

Appendix B: Checklists and Editing Tips

The General Checklist

You should check for all of the following before turning in any paper.

- The introduction accurately reflects the argument and structure of the paper.
- Each sentence contributes to the paper. You have removed anything that is redundant or tangential.
- You have used simple language instead of jargon. If you have used specialized terms you have defined them in clear, straightforward terms.
- If you have discussed other authors, you have accurately represented their work. This means that you have double checked the context of all quotes to make sure that you have not taken anything out of context or misconstrued any points.
- Each paragraph is organized around a single main point, and includes a topic sentence that states this clearly.
- You have checked to make sure that each point you have made has been adequately defended, either with an example, a reference to the text, or a few explanatory sentences.
- You have checked for inconsistencies, gaps, and flaws in your arguments. As part of this, you have considered counter-arguments for each of your points.
- The conclusion sums up the main points of the paper.
- The paper is formatted a commonly used font like Time New Roman 12. It is doubled-spaced, with normal margins.
- You have checked to make sure that you have cited when necessary.

- The reference list is complete.
- The paper is proofread. You have checked for correct grammar and spelling.

Research Paper Checklist

Section 1: Research Question¹⁷

- Clear, focused, and feasible research question
- Description of variables
- Explanation of possible relationship
- Description of theory-testing or theory-generating research
- Operationalized variables
- Description of why question is meaningful

Section 2: Literature Review

- Overview of theoretical perspectives
- Appropriate citations, quotes, and paraphrasing
- Explanations of errors and/or gaps in literature
- Justification for research
- Discussion of any relevant epistemological issues

Section 3: Research Design/Methods

- Description of study population
- Explanation of sampling methods and frame
- Description of how to get entrée
- Justification for chosen method

Section 4: Ethical Considerations

- Addresses voluntary participation, informed consent and confidentiality
- Minimization of risk/harm to research subjects
- Possible benefits for participants
- Discussion of researcher's social position/power dynamic

¹⁷By Jennifer Randles

Section 5: Feasibility Study and Preliminary Analysis

- Description of patterns in the data
- Connects data to hypotheses/previous literature
- Discusses fit of research design to research question

Section 6: Conclusion

- Discusses possible changes
- Main lessons
- Connects findings to larger social issues/processes

Things that Annoy your Instructors

Almost all of your professors, Graduate Student Instructors, and Readers will be annoyed by sloppy papers, careless mistakes, and petty inconsiderate acts. Before you turn in a paper with any of the problems listed below, consider this: Do you really want to irritate the person who is about to give you a grade?

Sloppy Papers

None of these are capital offenses, but they don't signal to your grader that you've paid close attention to detail either!

- A paper that is not proofread, and so is filled with trivial spelling or grammatical errors.
- Basic identifying information, like the student's name or date, is missing.
- Pages are not stapled together, so that your instructor either has to do it for you or take extra care not to lose stray, unattached pages.
- Pages are printed on scrap paper.
- The instructor's name is misspelled. Another version of this is when the name of an author from the readings is misspelled. Check the syllabus to make sure that you have spelled all names correctly.

Cut corners and flimsy arguments

These are more serious offenses, and you risk losing credit in addition to annoying your instructor.

- A paper mostly filled with quotations or summaries of the points from lecture, so that the author appears to be simply regurgitating the material from class.

- Quotations unaccompanied by footnotes or references.
- Wikipedia-based research. Some instructors love Wikipedia, but those who don't like it really don't like it. You should always check with a professor before you cite it.
- Obvious mis-attributions and inaccurate statements about an assigned text, which suggests that the author has either not cracked the books at all, or has skimmed them so quickly as to miss main points and central examples.
- Big Sweeping Statements about the state of the world which are either banal or flat-out wrong (“Since the beginning of time man has longed for answers to the world’s mysteries” or “The civil rights movement vanquished racism in America”).
- Feelings where analyses should be. Use your emotions to inform your arguments, not in place of them.
- Crazy Formats in Short or Long Papers only serve to announce that you have chosen to disregard the requested page length of the assignment. Messing around with margins and fonts does not fool anyone. Instead of messing with the formatting, spend time paring down your work.

E-mail Etiquette

- Just because you sent your paper on email 15 minutes after it was due doesn't mean it is not late.
- Emailed documents should have your last name and the date in the title (for example: `JaneDoe_13AUG2007.doc`). Also include the name of the course in the subject line of your email. Professors get a great many papers emailed to them. These steps will make their lives easier.

Lazy Questions

- There are no stupid questions, but there certainly are lazy ones. It annoys instructors when students ask a question about something that they carefully spelled out for you already. If you have a question about the course or assignment, check the syllabus or prompt before asking for help.

Will This Thesis Make the Grade?

In the end, you may have spent a good deal of time writing your thesis and still not know if it's a good one.¹⁸ Here are some questions to ask yourself.

¹⁸This section excerpted from Dartmouth College's *Materials for Students: Developing Your Thesis*. By Karen Gocsik. [http://www.dartmouth.edu/~writing/materials/student/ac_paper/develop.shtml]

Appendix C: Recommended Reading

Becker, Howard. *Writing for Social Scientists*.

Booth, Wayne C., Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams. *The Craft of Research*.

Johnson, William A., et al. *Sociology Student Writer's Manual*.

Michigan Series in English for Academic & Professional Purposes. *A Course for Nonnative Speakers of English*.

Strunk and White. *The Elements of Style*.

University of Chicago Press. *The Chicago Manual of Style*.