



The University of Sydney

Environment, Behaviour & Society Research Group

RESEARCH PAPERS AND REPORTS

FOR HONS, MPHIL, PHD & POST-DOC STUDENTS

The below has been prepared to help all research students with the writing and organising of research papers and reports including dissertations and theses. The first four pages, to the end of Methods, are also relevant for research proposals.

What is a research paper or report, including a thesis report?¹

- Form of professional documentation and communication
- Designed so readers can extract information readily and easily
- Describes research work in sufficient detail for it to be verified (and maybe repeated or at least built off) by others
- Interprets/draws conclusions from data
- Places research questions and conclusions in context of related research work in the field

Language and style:

- Use objective language
- Avoid words/phrases with a meaning that could be misunderstood
- Avoid bias in language² – scholarly writing should be free of implied or irrelevant evaluation of a group or individuals being studied
- Ensure simplicity and clarity – ensure it is easy to follow your thinking
- Contemporary science and scholarship use the active voice as much as possible
- Use the past tense for things already done, eg, research methods, tests applied, etc.; use the present tense for things that live on, eg, the findings and conclusions drawn
- Present information in a logical order for the reader
- The quality of your written communication will influence your reader's understanding
- Follow a standard style guide – EBS and most of the social/environmental sciences worldwide use the *APA Publication Manual*
- For dissertations and theses being submitted in Australia, use Australian spelling and punctuation throughout; for manuscripts being submitted to a journal, follow the journal's guidelines

Research terminology:

- Use appropriate research terminology
- Define terms when first used; do not give list of definitions
- Write terms in full before using acronyms

A scholarly research paper, report or thesis has:

- An informative summary (the abstract)
- Subdivisions with headings and subheadings (two levels are quite sufficient)
- Main points made obvious
- All factual statements supported by references to peer-reviewed research or by data from this study

¹ Parts of the first four subsections have been used by permission of Dr Meloni Muir, "Practical Report Writing", School of Medical Sciences, University of Sydney.

² See the *APA Publications Manual* (5th edition), section 2.12, pp 61-76 for an excellent set of guidelines for avoiding unintentional bias in language.