

3 Writing a paper

3.1 What is a paper?

The answer to this questions is mostly based on the task that is asked of you. A paper can be a very theoretical document or something that contains practical instructions. It can be very general or specific. It could have the purpose of sharing information or it can be made to convince someone or bring someone to action.

Generally, a paper is a written document of a certain length, that contains an independently executed (little) research that is linked to a course or an assignment ("papers micro", 2011). A teacher expects you to set up a research question and find some answers to your questions in diverse types of sources. After you have found these answers you process them in a paper.

3.2 Approach: how to write a paper

Work systematically when you write a paper. In the paragraphs below you will find a possible approach to writing such a research document.

3.2.1 Gather information

Go through different types of information sources. Start with some exploratory reading: look at the book covers, the images, the list of references (title, authors, publishing house, number of pages, date of publishing...). The resource list might tell you something about the point of view of the author.

Read the preface or the introduction. If they show signs that the text or book will probably give an answer to the question you are asking, then you can decide to go through the text more thoroughly. If you explore first, this will win you a lot of time.

Remember to write down some key terms for your research and in which sources you have found them. This way you don't have to reread everything afterwards. You could even use a mind map.

Not all the useful information you will find is worth writing down. What you will write down depends on a few aspects in your writing process: how you are going to write (planning), what you want to achieve (goal), what you will be writing about (subject) and who you are writing for (reader). (Hartenberg-ter Hedde & Ter Horst, 2016).

3.2.1.1 Planning

A lot of writers know when their deadlines are, but lack the insight of when to start writing a task and estimating how much time a writing task will take. It's very easy to say: I write better when I'm under pressure. But that doesn't really come in handy when writing a paper (Hartenberg-ter Hedde & Ter Horst, 2016).

Make a global estimation of how much work you will have and add another 10 percent extra. Don't fool yourself and set a deadline for every part of the task that you will undertake. This way you won't get in trouble at the very end. (Hartenberg-ter Hedde & Ter Horst, 2016).

3.2.1.2 Goal and reader

Ask yourself the question what you want to accomplish or achieve with your text. Do you want the reader to know something? If yes, then what should he/she know? Do you want the reader to form an opinion about something? If yes, then what is that opinion? Do you want the reader to take action? If yes, then what do you want him/her to do? If you have questions, conclusions or advice for your reader, that should be the starting point of your paper (Hartenberg-ter Hedde & Ter Horst, 2016).

3.2.1.3 Choosing your subject

Formulate your research topic and question as specific as possible and try to find answers. Once you have done this you can get deeper into the available materials and sources. Explore your subject and make sure you don't formulate it too broadly. If you, for example, choose 'bullying' as a theme, you can easily write a paper of 20,000 words. Look for subdivisions in your subject, for example 'bullying on the work floor'.

Ask yourself as many questions as possible in the beginning phase of your research. This way you will gather too much information, but this gives you the chance to make a selection of the most relevant items. Dear to be 'the devil's advocate': if you are on a certain track, try to put yourself in the position of someone who has the complete opposite opinion. Look at pros and cons, black and white points of view.

After this first general phase you have to select the core elements out of your found information. These will help you answer the main question of your research. Clearly specify the links between the different key elements. You could, again, use a mind map to do this.

3.2.2 What is your research question?

The research question should tell you **what** your paper is **about**, **what** you have researched and **how** exactly you have done this. It is a summary of what we have mentioned in the previous paragraphs. For this reason, a research question is almost never short. You have to make sure that your question is complete. If the answer is 'yes' or 'no', then you don't have a good question. If your question exists of more than 1 question, then you don't have a good question.

WRONG:

- Is the use of a biotechnical medicine responsible? (= yes or no question)
- What are the results of EPO and how can you explain them? (= 2 questions)

- How much vitamin C dissolves from 100 ml of orange juice is you leave it for one day in temperatures of 0, 10, 20 and 30°C? (= too specific + simple answer)

RIGHT

- How can you justify the use of a biotechnical medicine?
- How can you explain the results of EPO? (= here you can mention the results as a paragraph in your text)
- What happens to vitamin C in terms of dissolvment, when you leave it in different temperatures? / How does vitamin C dissolve in different temperatures?

3.2.3 Title

Think of a good title to match your text. Keep it short and simple but try to be catchy and creative.

3.2.4 First version

Start by writing the middle piece of your paper. This is where you analyse your information that refers to your research question. Don't focus on spelling or phrase and sentence structure in this version. Keep writing so you get a basic text that consists of all the information you want to use in your paper. Often when you write, you will come across new findings and new conclusions that could help you answer your question.

3.2.4.1 Introduction and conclusion

Some people like to start with writing their introduction or conclusion. Some find it easier to do this at the end. No matter which order you choose, make sure that your conclusion and introduction can be linked to each other. In your introduction you express uncertainties and things you want to find out, you introduce your subject. In your conclusion you summarize your findings and conclusions and determine the outcome of your research question.

3.2.5 Reread

Leave the text and the writing process for a day. Read it again afterwards and correct your text. Focus on quality of content, spelling and sentence structure.

3.2.6 Let someone else read

Have your text read by an outsider. They will see things you might have overlooked. Adjust your text according to this person's suggestions.

3.3 Structure of the paper

A lot of people who have to write a text start phrase by phrase without giving a structure to their text. Still, this structure is essential if you want to bring a message across to your reader. Most academic papers have a rather fixed structure. In what follows you will find some suggestions for the construction of a paper.

3.3.1 Paragraphs

The main parts of your text are usually paragraphs, with a whitespace in between them. This gives an immediate distinction of the structure of your work (De Wachter, 2010).

A paragraph is a logical unit: it exists of a few sentences that are logically connected and carry out a similar thought or subject. Mostly it has one core sentence that summarizes the entire idea of the paragraph. This core sentence is mostly found at the beginning or the end of a paragraph. The rest of the paragraph is the further elaboration of the subject.

When you start a new logical unit, you start a new paragraph.

To create a good cohesion in your text, you can use linking words or sentences to explain the link to the previous or following paragraph (De Wachter, 2010:54).

*E.g. In the previous paragraph we have been focussing on the individual differences between human beings and their causes. **Furthermore** there are a few other factors that increase the chance of succeeding.*

Don't make your paragraphs too long or too short. Especially too much information at once makes your text hard to read. Paragraphs usually contain about three up to ten sentences (Goosen & Schoordijk, 2015).

3.3.2 Links

To bring structure to a text we use linking words or sentences to make paragraphs coherent. These words guide your reader through the text in that direction that you want them to go with your information. If you don't use linking words, your reader has to look for the logics in your work on his own and maybe that can cause him to unhook his interest from your writings (De Wachter, 2010).

The following exercise demonstrates the use of some common linking words:

Linking words: replace the words printed in bold with a connector or linking word/phrase from the box that has a similar meaning.

admittedly	besides consequently	due to	since
in parenthesis	a great divide	on the other hand	
moreover	for instance	in conclusion	nevertheless

1. Smoking can damage your health. **Furthermore**, it's a very expensive habit.

2. The case has to be dropped **because of** a lack of evidence.

3. In my opinion, the guest speaker presented some really interesting views on starting a business. **By the way**, did you also think his logo resembled the Adidas logo too much?

4. I really don't have time to look at your proposal. **Then again**, it's very tempting to take a break from this tedious task.

5. **Because** our current supplier won't match your offer, we see no other option but to switch suppliers and accept your offer. We look forward to doing business with you!

6. **We admit**, we should've gone with your idea.

7. In the 1990s a lot of fast food chains opened up around Europe – following the American trend. **However**, the average European hasn't become as obese as the average American.

8. **To conclude**, Tesla Motors is one of the most innovative companies around.

9. The Spanish government has lowered taxes. **As a result**, they now receive less complaints.

10. There's **a world of difference** between the "suits" and the "creatives": the "suits" just want to keep the clients "happy" whereas the "creatives" just want to do great adds.

11. The new model shows no unique qualities **apart from** the fact that it now comes in different colors.

12. The CEO found unexpected ways to cut costs. Shutting down the escalators at one factory, **for example**, saved \$80,000 a year.

3.4 Resource list

3.4.1 What is plagiarism?

Plagiarism is the copying of ideas, texts, citations, paraphrases, summaries, music, movies, ... without referring to a source. This is a form of academic fraud and whoever pleads guilty to this, is also sanctioned accordingly ("Definitie plagiaat", 2012).

3.4.2 Why do you have to refer to sources?

Referring to sources is a must in a paper. By referring to a source (website, book, magazine) you clearly indicate who says what: you give credit to the work of the original publisher and his or her expertise in the domain. It also helps you to keep track of where you found all your useful information (so don't wait until the very end of your writing process to add your sources to your work, it will then be impossible to find every detail again at its original location). Referring to sources also show that your work is based on qualitative and scientific/academic sources.

Furthermore a reader who is interested in a part of your text can find useful extra information in your resource list (De Wachter, 2010).

3.4.3 When do you refer?

Every time you literally use a sentence, an idea, a structure, an image, a plan or outline, ... from a book or another source (citing), but also when you rephrase something or translate something (paraphrasing), you have to mention the original source. This is legally obligated. You can quote a source in three different ways:

1. By citing or literally repeating the words of the author
2. By paraphrasing or rephrasing the actual words from the author into your own words.
3. By summarizing the thoughts of the author.

3.4.4 Ways to refer

In academic literature two different referring systems are used: the classical system and the Anglo-Saxon system (APA norms – American Psychological Association). The APA is the publishing company of a few scientific publications and therefore developed a set of style rules.

3.4.4.1 General references

3.4.4.1.1 Book:

AUTHOR, Initials First Name., Title + Subtitle. Place of publishing, publishing company, year of publishing, page(s) where you found the info.

BOSSUYT, I., Muziekgeschiedenis. Deel I. Oudheid – Middeleeuwen. Renaissance (tot ca.1560). Leuven, Acco, 1994, p.55. (of pp 55-59) .

3.4.4.1.2 Article from a magazine:

AUTHOR, Initials First Name., Title of the article. Name of the magazine, year, number, page(s).

DE FEYTER, K., Ontwikkelingssamenwerking door een mensenrechtenbril bekeken, enkele voorbeelden. Noordzuid cahier, jaargang 25, nr. 4, 2000, p. 28.

3.4.4.1.3 Article from a newspaper:

AUTHOR, Initials First Name., Title and subtitle of the article. Name of the newspaper, day month year (in full), page(s).

STS, Tijdcapsule naar de 521ste eeuw. De Standaard, 23 februari 1998, blz. 1.

3.4.4.1.4 Encyclopaedia/dictionary

AUTHOR, Initials First Name., Title and subtitle of the encyclopaedia/dictionary. Perhaps part and number, place of publishing, publishing company, year, page(s).

DE BLOCK, A., e.a., (red.), Standaard encyclopedie voor opvoeding en onderwijs. deel 4, Antwerpen/Hoorn, Standaard/Kinheim, 1982, blz. 128.

3.4.4.1.5 Brochure, folder, course book, ...

AUTHOR, Initials First Name., Title + Subtitle.

'brochure'/'folder'/'course book' ... with addition of 'not published' if this is the case, place and name of the institution, year or full date, page(s) of the copied data.

Unicef. Cijfers en feiten 1990-1991. folder, Brussel, Unicef.

3.4.4.1.6 Website

AUTHOR, Initials First Name., Title + Subtitle. internet, date when you consulted the data (in full). Full internet address between round brackets

KAPADIA, A., (ed.), Mahatma Gandhi. internet, 17 april 1998.
(<http://amerisoft.net/india/gandhi.htm>)

3.4.4.2 Opmerkingen:

1. When the name of the author is unknown, start with the title.

2. When two authors are mentioned, you include both in your reference.

VAN PETEGEM, P. & J. VANHOOF.

3. When more than two authors are mentioned, you write down the first one followed by 'e.a.' (et alii = and others).

ADRIAENS, F., e.a. ,

4. In a reference list the sources are mentioned alphabetically.

3.4.4.3 In text references

In the APA style you refer to your sources in a brief way in the text itself. There are three possibilities (Wielandts, 2012):

1. The author is already mentioned in the phrase itself and is therefore immediately followed by the year.

E.g.: Vissers (2010) vond dat mensen met een lage socioeconomische status...

2. The author and the year of publication are added in between brackets.

E.g.: ... waardoor ze zich minder betrokken voelen (Vissers, 2010).

3. The year and the author are mentioned in the text itself.

E.g.: In 2010 toonde Vissers' onderzoek naar politieke participatie aan dat ...

Mind:

- If you use brackets, make sure that the '.' In the sentence comes after the reference at the end of a sentence.
- There are specific rules for citations (infra).

3.4.4.4 Citing

Citing means you copy a piece of another author's text literally. This means you also have to copy the spelling literally. Exceptionally you can adapt the spelling if that fits your sentence better or if there are spelling mistakes in the text. You then have to show that you made adaptations by putting them in between square brackets [].

E.g.:

Original: *"Zijn werk word vast en zeker nog gepubliceert"*
(Decoene, 2015:11-12).

Adapted: *"Zijn werk word[t] vast en zeker nog gepubliceer[d]"*
(Decoene, 2015:11-12)

3.4.4.4.1 Less or more than 40 words

If the cited text contains less than forty words, "you place the piece of text in between quotation marks" (Wielandts, 2012:10).

E.g.: De NAVO kan dan ook gezien worden als "'s werelds eerste multinationale militaire organisatie, waarvan de leden bovendien een oprecht belang hebben bij het vrijwaren van de wereldwijde stabiliteit" (Provoost, 2008:29).

If your citation contains more than forty words, you use a "block quote with a whitespace above and below the citation" (Wielandt, 2012:10). You don't use quotation marks for this, you just put the citation in a smaller font size.

E.g.: De respondenten werd naar hun kiesintenties gevraagd, gesteld dat de opkomstplicht zou afgeschaft worden. Opkomstplicht werd voor een beter begrip bij de respondenten wel vertaald als kiesplicht.

Gezien het feit dat stemmen op zich niet verplicht is of kan zijn, moeten we overigens eigenlijk spreken over de plicht om op te dagen bij verkiezingen, maar vooral om respondenten niet in verwarring te brengen peilden we toch naar het al dan niet gaan 'stemmen'" (Verlet, Carton, & Callens, 2010:51).

: "de webmaster is verantwoordelijk voor de webserver..."

3.4.4.5 Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing means that you don't literally copy a piece of text, but that you rephrase the original words in your own words.

3.5 General writing tips

Just like other skills, writing is something you can learn by critically analyzing the work of others, by practising a lot and by critically reviewing your own writings (Vandamme, 2012). Some general writing tips can teach you how to learn to write.

3.5.1 Writing is reading

Frequently look at other peoples' texts in newspapers and magazines (Vandamme, 2012). This way you will develop insights in articles. Look at the type of text (summary, review, academic article, ...)? Look at the structure. Which points of view and arguments are used? How are they linked to each other? What makes the text convincing or legible?

3.5.2 Writing is deleting

Kill your darlings. Getting your text on paper in just one attempt is only possible for very experienced writers. Writing means rewriting and scratching. Self-criticism is necessary for your writing process, only not at the beginning when you tackle the content and the construction of the text (Vandamme, 2012).

Work step by step for your different paragraph: bundle your arguments and core ideas, choose a structure for your story and then you can formulate sentences.

Every sentence needs to have a link to the main focus of your text. In a research paper that focus is your research question. Be as precise as possible when you explain the information that you have found to your reader so he has access to everything he needs to understand what you wrote.

3.5.3 Writing is pampering your reader

If you want your work to be read, you have to pamper your reader. This means that you have to guide your reader through the text by paying attention to cohesion and structure and that you write in an appealing way. A text has to make you hungry for more, starting from the introduction. You want to fascinate your reader.

The way you write depends on the type of text you have to write (genre) and who you are writing for (Vandamme, 2012). An opinion piece has other characteristics than an academic article. When you write you should set yourself in the position of your reader. If you notice, as a reader, that you want to stop reading, something has gone wrong.

3.6 Formulating

3.6.1 Be understandable

If you have finished your first version, you should reread your text a few times. Look at the word level of your text the first time you reread. A second time you can focus on sentence level.

A few tips:

1. Keep your sentences short.
Every sentence contains its own information. If you combine all that information into one sentence, the reader really has to focus to understand the entire content.
2. Keep your sentences simple.
Hard sentences are like puzzles, they stress the short term memory of your reader.
3. Formulate actively and personally.
Avoid passive sentences, they make your text heavy to read. Your sentences become indirect, static, 'businessy'. The more people you mention in a text, that more personal it becomes. A research by Rudolph Flesh (1995) shows that readers are more interested in people and their adventures than in objects and their processes. Readers are more interested if they can relate to what you write.
4. Formulate positively and visually
Make sure you are specific: your reader should see, feel, hear, taste, smell what you have to say. Formulate positively: don't use too many negations.
5. Be concise but thorough.
6. Be exact.
Avoid vague words that express uncertainty: maybe, apparently, probably, ...
They make your statements weaker.

(Hermans, 2015)