Academic Writing Flowchart
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(Abridged: 2018)

Title

The title of the paper should be interesting, informative, and relevant

Abstract *(100-150 words)*

The Abstract should include at least four components:

    a. within the first two sentences, state the research question/problem
    b. then describe the sample as well as methods used
    c. then briefly state the main findings, being sure to tie them into the research question/problem
    d. if space permits, end with an implication or conclusion given the findings

Introduction *(1-2 pages)*

In the Introduction, be sure to:

    a. address "what is the research topic" (content)
    b. address "why is it important"
    c. identify the theoretical/framework
    d. explicitly state the research topic (specific)

In this section, identify the dependent variable(s) and key independent variables or concepts. Link and justify them.

Tell the reader what you will be doing.

Literature Review *(4-6 pages)*

Summarize the books and articles related to the topic. Link them to the dependent variable(s) and key independent variables.

Justify their inclusion.

Theory *(2-3 pages)*

<u>Framework</u>

Summarize the topic again and present hypotheses or expanded research question.

How is this study different? Link the discussion to the dependent variable(s), key independent variables, and past studies. Here, it is particularly important to couch the work in broader macro- and middle-range theories.

Logic Models

To make things easier for the reader/reviewer, consider including a visual logic or conceptual model. They are very helpful to visually demonstrate hypothesized relationships among variables of interest. Therefore, they make it easier for readers/reviewers to grasp the logic of the work.

This can be rather easily done using the "drawing" menu in Microsoft Word. Again, doing so will help the researcher (and thus the reader) think more clearly and succinctly about this work's theoretical model/approach.

Some helpful examples and instructions can be found by searching for "logic models" in Google or at either of these websites:

    a. W.K. Kellogg Foundation <wkkf.org>
    b. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention <cdc.gov>

Key Transition Paragraph

The paragraph immediately before the 'methods' section is an extremely important paragraph. In it, the author should:

    a. remind the reader of the research question
    b. again, briefly state the limitations of previous research in addressing the question/problem
    c. while referring to their own methodology, briefly tell the reader how this research will fill that gap.

In the end, that paragraph serves as a cognitive roadmap to remind the reader what the author is doing and what to expect from the paper/research.

Data & Methods (3-4 pages)

When describing the methods section, the author should keep two things in mind – specify and justify. The author should specify exactly what s/he is doing and what s/he is doing it on/with. And while doing so, justify exactly why that sample and methodology was used.

Describe data and variables. Identify limitations.
In a reader friendly fashion, describe and justify methods.
Organize/present the information in a logical format.

Findings (3-4 pages)

    Present findings, as well as atypical results.

    Don't forget to use a reader friendly approach and to organize/present the information in a logical format.

    Tell them – the reader/reviewer – what you are doing.

Discussion/Conclusion (4-6 pages)

    <u>Discussion</u>

    This section of the paper needs to (and not in this particular order):

    a. briefly summarize the important results
    b. inform the reader of what these results mean; what is their larger implication
    c. tie the results back into the literature, theories, and/or hypotheses discussed in the background/literature review (supported/refuted)
    d. discuss the limitations of the research
    e. make it even more clear how the research/findings contribute to the field (this could include policy implications)
    f. delineate areas for future research

    Don't make the mistake of simply (re)presenting the Findings section. Instead, pick out two or three important findings, highlight them, and then spend time developing those findings. Are there any theories which are particularly supported or refuted given these findings? Consider tying these findings back into the literature discussed earlier in the paper. If there is no such literature currently in the paper, add it, and then link it here.

    In short, it's here where the author's sociological imagination should shine brightest. Here the author should showcase her/himself as not just a consumer of knowledge, but a producer of it.

    <u>Conclusion</u>

    End the paper on a strong note. Consider restating the research problem, and offering, in light of this research, a succinct answer to the research question/problem. Most important, end strong!

    Tell them what you told them.

References, Tables, Endnotes (no page limit, per se)