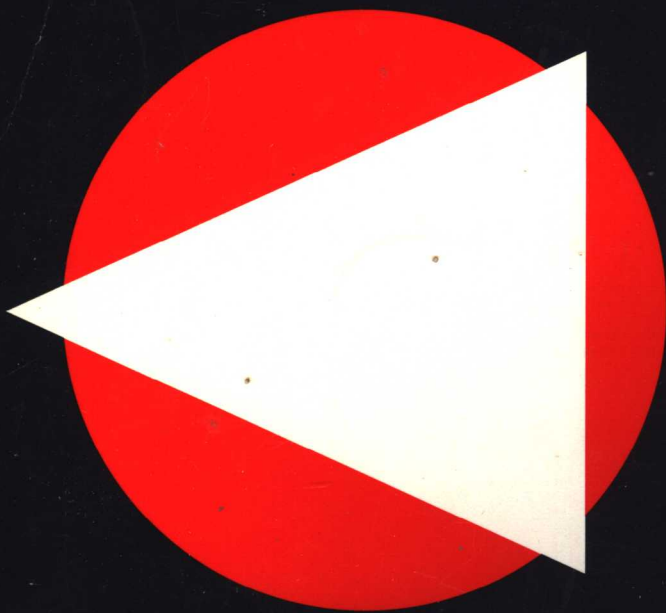


# RESOURCES *for* PRACTICING RESEARCH

*Robert Perrin*



# **RESOURCES FOR PRACTICING RESEARCH**

**Robert Perrin**

*Indiana State University*

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## PREFACE

*Resources for Practicing Research*, designed to complement the treatment of research in a handbook or a rhetoric, provides experience in writing a research paper. The first part of the book, "Writing Activities," divides the process of writing a research paper into sixteen steps, suggesting activities that allow students to practice each step. The second part of the book, "Selections," presents a variety of readings grouped into five content areas; students use these readings to complete the activities—no additional library research should be necessary.

The writing activities teach a variety of research techniques: identifying writing strategies in source materials, evaluating the usefulness of source materials, writing a research proposal, among others. The activities culminate in the writing of a research paper. Activities that discuss research strategies typically covered in handbooks and rhetorics are set up simply (see "A Practice Research Paper," page 45). However, when useful but somewhat unusual strategies are presented—especially those usually given brief treatment in general texts—they are presented with full explanations and with samples (see "Evaluating a Source," page 19, and "Preparing for an Interview," page 36). Because all the activities can be completed by using the source materials that appear in the book, the research practice they provide is concentrated and structured.

The sets of readings in the "Selections" section offer enough material to appeal to students who want to work in any number of content areas.

- *Emily Dickinson's "Because I Could Not Stop for Death"* The readings include three versions of one of Dickinson's most famous poems: the altered 1890 and 1924 versions and the unaltered version, which was finally published in 1955. Accompanying these primary readings are several general articles about Emily Dickinson and explications of the poem by ten prominent literary critics. These readings should appeal to students interested in language or literature.
- *Solar Energy* These readings include excerpts from several books that discuss, in a general way, the scientific principles of solar energy. Articles from seven periodicals assess the feasibility of solar power as an alternative energy source and examine the implications of energy dependency on the American lifestyle. These readings should appeal to students interested in science, social science, or technology.
- *American Educational Standards* These readings, which include Gallup poll results, an excerpt from a national report, an excerpt from a major book, and five articles from periodicals, address some of the problems in American schools.

They examine public responses to the perceived decline in educational standards, government reactions, and possible solutions to the problems. These readings should appeal to students interested in education (no matter what specialty), social science, or history.

- *The Trade Deficit* These readings deal with a problem that affects all Americans, directly or indirectly. An excerpt from a book provides a general background on elements of trade, and articles from five prominent business publications offer assessments of international trade problems and their potential solutions. In addition, two journal articles present the issue from a foreign policy perspective. These readings should appeal to students interested in business (no matter what specialty) or political science.
- *Federal Support for the Arts* These readings—including excerpts from two books, statements from two officials of the National Endowment for the Humanities, and seven articles from periodicals—assess the government's role in subsidizing the arts. Presenting a wide range of opinions, the authors address the philosophical as well as practical issues that influence government funding of cultural activities. These readings should appeal to students interested in the fine arts or culture in general.

*Resources for Practicing Research* is not meant to be a substitute for a handbook or a rhetoric. It provides discussions, special activities, and opportunities for writing that elaborate on the general treatments of research found in handbooks and rhetorics—important information and practice for student researchers. Therein lies its value.

R.P.

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# **WRITING ACTIVITIES**



**IDENTIFYING ELEMENTS  
OF ORGANIZATION  
AND STYLE**



# 1

## Thesis Statements

Not all works that you read will include a thesis statement (a sentence or sometimes several sentences that present the work's topic and the opinion the author supports). But scanning early paragraphs of a source to look for a thesis statement is a useful reading strategy; it enables you to determine the source's controlling idea. Finding the thesis statement is also useful in evaluating a source because it quickly reveals the author's view of the subject you are researching.

Identifying the thesis statement, when there is one, is not always easy, but a few strategies will help:

1. *Read the title carefully.* Sometimes the title, especially for a brief work, will clarify the topic and present the author's opinion. Often, however, the title only serves to get readers' attention, in which case you must read further.
2. *Skim the lead paragraphs, noting any introductory strategies* (see Unit 3). Many works begin with analogies, anecdotes, definitions, facts, quotations, or other strategies to create interest. These introductory elements will not usually supply a thesis statement, so you can skim them quickly and continue looking.
3. *Look for a clear statement of the topic.* After one or several introductory strategies, most writers will clarify their specific topic. Look for key terms that signal the topic. Sometimes, too, a very brief source will actually begin with the thesis statement.
4. *Look for a clear opinion about the topic.* Once you identify the sentence or sentences that present the topic, look for the accompanying statements—or sometimes word choices—that make the author's opinion clear. The author's opinion, in its simplest terms, will be the thesis statement. (Some sources, especially brief ones, may not present an opinion but may instead simply state a fact to be illustrated or described.)
5. *Look for special limitations or qualifications.* Most writers will place their opinions in a context, noting a few pertinent circumstances that influence their views. Other writers acknowledge opposing opinions, using words or phrases to show balance in their thesis statements.

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### ACTIVITY 1.1

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Skim the opening paragraphs of two of the following selections to locate the thesis statements. Although they help to establish the tone of an article, and therefore

serve a useful purpose, introductory strategies will not present the thesis statement; you can therefore ignore them in this activity. Instead, concentrate on thesis statements. Underline them, circle the key words that identify the topic and those that present the opinions. Mark any limitations or qualifications the author also presents and describe how they alter the meaning of the thesis statement.

- Dickinson:** Benfey, page 54  
Ferlazzo, "Deadly Beau," page 80
- Solar Energy:** Metz and Hammond, page 89  
Sheets, page 103
- Education:** Hawley, page 156  
*Nation at Risk*, page 132
- Trade Deficit:** Forbes, page 179  
Alexander, page 171
- The Arts:** Hulbert, page 221  
Kilpatrick, page 240

---

### ACTIVITY 1.2

---

Rewrite the two thesis statements in your own words. Make sure that the topics are still clear, that the opinions are unchanged from the originals, and that the limitations and qualifications remain.



# 2

## Topic Sentences

Writers frequently use topic sentences (sentences that state the idea to be presented in a paragraph) to guide readers through the supporting paragraphs in a discussion. Using such a strategy gives clarity to writing because readers know what to expect at each stage of a presentation.

Reading topic sentences is an excellent way to skim a source when you are beginning your research work. Topic sentences can show you what ideas are presented and can also show you, if you analyze the sequence of topic sentences, the author's method for arranging a discussion of the overall topic.

---

### ACTIVITY 2.1

Underline the topic sentences in one of the following selections.

**Dickinson:** Ferlazzo, "Deadly Beau," page 80

**Solar Energy:** Meyer, page 120

**Education:** Strickland, page 151

**Trade Deficit:** Gordon, page 195

**The Arts:** Hulbert, page 221

---

### ACTIVITY 2.2

Create a topic-sentence outline of the selection to get a sense of how the article is arranged. Feel free to simplify the wording of each topic sentence. Then write a brief paragraph (25-50 words) explaining the logic of the author's arrangement.