FYC 13200.01
Prof. John Duffy
2 December 2009

A Rational Guide to the Research Paper: How to Survive, Prosper, and, Yes, Even Take Joy In Your Fabulous Research Paper

What follows is a kind of template for Your Fabulous Research paper. It offers you an outline that will guide you in writing sound, well-structured research papers. It is not to be regarded as sacred doctrine, and you needn't follow it slavishly. As a writer, you will have numerous decisions to make about your arguments, evidence, counter-arguments, organization, word choices, and so forth. This template cannot make those decisions for you. Still, it can help you to arrange your papers in ways that establish your authority and create a strong ethos.

1. Begin at the beginning: The Introduction

Introductions, as we have discussed, have many forms. You may introduce your topic by beginning with a quotation, telling a story, asking a question, offering a paradox, providing background information, presenting a fact, or defining a term. (For more—much more—than you ever thought you'd want to know abut introductions, go here: http://humanistic.mit.edu/wcc/resources/writers/introduction).

However you choose to introduce your topic, your introduction should contain the following:

> • *They Say/I Say* Move. What conversation are you joining? What are others saying? What will be your contribution to the conversation (i.e., what is your ***argument*** and to what **prior arguments does it respond**?).
>
> • The *So What?* Move. What is the significance of this paper? Why should anyone read it? Why should you write it? Help the reader see the importance of your argument!
>
> • The *Let's Use a Cool Latin Term* Move (The *Partitio,* or "partition"). This is where you tell the reader *how* you will do what you will do. Think of this as stage directions for the reader, signaling in advance the format of the paper: " In this paper I will explore [X], considering how previous arguments about have neglected [Y], and therefore have wrongly concluded [Z]," etc. You can make the partition more or less detailed as it serves your purpose.
>
> Here's how one writer, Robert Putnam, uses a partition in his article, "Bowling Alone":

> "I do not intend here to survey (much less contribute to) the development of the theory of social capital. Instead, I use the central premise of that rapidly growing body of work--that social connections and civic engagement pervasively influence our public life, as well as our private prospects--as the starting point for an empirical survey of trends in social capital in contemporary America. I concentrate here entirely on the American case, although the developments I portray may in some measure characterize many contemporary societies." http://muse.jhu.edu/demo/journal_of_democracy/v006/putnam.htm

Wait! Before you move on to the rest of the paper, and to certain fame and glory, ask yourself:

- Will you need to provide additional background information for your reader to understand this paper? Where should that background information be placed? In the Introduction? Immediately following the Introduction? (What's important is that you have a rationale for whatever you decide.)

- Will you be using any specialized terminology in your paper? When and where will you provide definitions? Will you offer a separate paragraph to in which you define key terms? Or will provide definitions in the context of the sentence, e.g. "Many advocates of inclusion, the educational philosophy that holds that. . . "

  Important point—define terms immediately after the first use. Don't use them for the first time in page 1, and then define them on page 3. But you knew that!

2. Presenting Your Arguments and Providing Your Evidence

This is the substance of your paper, the main course, the meat of the thing. This is where you make your arguments, present your evidence, and prove beyond a shadow of a doubt your astonishing cognitive capacities. What do you need to know here? Simply that the presentation of your arguments should be *clear*, *coherent*, and *supported by your evidence*. So, for example if you are arguing that children with Down Syndrome should be included in regular classrooms, you may make (for the purposes of this example) four arguments: inclusion is better for the child's learning; it is better for the child's socialization; it is better for the so-called "normal" child's learning and socialization; and it is better for the society as a whole.

Each of these arguments can be treated as a paper within a paper. That is, each argument should have a central claim (e.g., inclusion is better for the child's learning), should have a ***clear topic sentence or sentences*** that communicates the claim, and should be supported by evidence. Evidence to support your argument may be logical, emotional, or based on your character and experience—or a combination of these. Evidence might be deductive or inductive—or both. Evidence may consist of previously published sources (for example, Berube's writing), statistical information, or narrative

and personal experience—or different combinations of these. For some thoughts on the varieties of evidence, take a look at this: http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/evidence_use.html.

How much space for each argument? It's up to you. Your first argument might be one paragraph, 2-3 paragraphs, 2-3 pages. It's your call. What do you need to do and say to convince your audience that "inclusion is better for the child's learning"? What matters is that you make your case.

3. Only Connect: Transitions

As you move from point to point, you will need to help readers see the connections between your sentences, paragraphs, ideas. Transitions are signals to the reader. When you write, "In addition," you are about to add to the point you just made. When you write "Alternatively," you are offering a different point of view. When you write "Indeed," you are emphasizing a previous point. For a nice list of transitional devices, take a look at: http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/574/02/.

4. The Ethical Writer: Counterarguments

Most things in life aren't neat and clean, and neither are most research topics. No matter how brilliant, incisive, or devastating your logic, there will *always* be other points of view, other perspectives. And you must acknowledge these. In academic writing especially, you must show that you are familiar with the conversation, the objections, the qualifications, etc. Only a weak or inexperienced writer denies alternative or contrary points of view. Experienced writers take these head on—acknowledging them, crediting them when they are strong, disposing of them when they are inferior. The important thing is that you represent these other view *fairly* (don't misrepresent them just so you can knock them down—the straw man fallacy) and *honestly* (represent them, as best you can, as they would represent themselves).

Engaging alternative points of view is more than strategic; it is ethical. It is your way of acknowledging others in the world, treating them respectfully, and yet ultimately showing, to the best of your ability, why your views should carry the day.

The counterargument may come in different places in your essay. You almost certainly want to include an abbreviated version of the counterargument in your introduction: that's your *They Say* move. You may want to address the counterargument more fully right after your introduction. This is especially good if you believe your audience opposes your ideas. You may want to address counterarguments at the beginning or end of sub-argument. (Don't overdo this strategy of your paper will read like a tennis match: the ball getting batted this way, then that way, then this way, etc.) Finally, you may wish to hold off you've made all of your arguments, and address alternative perspectives then. You make the decision.

Here's how one writer handled a counter-argument, with editorial comments in brackets and underscored:

> Although there is obviously a strong case for introducing multicultural topics in the English classroom, not all would agree with the argument I've put forth here. One of the most vocal critics of my position is George Will. For example, Will's editorial in Newsweek states that the reason "Johnny Can't Write" is the misguided nature of English teachers who focus more on issues of multiculturalism, political correctness, new theories of reading such as deconstruction, and so on, than on the hard and fast rules for paragraph development, grammar, and sentence structure. [Summary: a concise yet fair summary of Will's main argument and proof used] Yet, as I have shown here, multicultural methods clearly do not interfere with teaching writing. [Refutation #1: Disproves Will's position by referring to research already cited.] Further, Will demonstrates a certain nostalgia in this piece for "older ways" that, although persuasive, has no research to back it up with the exception of Will's childhood memories. [Refutation #2: Exposes flaws in proof used by Will.] Although most of us think the way we were taught must be the right way, such is not necessarily the case. We should neither confuse nostalgia with research nor memory with the best curriculum. [Opposing argument: Memory and research are not the same; thus, Will's point is wrong.]

For some helpful thoughts on writing the counterargument, look here: http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~wricntr/documents/Counterarg.html

5. Your Incomparable Conclusion!

A conclusion, as Edward Corbett pointed out, is an *ending* rather than a *stopping*. That means that a conclusion should do more than simply recapitulate the arguments you have made throughout the paper. The conclusion can

1) *Reflect back to the introduction*. If you asked a question, for example, this is the place to be sure you have answered it.
2) *Summarize the points made previously*. Remind readers how all your arguments come together, and what they mean in the big picture.
3) *Generalize about a subject*. Your conclusion can also suggest how your study has wider implications for . . . etc. Then show what these are.
4) *Call to action*. This is the "next step" conclusion. Given what you've argued, what needs to be done? More research? Greater funding? Storming the barricades, etc?
5) *Make an emotional or moral appeal.* State why your issue goes beyond relatively narrow arguments of X or Y but instead speaks to the future of the society, the good of the world, the future of Notre Dame football, etc. In this conclusion, you want to stir readers, to make the feel, believe, act.

For thoughts on your incomparable conclusion, take a look at this:
http://leo.stcloudstate.edu/acadwrite/conclude.html

•

So that's it. Learn it, live it, breathe it, etc. The above won't answer all your questions, solve all your problems, teach you to play the sax, or even make you a great writer. But it will provide, I hope, a clear path forward. Finally remember that all good advice, all good rules, are meant to be, at the proper moment, disregarded, disobeyed, and disdained. So you should do, too. Just so that you understand what you're doing, and why you are doing it. Know the path before you diverge from it.

Rhetoric is sermonic! Go forth and change the world!