



Cavalla International University

DOCTORAL RESEARCH REQUIREMENTS

Students are required to submit two doubled space 25–35-page research papers for each doctoral course. **Note:** Students that are in the Barclay College of Law – SJD and EJD program must complete three 4-page research papers, and two 25 – 35-page research paper for each course.

Basics of Research Papers

At some point in your academic tenure, you will be asked to write a research paper. A research paper combines two fundamental elements of academic writing: (a) analyzing and synthesizing outside evidence and (b) providing your own evidence-based interpretation or argument about a given topic within your field of study.

Generally, research papers in the social sciences are organized to include an abstract, introduction, literature review, methods section, results section, and discussion section. However, despite these general components, research paper requirements may vary based on the scope and particular assignment guidelines provided by your instructor or within your competency. As a result, make sure that specific assignment and/or instructor requirements supersede the general guidelines included here.

Note: These guidelines do not refer to a doctoral capstone study. If you are writing your doctoral capstone study, be sure to refer to resources on the Doctoral Capstone Form and Style website and email any questions to the editors at vjohnson@cavallauniversity.education .

Organization

Most social science research manuscripts contain the same general organizational elements:

1. Title
2. Abstract
3. Introduction
4. Literature Review
5. Methods
6. Results
7. Discussion

8. References

9. Appendices

Note that the presentation follows a certain logic: in the introduction one presents the issue under consideration; in the literature review, one presents what is already known about the topic (thus providing a context for the discussion), identifies gaps, and presents one's approach; in the methods section, one identifies the method used to gather data; in the results and discussion sections, one then presents and explains the results in an objective manner, acknowledging the limitations of the study (American Psychological Association [APA], 2020). One may end with a presentation of the implications of the study and areas upon which other researchers might focus.

For a detailed explanation of typical research paper organization and content, be sure to review Table 3.1 (pp. 77-81) and Table 3.2 (pp. 95-99) of your 7th edition APA manual.

Abstract

Generally, research papers require an abstract. If you are required to construct an abstract for your research paper assignment, it should briefly detail:

- The overall purpose of your research or research problem.
- The design and method of the study.
- Major findings that resulted from your analysis.
- A broad overview of your study's conclusions.

Know that an abstract is not the same as an introduction. An abstract is a summary of your paper; it does not provide context or attempt to interest a reader in your paper the way an introduction does. Assignments that require abstracts should still include an introduction section that provides background on the topic and establishes the purpose of the paper.

If you have questions about whether or not to include an abstract in your research paper, be sure to check with your instructor or reread your assignment for clarification.

Basics of Abstracts

An *abstract* is "a brief, comprehensive summary of the contents of the paper" (American Psychological Association [APA], 2020, p. 38). This summary is intended to share the topic, argument, and conclusions of a research study or course paper, similar to the text on the back cover of a book. Abstracts may be required for certain course assignments and are required elements of Cavalla capstone projects (Read on for guidelines on constructing a strong abstract for course papers).

Formatting Guidelines

An abstract appears after a paper cover page but before the body of the paper. Per APA 7, Section 2.9, to format an abstract, center the title "Abstract" at the top of a new page in bold text. Note that the bolding is a change from APA 6 guidelines, which recommended plain text. The body of the abstract for course papers should be

- be no more than 250 words,
- flush left on the page and not indented, and
- a single block paragraph.

The abstract may use the full name of an acronym and identify the acronym in parentheses; writers should thereafter refer to the acronym. If the acronym is identified but then not used again in the abstract, however, it should only be written out and not identified. The abstract should not include citations or any material that needs to be cited; all background information on your topic should appear in the body of the paper. Citations, which are intended to credit supporting sources, would be out of place in an abstract, just as they would on the back cover of a textbook.

Note that APA 6 had an additional recommendation about writing numbers in the abstract differed from the general guidelines for writing number requirements. In APA 7, that distinction has been removed. Write out numbers as words or use numerals according to the general guidelines.

To review a sample abstract, see p. 50 of the 7th edition APA manual.

Introduction

Generally, all academic introductory sections should introduce readers to your topic and scope, moving readers from a broad overview to their specific, narrow focus. In an academic introduction, you should also indicate your perspective on or argument about your given topic and explain to readers why the study of your topic is important. An introduction can range from a single paragraph to multiple paragraphs, depending on the length and scope of your draft.

For research papers, in particular, you want to make sure your introduction not only meets the general guidelines above but also does the following:

- Includes a central argument, problem statement, or thesis statement, detailing the intent, rationale, and/or purpose of your research.
- Addresses why your problem or topic is important.
- Outlines the design, method, and/or key characteristics of your research.
- Describes important results or conclusions of your research.

- Provides a brief, yet clear overview of the structure of the paper.

Basics of Literature Reviews

A literature review is a written approach to examining published information on a particular topic or field. Authors use this review of literature to create a foundation and justification for their research or to demonstrate knowledge on the current state of a field. This review can take the form of a course assignment or a section of a longer capstone project. Read on for more information about writing a strong literature review!

Students often misinterpret the term "literature review" to mean merely a collection of source summaries, similar to annotations or article abstracts. Although summarizing is an element of a literature review, the purpose is to create a comprehensive representation of your understanding of a topic or area of research, such as what has already been done or what has been found. Then, also using these sources, you can demonstrate the need for future research, specifically, your future research.

There is usually no required format or template for a literature review. However, there are some actions to keep in mind when constructing a literature review:

1. **Include an introduction and conclusion.** Even if the literature review will be part of a longer document, introductory and concluding paragraphs can act as bookends to your material. Provide background information for your reader, such as including references to the pioneers in the field in the beginning and offering closure in the end by discussing the implications of future research to the field.
2. **Avoid direct quotations.** Just like in an annotated bibliography, you will want to paraphrase all of the material you present in a literature review. This assignment is a chance for you to demonstrate your knowledge on a topic, and putting ideas into your own words will ensure that you are interpreting the found material for your reader. Paraphrasing will also ensure your review of literature is in your authorial voice.
3. **Organize by topic or theme rather than by author.** When compiling multiple sources, a tendency can be to summarize each source and then compare and contrast the sources at the end. Instead, organize your source information by your identified themes and patterns. This organization helps demonstrate your synthesis of the material and inhibits you from creating a series of book reports.
4. **Use headings.** APA encourages the use of headings within longer pieces of text to display a shift in topic and create a visual break for the reader. Headings in a literature review can also help you as the writer organize your material by theme and note any layers, or subtopics, within the field.
5. **Show relationships and consider the flow of ideas.** A literature review can be lengthy and dense, so you will want to make your text appealing to your reader. Transitions and

comparison terms will allow you to demonstrate where authors agree or disagree on a topic and highlight your interpretation of literature.

Methodology

The methods section is designed to describe, in detail, how you conducted your study. Different study designs will require different methodologies, which means the specific details within this section vary widely. However, despite such variations, all effectively written methodology sections should include the following:

- A clear introduction to the methodological design and approach for conducting your research.
 - A rationale of why such a design and approach are appropriate for your given topic.
- An indication of the specific methods for information gathering and/or data collection
 - A rationale of why the methods is appropriate for your given topic.
- An explanation of how you intend to analyze results.
- Subsections, if necessary, that include the following: (a) participant descriptions, (b) procedures used, (c) sampling procedures and sample size, (d) measurement approaches, (e) detailed information about research design
 - For more on each of these possible subsections, review Sections 3.6 (p. 82) and 3.14 (p. 94) of your 7th edition APA manuals.

***Box content adapted from:**

University of Southern California (n.d.). *Organizing your social sciences research paper: 6. the methodology*. <https://libguides.usc.edu/writingguide/methodology>

Methods Section Basics

In examining a research question, social scientists may present a hypothesis, and they may choose to use either qualitative or quantitative methods of inquiry or both. The methods most often used include interviews, case studies, observations, surveys, and so on. The nature of the study should dictate the chosen method. (Do keep in mind that not all your papers will require you to employ the various methods of social science research; many will simply require that you analyze an issue and present a well-reasoned argument.) When you write your capstones, however, you will be required to come to terms with the reliability of the methods you choose, the validity of your research questions, and ethical considerations. You will also be required to defend each one of these components. The research process as a whole may include the following: formulation of research question, sampling and measurement, research design, and analysis and recommendations. Keep in mind that your method will have an impact on the

credibility of your work, so it is important that your methods are rigorous. Cavalla offers a series of research methods courses to help students become familiar with research methods in the social sciences.

Results

Generally, your results section should include a summary of your results detailing key findings. You will need to clearly and carefully explain a result, so readers understand your meaning, without falling into the trap of interpreting your results (which should be reserved for your discussion section). Include results that are both in line and run counter to any hypotheses you proposed.

Just as you have a license to arrange your literature review in the way that best conveys the relevant literature on your particular topic, you have similar freedom when organizing your results section. However, a well written results section will include the following:

- Context for understanding your results, including a reminder of your research problem or focus.
- Non-textual elements, including charts, tables, and figures, as well as a description of these elements.
- A systematic, clearly organized detailing of your key findings in past tense (as your research was conducted in the past).
- A synopsis of key findings, which serves as a transition into your discussion section.

For more specific details on your Results section, be sure to review Tables 3.1 (pp. 77-81) and 3.2 (pp. 95-99) of your 7th edition APA manuals.

***Box content adapted from:**

University of Southern California (n.d.). *Organizing your social sciences research paper: 7 the results*. <https://libguides.usc.edu/writingguide/results>

Discussion Section

The overall purpose of a research paper's discussion section is to evaluate and interpret results, while explaining both the implications and limitations of your findings. Per APA (2020) guidelines, this section requires you to “examine, interpret, and qualify the results and draw inferences and conclusions from them” (p. 89). Discussion sections also require you to detail any new insights, think through areas for future research, highlight the work that still needs to be done to further your topic, and provide a clear conclusion to your research paper. In a good discussion section, you should do the following:

- Reiterate the research problem or focus.

- Clearly connect the discussion of your results to your introduction, including your central argument, thesis, or problem statement.
- Provide a brief overview and in-depth interpretation of key findings/results.
 - Provide readers with a critical thinking through of your results, answering the “so what?” question about each of your findings. In other words, why is this finding important?
 - Detail how your research findings might address critical gaps or problems in your field.
- Compare your results to similar studies’ findings.
- Consider alternative interpretations to your results.
 - Provide the possibility of alternative interpretations, as your goal as a researcher is to “discover” and “examine” and not to “prove” or “disprove.” Instead of trying to fit your results into your hypothesis, critically engage with alternative interpretations to your results.

For more specific details on your Discussion section, be sure to review Sections 3.8 (pp. 89-90) and 3.16 (pp. 103-104) of your 7th edition APA manual

***Box content adapted from:**

University of Southern California (n.d.). *Organizing your social sciences research paper: 8 the discussion*. <https://libguides.usc.edu/writingguide/discussion>

Limitations

Limitations of generalizability or utility of findings, often over which the researcher has no control, should be detailed in your Discussion section. Including limitations for your reader allows you to demonstrate you have thought critically about your given topic, understood relevant literature addressing your topic, and chosen the methodology most appropriate for your research. It also allows you an opportunity to suggest avenues for future research on your topic. An effective limitations section will include the following:

- A detailed account of the limitations of your study
 - Detail (a) sources of potential bias, (b) possible imprecision of measures, (c) other limitations or weaknesses of the study, including any methodological or researcher limitations.
- Common Methodological Limitations
 - **Sample size:** In quantitative research, if a sample size is too small, it is more difficult to generalize results.

- **Lack of available/reliable data:** In some cases, data might not be available or reliable, which will ultimately affect the overall scope of your research. Use this as an opportunity to explain areas for future study.
- **Lack of prior research on your study topic:** In some cases, you might find that there is very little or no similar research on your study topic, which hinders the credibility and scope of your own research. If this is the case, use this limitation as an opportunity to call for future research. However, make sure you have done a thorough search of the available literature before making this claim.
- **Flaws in measurement of data:** Hindsight is 20/20, and you might realize after you have completed your research that the data tool you used actually limited the scope or results of your study in some way. Again, acknowledge the weakness and use it as an opportunity to highlight areas for future study.
- **Limits of self-reported data:** In your research, you are assuming that any participants will be honest and forthcoming with responses or information they provide to you. Simply acknowledging this assumption as a possible limitation is important in your research.
- **Common Researcher Limitations**
 - **Access:** Most research requires that you have access to people, documents, organizations, etc. However, for various reasons, access is sometimes limited or denied altogether. If this is the case, you will want to acknowledge access as a limitation to your research.
 - **Time:** Choosing a research focus that is narrow enough in scope to finish in a given time period is important. If such limitations of time prevent you from certain forms of research, access, or study designs, acknowledging this time restraint is important. Acknowledging such limitations is important, as they can point other researchers to areas that require future study.
 - **Potential Bias:** All researchers have some biases, so when reading and revising your draft, pay special attention to the possibilities for bias in your own work. Such bias could be in the form you organized people, places, participants, or events. They might also exist in the method you selected or the interpretation of your results. Acknowledging such bias is an important part of the research process.
 - **Language Fluency:** On occasion, researchers or research participants might have language fluency issues, which could potentially hinder results or how effectively you interpret results. If this is an issue in your research, make sure to acknowledge it in your limitations section.

***Box content adapted from:**

University of Southern California (n.d.). *Organizing your social sciences research paper: Limitations of the study*. <https://libguides.usc.edu/writingguide/limitations>

Conclusion

In many research papers, the conclusion, like the limitations section, is folded into the larger discussion section. If you are unsure whether to include the conclusion as part of your discussion or as a separate section, be sure to defer to the assignment instructions or ask your instructor.

The conclusion is important, as it is specifically designed to highlight your research's larger importance outside of the specific results of your study. Your conclusion section allows you to reiterate the main findings of your study, highlight their importance, and point out areas for future research. Based on the scope of your paper, your conclusion could be anywhere from one to three paragraphs long. An effective conclusion section should include the following:

- Address possibilities for future research.
 - Describe the possibilities for continued research on your topic, including what might be improved, adapted, or added to ensure useful and informed future research.

Provide a detailed account of the importance of your findings.

- Reiterate why your problem is important, detail how your interpretation of results impacts the subfield of study, and what larger issues both within and outside of your field might be affected from such results.

***Box content adapted from:**

University of Southern California (n.d.). *Organizing your social sciences research paper: 9. the conclusion*. <https://libguides.usc.edu/writingguide/conclusion>

References

Research papers should always include a clear reference section to acknowledge the work of previous scholars in your field and give credibility to your own research. Your reference page should appear directly after your conclusion, and all references should be formatted to meet current APA guidelines.

Appendices

If you have some information you would like to include in your research, but it could potentially be distracting to readers or inappropriate within the body of your research paper, you can always include supplemental information as an appendix to your work. An appendix or appendices

should always be inserted after your Reference List; however, the appropriateness of appendix content really depends on the nature and scope of your research paper.

For a more in-depth review of what supplemental materials might be included in a social science appendix, be sure to review Section 2.14 “Appendices” (pp. 41-42) of your 7th edition APA manual.

Appendices Formatting

APA 7 addresses appendices and supplemental materials in Section 2.14 and on page 41:

- The appendices follow the reference list.
- They are lettered "Appendix A," "Appendix B," "Appendix C," and so forth. If you have only one appendix, however, simply label it Appendix.
- Put figures and tables in separate appendices. The appendix title serves as the title for a table if it is the only table in the appendix.
- If you decide that certain figures and tables should appear in the same appendix, number them A1, A2, A3, and so forth, according to the appendix in which they appear.
- The materials in the appendix must not extend beyond the margins of the rest of the paper: Reduce the appendix materials as needed.

As a general guide, appendices are appropriate for any material that, if presented in the main body of the document, would unnecessarily interrupt the flow of the writing. Note that it is unlikely that you will use appendices in Cavalla course papers. For doctoral capstone studies, you might include some appendices with supplementary information.