

## A Handy Guide for Writing a Better Research-Based Paper

Writing a research paper in the psychological sciences can feel like a daunting task. As you create a plan, and begin to organize your resources and ideas, consider the following tips.

1. Write your first draft. Just put it all out there.  
*(You are a sculptor. Your initial writing is a big block of clay. It's easier to trim away excess and craft a masterpiece from a full chunk than to try and scrounge up small bits and pieces.)*
2. Simplify your writing. Here's how:
  - Walk away for a bit (a few days, a week if possible)
  - Comb through each sentence and remove any and all hedges.
    - Your points should be strong and confidently worded. You're the authority and the expert on the topic. State those facts!
  - Consider ways to simplify the point you're making with each sentence.
  - Be deliberate in your word choice. You can cut down on a complicated descriptor by using a single, well-selected term.
  - Eliminate redundancy. If you're making your point adequately, you should only need to say it once.
  - **Bonus Tip:** The Paramedic Method, as outlined on the [Purdue OWL](#) site is helpful. [The Hemingway Editor](#) app can also help identify and point out problematic wording.
3. Every assertion, decision, or justification you make should be grounded in some literature or empirical source. It's fine to make general statements, but back these claims with research.
  - e.g., You may be inclined to state that "Students aren't very good at selecting effective study habits." How do you know? Where did this information come from?
    - **Hint:** There are SEVERAL primary research articles assessing preferences for study habits. Find a few, and corroborate your claim with real evidence!
4. For the love of all that is good in this world, please do not start your paper with "Previous research shows..."
  - Instead, make a statement regarding a real world observation, a new behavioral/cognitive trend, or skepticism about the benefits of an existing practice in order to contextualize the importance of this work.
    - **Instead of:** *Previous research shows that studying by testing oneself leads to better long-term retention than studying by rereading notes (Roediger & Karpicke, 2006).*  
**Try:** *Students cultivate their own study strategies based on misinformation about what is beneficial for learning (Yan, Thai & Bjork, 2014). For example, rereading notes is a common method of study, but is significantly worse for long-term retention than engaging in brief practice tests or retrieval-inducing "brain dumps" (Roediger & Karpicke, 2006).*
5. Proofread your writing before submitting it. Check for spelling and grammatical errors, logical flaws, and awkward sentences.
6. Send your writing to a colleague, research team member, friend, writing center tutor, etc. for proofreading prior to submission. Your eyes will miss some errors, so ask for help.