

A Practical Guide to Writing Academic Research Papers

学术论文写作实用指南

彭金定 赵培玲 著



中南大学出版社
www.csupress.com.cn

A Practical Guide to Writing Academic Research Papers

学术论文写作实用指南

彭金定 赵培玲 著



中南大学出版社
www.csupress.com.cn

图书在版编目(CIP)数据

学术论文写作实用指南 = A practical guide to writing academic research papers: 英文/彭金定, 赵培玲著.

—长沙: 中南大学出版社, 2015. 2

ISBN 978 - 7 - 5487 - 1398 - 2

I. 学... II. ①彭... ②赵... III. 英语 - 论文 - 写作 - 指南
IV. H315 - 62

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字(2015)第 035410 号

A Practical Guide to Writing Academic Research Papers

学术论文写作实用指南

彭金定 赵培玲 著

☐责任编辑 彭达升

☐责任印制 易红卫

☐出版发行 中南大学出版社

社址: 长沙市麓山南路

邮编: 410083

发行科电话: 0731-88876770

传真: 0731-88710482

☐印 装 湖南地图出版社印刷厂

☐开 本 720 × 1000 1/16 ☐印张 12 ☐字数 216 千字 ☐插页 2

☐版 次 2015 年 4 月第 1 版 ☐2015 年 4 月第 1 次印刷

☐书 号 ISBN 978 - 7 - 5487 - 1398 - 2

☐定 价 29.80 元

图书出现印装问题, 请与经销商调换

Preface

A Practical Guide to Writing Academic Research Papers is a guide book for academic writers in writing research papers in English for various academic purposes. Conceived about eight years ago for a course *Academic Writing and Publishing* (AWP for short), this book has been developed from the course lectures satisfactorily delivered over the past years to graduate students of School of Foreign Languages at Central South University. Against the backdrop of accelerating globalization and increasing intercultural communication, *A Practical Guide to Writing Academic Research Papers* responds to the increasing pressure for professionals and students in higher education to be proficient in English academic research writings and aims to offer theoretical and practical guidance to nonnative writers of English academic research papers, addressing related concerns, smoothing out possible difficulties and alleviating typical fears.

Keeping abreast of major trends and changes in similar writing guidebooks in the field, *A Practical Guide to Writing Academic Research Papers* collects guidelines and examples from a wide variety of reliable academic sources and draws not only upon the authors' own experiences with writing and publishing English academic research papers, but also upon their teaching various writing courses both in China and in the United States. More importantly, this book is largely guided by the authors' long-time research interests in writing theories and second language writing pedagogy. While targeting a mixed audience of teachers and students, of different disciplines, this book treats its audience as subjects, who write from different contexts and for various reasons and are capable of making their own choices, and calls upon its audience to interact with the concepts and examples discussed and presented in the book. Thus, the book incorporates a wide range of writing theories (such as cognitive, socio-epistemic, classical, and current-traditional writing theories) and different writing pedagogies to offer a comprehensive guide to understanding, drafting, revising, presenting, and publishing academic research writings. Briefly summarized in this preface are five

major principles for the writing of this book: three writing theoretical principles and two writing pedagogical principles.

Principle 1: Good academic writers dialogue with others within the discourse community.

Some academic writers assume that academic research papers are written by serious scientists doing innovative experiments. Others believe that academic research writing means copying and pasting all the relevant information from the sources. Still yet some consider English academic writing as reserved only for professors as native speakers of English.

Because these debilitating misconceptions often lead to serious struggles and problems in the writing process, it is important to help academic writers construct an accurate understanding of academic research writing. Although new knowledge or novel ideas are emphasized in the process of writing academic research papers, no writer can produce completely new ideas. All academic writings can be visualized as a conversation within a discourse community. It is only through interaction and conversation with the discourse community in the field can one make contribution to the existing knowledge within the discourse community.

Therefore, the first important principle in writing this writing guidebook is that academic writers understand academic research writing as a scholarly conversation on some worthy issues or problems with others within the discourse community, famously imagined by Kenneth Burke as a parlor where conversations go on. Such an image is enabling because it both allows novice academic writers to believe in their right and abilities to participate in the conversation and motivates them to join the discourse community. It is productive because it encourages novice writers to learn the conventions of the discourse community and motivates them to pose worthy questions and solve problems.

Guided by this principle, Chapter 1 defines academic research writing and introduces the conventions and formats of academic research writing. It introduces its distinctive features and various types, discusses the basic structure of a thesis and dissertation, and describes the general features of a good academic research paper. It also briefs on the types of research sources and major documentation

systems. The same principle also dictates subsequent chapters on abstracts, introductions, literature review, conclusions, presentations, and publications. These chapters constantly drive home the idea that academic writers should be always aware of audience and situate each component in dialogue with others within the discourse community.

Principle 2: Good academic writers understand the writing process.

Non-native speakers' paranoid of English academic writing, widely shared across China, oftentimes derives from their diffidence in English writing in general and their ignorance of academic research papers. When teaching AWP to English graduate students, when directing English seniors in writing their graduation papers, when sitting at the oral defense of masters' thesis, when editing scholarly articles by Chinese professors intending to pursue publishing with academic journals in English, we are appalled to find that many of these writers' struggles originate from their lack of awareness of the writing process and most of their problems can be traced back to their lack of formal guidance on the writing process.

It is true that students can learn from models, which are made available in writing textbooks, databases, and academic journals. However, it is equally true that without a clear sense or understanding of the rationales, reasons, theories that underlie the models, these models can mislead, disable, and disrupt students' writing process and discourage them from developing their own voice and style.

Therefore, the second important principle in writing this guidebook is that students should learn the *how's* and at the same time understand the *why's* of the writing process. From developing topics to structuring the draft to citing sources, the long list of things-to-do in the writing process may sound impossible to tackle at one time, a clear sense of and some degree of familiarity with the writing process of academic writing papers can make academic writers develop both a stronger sense of control of the complex writing task and a stronger awareness of strategies, tools, and resources available to them as writers. The writing process, like a map, is seldom a drawing of straight lines. Never a linear process, the writing process has

recursive stages that writers can use to navigate with some sense of direction, recursive patterns that we can conceptually grasp with proper guidance, meaningful chunks that writers can strategically manage with diligent practice, and tricky pitfalls that writers can learn to gingerly circumvent with timely self-reflection. Only when empowered with such knowledge can academic writers better control their own writing process and eventually become their own writing coach or editor.

Guided by this principle, Chapter 2 breaks the writing process into eight important recursive chunks, or steps that academic writers would normally take. Accordingly, the chapter discusses the early stage of the writing process: finding a good research topic, developing a research question, collecting research sources, taking sufficient notes, and preparing bibliography. The idea-generating stage comes next: forming a working thesis statement, applying a theory or formulating a hypothesis, writing an outline or tentative structure, and analyzing and interpreting data. The third stage focuses on drafting, reviewing, and revising the paper. The major components of each stage are later discussed in detail in Chapters 3 – 10.

Principle 3: Good academic writers make well-informed choices.

Academic research writing has so far been presented as if it were a linear and logical process, where one always knows what to do next. Many writing textbooks, however, fail to alert academic writers of its messiness of the process, the multiple manifestations and configurations of the same structure or convention, and to guide them through different writing contexts. On the one hand, it is true that the writing process is often disrupted by persistent misconceptions, models that are out of date or inappropriate yet still upheld as standards, conflicting comments and preferences from real and potential audiences. The messy nature of the writing process often leaves academic writers at loss about how closely they need to follow the conventions described by the writing guidebook. On the other hand, the writing process is far from being a process of following fixed rules and set conventions, as individual writers do not write in an ideal context; they must write in specific contexts – such as specific cultural, social, religious and political backgrounds, specific expectations from real audiences, and specific writer-reader positioning,

etc. .

Therefore, offering readers various choices and encouraging them to make the best choice appropriate to their specific writing contexts is another important principle that guides every chapter of this book. From different types of academic research papers to the various approaches to organize literature review, from different types of abstracts to diverse versions of the basic structure of academic research paper, this book not only wants to inform academic writers of the varieties available but also strives to promote the idea that writing is not just about following conventions but more about making their own choices based on information. For example, Chapter 5 first informs academic writers of the basic function and general content of literature review, offers them approaches to structure literature review, with clear explanation on the purpose each approach serving, and provides different examples of literature review to explain how different disciplines present literature review differently. The chapter also offers guidelines on various vocabularies and syntactic templates academic writers often use to introduce and agree with existing scholarship or to challenge and refute arguments in the section of literature review. Overall, the book guides academic writers in making well-informed choices in audience, structure, approach, method, style and vocabulary.

Principle 4: Writers learn best from their misconceptions about writing.

Misconceptions about academic research writing, for example, about what abstracts are, what a literature review does, and how to draw a conclusion, are so persistently popular with academic writers of English in China that these misconceptions have become sources of wisdom. Other misconceptions are so mysteriously hidden yet persistent that we are often misled without knowing. Targeting a wide range of audience, this guidebook believes that it is pedagogically effective to verbalize the obvious and hidden misconceptions that often haunt academic writers and then dispel them with more accurate, productive, and enabling conceptions and definitions. This is because misconceptions are not born in a void but distorted, incomplete, or fossilized versions of truth.

As an important pedagogical principle, introduction, examination, and

deconstruction of academic writers' misconceptions about academic writing can allow them to face their own phantoms and achieve a more powerful and productive understanding of academic writing. For example, to guide academic writers on writing conclusions in Chapter 7 offers quick information on the basic functions of conclusions. However, frequent experiences with unsatisfactory conclusions attest to the fact that most academic writers do not fully or clearly understand what those functions really mean. Thus, the chapter follows with detailed discussions of various wrong assumptions about conclusions – such as a place to summarize and repeat, a chance to give readers a surprise with new questions and arguments. Then, the chapter moves on to guide them to construct a good conclusion.

Principle 5: Writers learn best with examples, practices, and reflections.

To further guide academic writers in understanding and applying writing theories, this book adopts another pedagogically effective principle that teaches academic writers to become their own writing coach and editor. With this principle, Chapter 8 offers examples to each of the major concepts or components in the writing process. For example, one of the most perplexing components in writing academic research paper is citation and documentation. In addition to detailed lists of rules and examples for each rule, the book provides annotated sample papers to illustrate how MLA, APA, and Chicago documentation styles are used in papers and how they are different from each other. Academic writers are encouraged to practice annotating examples in the book and examples they find on databases or in their books. The end-of-chapter practices also ask academic writers to reflect on the differences between examples and their own (as well as their teachers' or peers') conceptions about these documentation styles. These examples, practices, and reflections help close the learning circle and guide academic writers in moving cognitively from one learning stage to the next.

To facilitate a clearer understanding of the structure of academic research papers, Chapters 3 to 8 zoom in on each component of the academic research writing and offers clear, detailed, and practical guidance in the composing and revising stage. Chapter 3 focuses on writings abstracts; Chapter 4 deals with

writing introduction; Chapter 5 discusses features of a literature review. Chapter 6 elaborates on how to describe research methods. Chapter 7 deals with how to present research findings, and Chapter 8 discusses analysis. Chapter 9 offers guidelines on concluding the paper; Chapter 10 provides general guidelines on how to use different styles of citation and documentation – MLA, APA, and Chicago. Chapter 11 offers guidance as how to present academic papers. The last chapter provides general guidelines on submitting papers for publication.

As presenting and publishing academic research papers is the ultimate stage of this scholarly endeavor, this book also designs two chapters to discuss the general strategies and resources useful to academic writers. Chapter 9 details the process of finding a presenting venue (conference, forum, meeting, lecture, etc.), converting academic papers to presentations, and delivering the presentation. Chapter 10 moves the stage further and delineates the publishing process: choosing the right journal, familiarizing with the expectations and conventions of the journal, designing winning titles, and revising manuscripts for publishing.

Readers may also find useful the end-of-chapter practices as well as the three appendixes listed at the end of this book. The end-of-chapter practices are designed to help students further apply the knowledge and skills from the chapter and facilitate course adoption by the teachers. They offer updated information on the three mainstream documentation styles as well as a plethora of information for writers.

As is always the case with projects involved in the book, many people have contributed to the final results. Our thanks go to all the graduate students in the School of Foreign Languages at Central South University who have taken the AWP course with the authors and offered their valuable feedback and insightful reflections on the earlier drafts of this book. Our thanks also go to Professor Deng Jun and Professor Duan Huiru who have read through the first manuscript and offered constructive comments. We are especially indebted to Dr. Li Qingping, Dr. Su Yi, who have not only offered warm encouragement but also their own published papers as valuable examples involved in this book.

Peng Jinding, Zhao Peiling
Central South University

Contents

Chapter 1	General Introduction to Academic Research Writing	(1)
1.1	Academic Research	(1)
1.2	Writing Academic Research Papers	(3)
1.3	Basic Structure of Academic Research Papers	(8)
1.4	Criteria and Features of a Good Research Paper	(12)
1.5	Research Sources and Documentation System	(16)
1.6	End-of-Chapter Reflection and Practice	(20)
Chapter 2	The Writing Process of Academic Research Papers	(22)
2.1	Develop an Interesting Research Topic	(22)
2.2	Keep Research Logs	(25)
2.3	Identify an Audience	(28)
2.4	Develop Research Questions	(29)
2.5	Have a Theory	(35)
2.6	Write an Outline	(37)
2.7	Analyze Data	(40)
2.8	Write the First Draft	(41)
2.9	Review and Revise	(42)
2.10	End-of-Chapter Reflection and Practice	(43)
Chapter 3	Writing the Abstracts	(45)
3.1	Purpose of Writing Abstracts	(45)
3.2	Structure of an Abstract	(46)
3.3	Length of Abstracts	(49)
3.4	Composing Abstracts	(49)
3.5	Syntactic Features of Abstracts	(52)
3.6	Common Problems and Checklist in Writing Abstracts	(53)

3.7	Abstract Examples	(56)
3.8	End-of-Chapter Reflection and Practice	(61)
Chapter 4	Writing the Introduction	(62)
4.1	General Function and Format	(62)
4.2	Basic Structures	(63)
4.3	How to Introduce Your Thesis	(67)
4.4	Introduction Checklist	(69)
4.5	Application: Introduction Examples	(70)
4.6	End-of-Chapter Reflection and Practice	(74)
Chapter 5	Writing the Literature Review'	(76)
5.1	Functions of a Literature Review	(76)
5.2	General Content of a Literature Review	(77)
5.3	Approaches in Writing a Literature Review	(78)
5.4	Strategies for Writing a Literature Review	(79)
5.5	Guidelines on the Language of Literature Review	(84)
5.6	Common Problems with Writing Literature Review	(87)
5.7	Literature Review Example	(88)
5.8	End-of-Chapter Reflection and Practice	(90)
Chapter 6	Writing the Method	(91)
6.1	Functions of the Method	(91)
6.2	Major Components of the Method	(92)
6.3	Strategies for Writing the Method	(98)
6.4	Method Writing Checklist	(99)
6.5	Sample Text for the Method	(99)
6.6	End-of-Chapter Reflection and Practice	(103)
Chapter 7	Writing the Results	(104)
7.1	Functions of the Results	(104)
7.2	How to Describe the Results	(105)
7.3	Some Typical Expressions for Writing the Results	(106)

7.4	Traps to Avoid	(106)
7.5	Checklist for Writing the Results	(107)
7.6	Examples of the Results	(107)
7.7	End-of-Chapter Reflection and Practice	(112)
Chapter 8	Writing the Discussion	(115)
8.1	Functions of the Discussion	(115)
8.2	Basic Structures of the Discussion	(116)
8.3	How to Write the Discussion	(117)
8.4	Discussion Section Checklist	(118)
8.5	Traps to Avoid	(119)
8.6	Sample Text for the Discussion Section	(119)
8.7	End-of-Chapter Reflection and Practice	(122)
Chapter 9	Writing the Conclusion	(123)
9.1	Functions of the Conclusion	(123)
9.2	Structures of the Conclusion	(124)
9.3	Common Problems with Writing the Conclusion	(124)
9.4	Strategies for Writing a Good Conclusion	(127)
9.5	Examples of Conclusions in Journal Article	(129)
9.6	End-of-Chapter Reflection and Practice	(133)
Chapter 10	Documentations and Citations	(134)
10.1	Functions of Documentations and Citations	(134)
10.2	Sources to Be Documented	(136)
10.3	Three Ways to Use Sources	(137)
10.4	Three Styles of Documentations and Citations	(139)
10.5	End-of-Chapter Reflection and Practice	(147)
Chapter 11	Presentation of Academic Papers	(149)
11.1	Academic Presentation: Misconceptions	(149)
11.2	Academic Presentation: Definition and Benefits	(150)
11.3	Types of Academic Presentations	(151)

11.4	Presentation Arrangements	(153)
11.5	Presentation Preparations: Seven Steps	(154)
11.6	The Presentation in Action	(161)
11.7	End-of-Chapter Reflection and Practice	(163)
Chapter 12	Writing for Publishing in Academic Journals	(166)
12.1	General Guidelines on Submitting Papers for Publication	(166)
12.2	Writing for the Right Journal	(168)
12.3	Submitting Cover/Query Letters	(169)
12.4	Tips on Titling	(173)
12.5	Revising Dissertations for Journal Articles	(174)
12.6	End-of-Chapter Reflection and Practice	(177)
References	(178)

Chapter 1 General Introduction to Academic Research Writing

Living in the twenty-first century featured with information explosion, all professionals pursuing research in natural science or humanistic or social sciences not only need to make our choices about what others have voiced, but also have to voice our own opinions as well if we aim to conduct meaningful research, to make our research public and to be admitted and acknowledged by our academic field.

This chapter serves as an introduction to the book, essentially a practical guide in nature, with focus on:

- Definition of Research
- Types of Research Papers
- Basic Structure of a Research Paper
- Criteria of Good Research Paper
- Basic Features of a Good Research Paper
- Documentation Systems

1.1 Academic Research

1.1.1 Definition

In *Collins English Language Dictionary*, the term “research” is defined as “detailed study of a subject or an aspect of a subject. If you do research, you collect data and analyze facts and information and try to gain new knowledge or new understanding”.

A research is a focused, creative study undertaken on a systematic basis in order to increase the stock of knowledge and understanding of a subject, including knowledge of humanity, culture and society, and the use of this stock of knowledge to devise new applications. It is also a form of inquiry that involves seeking of evidence to increase that knowledge.

Any activity classified as research and experimental development is characterized by originality; it should have investigation as a primary objective and should have the potential to produce results that are sufficiently general for humanity's stock of knowledge (theoretical and/or practical) to be recognizably increased.

However, research is not just an activity, and it is a process as well. The process involves both formulating questions and answering questions.

1.1.2 Types of Academic Research

Research can be classified into qualitative research, quantitative research and quantitative-qualitative research by examining their research methods. In social sciences, most research can be classified as fitting into one of the two paradigms. Although originally termed as naturalistic and rationalistic research, they are currently referred to as qualitative research and quantitative research. The quantitative approach has dominated the field of education since the 1950's and become a popular research approach used for research today. However, the qualitative approach gained recognition in the 1980's and is acknowledged today as an appropriate way of conducting research.

1.1.2.1 Quantitative Research

Quantitative research reflects the traditional scientific approach to problem solving. It assumes that there is a single reality that can be broken down into variables. By identifying and isolating different variables, cause and effect relationships can be established. The purpose of this type of research is to test hypotheses that have been developed before the research project started and to form conclusions that can be generalized and applied to other situations. The emphasis in this approach is upon measurement, comparison, and objectivity.

1.1.2.2 Qualitative Research

In contrast, qualitative research is based upon the assumption that multiple realities exist in people's perception of the world. Hence, in order to understand phenomenon in the world multivariate approaches are needed; information from a wide variety of sources must be sought and combined in a meaningful way. Since

perceptions are an internal process and not observable, one of the prime methods for obtaining them is by talking with people in focused interviews. The purpose of qualitative research is to better understand a phenomenon. The emphasis in this approach is upon description, uncovering patterns in the data, giving voice to the participants, and maintaining flexibility as the research project develops.

1.1.2.3 Quantitative-qualitative Research

Both the quantitative and qualitative approaches are valid ways of doing research. While the quantitative research is believed to be more objective, rigid, and compatible, the qualitative approach is more flexible, holistic in nature and contextual rather than antiseptically objective. This is true to some extent.

Qualitative research often requires empathy (e.g. in interviews) and imagination (e.g. in discourse analysis). However, this difference does not imply anything about the comparative value of the two approaches. Many research projects have elements of both so as to combine the advantages of each approach.

1.2 Writing Academic Research Papers

1.2.1 Some Misconceptions

Some academic writers, especially in the social sciences, tend to assume that research papers are papers written only when some innovative scientific research experiments are completed. While some tend to hold the notion that research papers are only about novel ideas, others believe that to write academic research papers is simply to copy and paste all the relevant information from the sources they could find. Still yet some students do not think that graduate students and undergraduate students or nonnative speakers of English are capable of writing serious academic research papers because they are reserved only for professors or advanced writers who are native speakers of English.

Other misconceptions are well summarized by the Online Writing Lab (OWL) sponsored by Purdue University. (<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>) For example, academic research papers are often equated with research summaries or book reports. Other writers confuse a literary research paper with “an expository