How to Write a Research Paper
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Introduction
One of the benchmark capstones of a college degree is the ability to write a research paper. Writing research papers is more a matter of structure, expected content, and is faithful to APA publishing guidelines. Also, you need to understand how to navigate the research databases in order to find scholarly source material to use in your paper. The following information will guide you through the research paper writing process.

What is and what is not a Research Paper
A report is NOT a research paper. Without the skills to write a research paper, many students pick a topic and then write a report on their topic and submit it as a research paper – when in fact, they have written a report. A report informs the reader of the four basic types of information concerning their topic – who, what, when, and where. A research paper supports a topic thesis (usually a declarative statement) and makes the case that supports their thesis using scholarly research support. As such, a research paper contains 6 types of information – who, what, when, where, HOW, and WHY. The “how” and “why” of your thesis support is what makes a research paper.

The Relationship between Topic Selection and your Thesis
Think of your paper topic as generally what your paper is about and think of your thesis statement as specifically what aspect of your topic you will establish within your paper. If you take a little time to select and narrow a topic along with a tight thesis statement, your paper will be much easier (and less frustrating) to write.

Narrowing a Topic with a Thesis in Mind
Let’s say that we want to write a paper on the topic of police stress. At first glance, we should be able to see that this topic is too broad for a paper. Many textbooks have been written about police stress and still did not completely cover the topic – what chance would you have in writing a research paper on police stress? Very good actually, provided we first do a few things to narrow our topic coverage and develop a tight thesis statement. First we need to decide what aspects of police stress we wish to write about and then develop a tight thesis – once we have done that, our paper will become much more manageable and easier to write.

Bubble Diagramming – A Brainstorming Technique
"Bubble" diagramming is a form of brainstorming in which we start with a topic you want to write about, and then thinking of as many of the basic component parts of the topic, including tangents and sub tangents. By having all these parts in front of you, it is easier to select a narrowed topic.
Beginning to Construct our Paper

1. By listing the subtopics of your main topic, it becomes easier to see and select a topic for your paper. In this example, I have selected two subtopics that will be the main thrust of my paper. Also keep in mind a research statement or thesis for your paper that embodies your topic. In the example below, we are going to make the case for our thesis that stress negatively affects police officers and what current research suggests for reducing on the job stress for police officers.

Developing a Thesis statement from our Bubble Diagram Subtopics

Example Thesis Statement:
Stress negatively affects police officers in detrimental ways, and as such, empirical studies suggest that police administrators take an active role in stress reduction and wellness programs.

2. Now that we have narrowed our topic and developed a thesis statement, we can develop and outline from which to write our paper. Keep in mind that our bubble diagram is still very useful as we can still use subtopics as paper headings and mention some of these subtopics in our paper. For instance, we will want to use “Stress Defined” from our bubble diagram as a heading in our paper to ensure that our readers understand the clinical definition of stress. Likewise, we will probably want to explain psychological causations as possible theoretical explanation(s) of stress to add a better framework in understanding stress. The point here is that your bubble diagram is a very good source of material for your paper.
3. Think of an outline as a road map that will guide us through our research paper in terms of expected content. By setting forth our main headings and some of our subheadings, our paper will be more organized and easier to write.

Outline Example

I. Introduction (Our introduction will be a good place to state our thesis and provide a verbal index of what is to follow within our paper. In the introduction example to follow, we will lead with our thesis statement and continue with our "index introduction." This will allow our readers to understand our paper’s content to follow.) Example:

Stress negatively affects police officers in detrimental and costly ways, and as such, empirical studies suggest that police administrators take an active role in stress reduction and wellness programs. This paper will begin by providing clinical definitions of stress. Next the scope and prevalence of stress will be discussed in terms of its detrimental effects. The next section will examine a theoretical framework and offer several psychological theories that may account for depression and stress. This will be followed by five strategies to reduce police stress. Finally, this paper will provide an empirical review of the effectiveness of stress reduction strategies. The significance of this paper is that it will identify negative effects of stress and offer strategies for stress reduction. This paper is written for colleagues and clerisy who have a professional or academic interest in police stress and stress reduction strategies.

II. Police Stress Defined
   A. Definition
      i. included behaviors
      ii. police perspective
      iii. public perspective
   B. Prevalence
      i. statistics
      ii. cost in dollar amount
      iii. cost in human toll

III. Theoretical Framework
   A. Psychological Theories that may account for Stress
      i. role ambiguity, dissociation, stress response, defense and survival mechanisms, and conditioning theories
      ii. personal and cognitive influences, social psychological influences, and the organizational environment
      iii. emotional processing theory

IV. Reducing Police Stress
   A. Department Responses
      i. improved selection process
      ii. recurrent training and evaluation
iii. wellness assistance programs
iv. encouragement and elimination of stereotyping
v. providing access to help

V. Effectiveness of Stress Reduction Strategies
   A. Empirical Review

VI. Conclusion (highlights of paper sections – no new material here!)

VII. Reference Page (good solid peer-reviewed references – no non-scholarly internet links, no Google, no Wiki!)

Review
Bubble diagramming allows us to organize our thoughts and provides us the ability to view our main topic in its component parts, thus making it easier to narrow our research paper topic. Our thesis statement is easier to develop after we identify our narrowed topic(s) – thanks to our bubble diagram. By taking the time to structure our outline, we can see our paper’s “roadmap” which will in turn make our paper easier to write.

UWPCJ Undergraduate Criminal Justice Research Paper Guidance and Example

First, a Word…

The completion of a course research paper is a requirement of the program accreditation standards. As you have found, or will find, most accredited programs have a paper requirement. Writing a research paper is a demonstration of your knowledge and critical thinking abilities of a narrowed aspect of the course material. Research papers tend to follow a pattern of expected content and the more familiar you are with these patterns, the easier and better quality your papers will become.

While different professors have different styles and expectations for papers, commonalities for course research papers include a narrowed topic that is explained and explored in a critical and scholarly way; examines a problem with possible recommendations for improvement or policy change; is faithful to APA 5 publishing guidelines; and has a logical flow that is free of grammatical errors. My experience has been that even if a course paper does not exactly meet a particular professor’s vision for the paper, the professor will usually acknowledge (and rightfully so) that a paper contains critical evaluation and thinking, and demonstrates scholarly effort. After all, it is your paper.

The following material should be included in your paper. I will provide examples of how to get started on each of these components.
The Effects of Police Stress and Reduction Strategies

John Student

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2009

(Not much to comment on here – just a basic title page format. You might check with your professor to see if there is anything special expected here)
This paper examines the growing concern of how stress affects police officers. On-the-job police stress is defined and discussed in terms of severity and prevalence. This paper also examines theoretical aspects that may account for police stress. Stress reduction strategies are examined and the effectiveness of these strategies are reviewed.

(Abstract is another term for summary – your abstract should be short and concise. It should present the overview of your paper’s contents to the reader. Per APA 5, an abstract is a maximum of 120 words. Another point to remember – the abstract is usually entered into a special database for search engines to hit on, so you will want to include terms that would help others locate your paper)
The Effects of Police Stress and Reduction Strategies

This paper will address two main concerns, 1) how stress affects police officers, and 2) recommended strategies for reducing police stress. This paper will begin by defining police stress and its various manifestations as it relates to police officers. Next, this paper will examine the prevalence and theoretical aspects that may account for police stress. The paper will then look at strategies that can be used to reduce police stress and a discussion of the effectiveness of these strategies. The significance of this paper is that it will identify negative effects of stress and offer strategies for stress reduction. This paper is written for colleagues and clerisy who have a professional or academic interest in police stress and stress reduction strategies.

Definition of Stress

Stress occurs when one perceives the demands of a situation taxes or exceeds one’s ability to cope with those demands. Finn and Tomz (1997) provide a more clinical definition of stress as “a mentally or emotionally disruptive and upsetting condition occurring in response to adverse external influences, and a stimulus or circumstance causing such a condition” (p. 5). Stress behaviors include cynicism and suspiciousness, emotional detachment, reduced efficiency, absenteeism, excessive aggressiveness, alcoholism and substance abuse, marital problems, posttraumatic stress disorder, health problems, and suicide (National institute of Justice, 2000).
Prevalence of Police Stress

Nearly 100 percent of police will experience some form of stress in their careers (Anson and Bloom, 1988). To this end, Volanti (1996) reports that police divorce rates are twice the national average and police suicide rates are three times the national average. Constant exposure to stress for police officers comes in the form of the threat of violent death, injury, the constant exposure to human tragedies, assuming responsibility for others, feelings of alienation and helplessness, exposure to contagious disease, and many other factors resulting from the demands of police work (Hunter, Barker and Mayhall, 2004).

How Stress Affects Police officers

Stress felt by police officers can negatively affect all aspects of one’s life. A primary aspect of stress is that it can degrade the quality of life in an officer’s home environment and set the stage for domestic abuse. Johnson (1991) reports that as many as 40 percent of police officer families experience domestic abuse compared to 10 percent of the general population families. Stress increases the risk of personal health problems of police officers in the form of heart attacks, high blood pressure, ulcers, weight gain or loss, sleep disorders, alcoholism, and other health problems (National Institute of Justice, 2000).

Police officers who suffer from stress tend to perform poorly at work. Stressed officers are more likely than other officers to have higher absenteeism rates, leave the profession earlier (through termination or early retirement), be the subject of more lawsuits, and garner more citizen complaints against them.
(Springer, 1995). McCraty, Tomasino, Atkinson, and Sundram (1998) aptly note, “Officers operating under severe and chronic stress may well be at greater risk of error, accidents and over-reaction that can compromise their performance, jeopardize public safety and pose significant liability costs to the organization” (p. 1).

Theoretical Framework

A literature review regarding stress reveals a wide range of stress causation. Brewin and Holmes (2003) account for police stress in psychological theories that involve role ambiguity, dissociation, stress response, defense and survival mechanisms, and conditioning theories. Paton, Smith, and Stephens (1998) report that work related psychological trauma is a result of a combination of personal and cognitive influences, social psychological influences, and the organizational environment. Others proffer recent theories such as the emotional processing theory that forwards the concept that stress is based on accumulated knowledge of an unsafe world (Dalgleish, 1999).

The disparity in theories of stress causation indicates the vastness of the problem. While stress has many causes, most research tends to agree it is imperative that police stress is addressed in a meaningful way (National Institute of Justice, 2000).
Reducing Police Stress

Two major strategies of addressing police stress are preventing stress and stress reduction programs (National Institute of Justice, 2000). The most common method to prevent stress is found in the training stage of a police officer’s career. This involves training officers to recognize signs and sources of stress and to utilize stress reduction techniques and coping strategies (National Institute of Justice, 2000). Other stress prevention strategies include more comprehensive pre-hire screening, better supervision and management training for the command staff, and improving the match between the officer’s capabilities and the demands of specific assignments (Hunter et al., 2004).

Stress reduction programs should be an essential part to any police organization. Employee assistance programs have proven to be of great value in stress reduction. Such wellness programs provide access to stress assessment and mental health practitioners, critical incident debriefings, crisis interventions, counseling, and substance abuse treatment (National Institute of Justice, 2000). Many wellness programs involve families and coworker support groups. These programs offer seminars on topics such as nutrition, stress reduction, physical fitness, financial planning, and other topics targeted at wellness (Hunter et al., 2004).

Effectiveness of Police Reduction Strategies

As expected, the vast definition of stress reduction produces a range of results. The HeartMath Institute provides Santa Clara County Police Officers
training in self-management of stress reactions. The results of this training are measured physiologically in terms of the time it takes the heart rate to recalibrate and return to normal levels after participants were subjected to simulated stressful scenarios. For clarification, the medical community is in agreement that it is important to cardiac health to achieve quick and deep recalibration of the heart rate following intense stress (Arnsten, 1998). The HeartMath study empirically demonstrated improvement in reducing the time of recalibration of the heart rate to normal ranges. As a result, 83 percent of the participants exhibited improved work performance, greater confidence, balance and clarity under acute stress (Mearns and Mauch, 1998). A National Institute of Justice (2000) study reported that group therapy involving police spousal couples confirmed evidence of decreased the stress levels of those who participated in the program when compared to a control group.

As with most studies of stress reduction effectiveness, results are relative and difficult to quantify beyond increases and decreases of stress.

**Conclusion**

On-the-job police stress negatively affects police officers in terms of quality of life, the officer’s family, the police agency, and the community. These Stresses occur when one perceives the demands of a situation taxes or exceeds one’s ability to cope with those demands. Research indicates that stress is so prevalent that nearly 100 percent of police officers will experience stress during their careers and incorporate higher divorce and suicide rates than the general
public. The effects of police stress account for increased domestic abuse, health problems, and work performance issues.

Stress reduction efforts generally consist of prevention and reduction strategies. Employee assistance programs (EAP) and wellness programs provide many of the recommended strategies for reducing police stress. Police officers and their families, the public, and police agencies significantly benefit as a result of reduced police stress.
References


*A Note About the Reference Page*

APA publishing guidelines call for double spacing within the reference page – however, recent, more relaxed interpretations may allow for single spacing as presented in this example – so it might be a good idea to check with your professor to see what is expected.

*Research Paper discussion*

You will notice the example paper did not exactly follow the outline. That is okay, and expected to a certain extent. It is not unusual to increase coverage of some aspects and decrease coverage of other aspects as your research quest unfolds. This only reinforces the importance of starting with a good outline – if this example paper veered a little off course while using an outline, imagine how much you would veer all over the place while trying to write a research paper without using an outline.

This is a research paper and not a report. A report provides four aspects of explanation – who, what, when, and where. A research paper adds the additional explanation of how and why. The example paper covers how and why police stress occurs in terms of the constant danger of police work, exposure to contagious diseases, theoretical explanations, etc.

The first paragraph is generally considered an introduction. In this example, the first paragraph explains what is contained in the paper. The first sentence in this example is actually the thesis statement (although the thesis statement does not have to be the first sentence). The last sentence of the first paragraph is optional, but it is a nice touch to explain for whom you are writing the paper.

The headings are a way of breaking up and containing long passages of text. Which headings you should use are up to you. This example paper did not contain any primary research and instead cited secondary sources of research. Had it contained primary research (as in actual research conducted by the author), it would have utilized a research, methods, and results headings.
It is a good idea to define aspects of your paper topic, particularly concepts that are not common knowledge. In this example, a definition of stress is included.

In most social science topic papers, you should attempt to include theory causation to help explain or understand why the behavior you are writing about occurs. In this example, stress causation is suggested to be related to psychological based theories.

A word about in-text citations and referencing. The use of someone else’s work requires that you acknowledge them with an in-text citation as an abbreviated form of reference. All in-text citations should be accompanied by a full APA reference on your reference page. Using someone else’s work without crediting them is plagiarism.

Avoid excessively using quotes in your paper. Two or three quotes are okay, but too many quotes tend to indicate that you got tired of writing your paper and are telling the reader what other people said.

The conclusion should not introduce any new material. Instead it should be a recap of your paper and highlight any points you wish to emphasize to the reader.