroom, rather than who did it.

Original

I arrived in the classroom ten minutes early to place the assignment instructions on the board. Once the class began, I reviewed these instructions thoroughly prior to the class beginning the assignment.

Revised

Ten minutes prior to class, assignment instructions were placed on the board. When the class began, these instructions were reviewed thoroughly.

Using the Correct Verb Tense in Literature Reviews

Use the correct verb tense when writing a literature review. When you make a direct reference in a paper to what a source wrote in the past, use the past tense. When you make a reference to the work itself, it is acceptable to use the present tense.

Original

In 1989, Dupont writes about the rise of strategic thinking in businesses.

Revised

In 1989, Dupont wrote about the rise of strategic thinking in businesses.

Original

In *The Team Manager*, Dupont (1989) wrote about the rise of strategic thinking in businesses.

Revised

In *The Team Manager*, Dupont (1989) writes about the rise of strategic thinking in businesses.

Writing for Your Audience

When you write a paper, you should assume that your audience is educated, but not necessarily knowledgeable about the specific subject of your paper. Consequently, you cannot assume that the audience understands discipline-specific terms. Be sure to define words that may be unfamiliar to your audience.

Original

Simon and Newell (1967) were the first cognitive scientists to use protocol analysis extensively.

Revised

Simon and Newell (1967) were the first cognitive scientists to use protocol analysis extensively. Protocol analysis requires the subject to “think out loud” while solving a problem. These responses are recorded and analyzed to infer the subject’s cognitive processes.

Writing Gender Neutral Course Papers

Use gender neutral language. For example, “he or she” and “his or her” is preferable to “he” and “his” or “she” and “her,” unless you are writing about a specific person. When possible, use a gender neutral plural, such as “they” or “their.” However, remember that whenever you use plurals such as “they” or “their,” you are referring to more than one person. Your writing must reflect this, and you cannot use “he or she” or “his or her.”

Original

For hundreds of years mankind has attempted to improve educational methods.

Revised

For hundreds of years humankind has attempted to improve educational methods.

Expressing Ideas in the Course Paper

Logical Development

Once you have collected all of the information that you need to support your argument, place it in an order that follows an understandable pattern. This is difficult to do because you must determine how to guide your reader through material that you understand quite well. As you plan and organize your paper, try to present your material in a sequence that is easy for someone else to follow. You may find that it takes you several attempts to find the best organization. Remember that you can use headings and transitions to help signal the paper's organization to your reader.

It is very difficult to learn how to incorporate logical development in a paper simply by reading about it. Papers may be sent to [Smarthinking](#) for feedback from a tutor. Be sure to indicate that you want to improve the logical development in your writing.

Coherence and Unity

Coherence means that an idea presented in a sentence flows logically to the next sentence. Coherence helps you write paragraphs that are focused on one topic, instead of paragraphs with ideas that jump from one topic to another.

Unity means that a paragraph is about one main topic. Every sentence must in some way support the main topic. The only exception may be the last sentence in the paragraph when it is used as a transition to the next paragraph. In this case, the transition sentence must clearly connect to the main ideas of *both* paragraphs.

It is very difficult to learn how to incorporate coherence and unity in a paper simply by reading about it. Papers may be sent to [Smarthinking](#) for feedback from a tutor. Be sure to indicate your specific goals.

Conciseness

Academic writing should be direct and to the point. Eliminate redundancy unless it is used to summarize a section or help the reader recall information placed much earlier in the paper. Defining terms unfamiliar to the audience is a legitimate reason to lengthen the paper (see Characteristics of Effective Writing: Writing for Your Audience).

Original

At the present time, educators focus on instructional methods that lead to a deeper understanding of knowledge.

Revised

Today, educators focus on instructional methods that lead to a deeper understanding of knowledge.

Critical Thinking: Analyzing

Analyzing is the process of breaking something into its component parts to examine how each part works or how the parts work together. For example, a paper presenting how a computer works may discuss how individual parts, such as the central processing unit and the disk drive, operate. This may be followed by a discussion about how the parts work together.

It is very difficult to learn how to incorporate critical thinking in a paper simply by reading about it. Papers may be sent to [Smarthinking](#) for feedback from a tutor. Be sure to indicate your specific critical thinking goals.

Critical Thinking: Comparing

Comparing is the examination of different objects, processes, events, or concepts in a search for similarities. For example, one might compare how business people in different industries make purchasing decisions and devise a new model of decision-making.

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Critical Thinking: Contrasting

Contrasting is the examination of different objects, processes, events, or concepts in a search for differences. For example, one might compare computer programs written by different learners in order to discover the different categories of mistakes that are made.

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Critical Thinking: Synthesizing

Synthesizing is the process of combining two or more objects, processes, events, or concepts in order to produce something new. For example, one may synthesize an individual's personality, interests, and skills into a product "brand" in order to understand what job in a company might provide the best fit.

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Critical Thinking: Evaluating or Assessing

Evaluating or assessing is the process of examining something against a proven or generally accepted standard. For example, one might evaluate the courses in an accounting program by assessing them against the standards provided by a national organization of accountants.

Critical Thinking: Combining Multiple Strategies

There are occasions where two or more intellectual activities are combined within one paper. For example, one may analyze how well the parts of an educational administration program are working (analysis) and then compare the parts to standards set by a national organization (evaluating).

It is very difficult to learn how to incorporate critical thinking in a paper simply by reading about it. Papers may be sent to Smarthinking.com for feedback from a tutor. Be sure to indicate your specific critical thinking goals.