

## STRUCTURING YOUR RESEARCH PAPER

Many writers find it helpful to structure their research papers in one of the following ways. Keep in mind, some strategies may be more appropriate to some disciplines than to others; in some cases, you may also want to apply a combination of these approaches:

1. **Problem-to-Solution:** In the first part of your paper, label a problem and explain its importance; in the second part, propose solutions for that problem based on your research.
2. **Cause-to-Effect or Effect-to-Cause:** If your research question (RQ) is “How does free trade affect the economy in Indonesia?”, you are beginning with a cause (free trade) and trying to explain the effects (the economy in Indonesia). If your RQ is “Why is Indonesia impoverished?”, your paper will attempt to explain the *causes* of a certain phenomenon.
3. **Unknown --> Known --> Unknown:** Raise a question (“unknown”), and use the research you have done (“known”) to answer it. After presenting your research and explaining your conclusions, you can label new questions raised by your research. What questions or problems have your sources overlooked?
4. **Comparison-and-Contrast:** Do your researchers provide different data? Do they provide similar data but *interpret* the data differently? Evaluate the merits and shortcomings of different approaches, and be specific about where your evaluation is coming from.

### Exercises

**\*Take about 10-15 minutes and write what you want your final paper to look like.** This will help you identify themes that are important to bring to the forefront and will also give you a sense of what you’re working toward. (As you get further into developing your research paper, you may repeat this exercise and find that things have changed.)

**\*On the blank side of a note-card, write down a specific topic that you are addressing.** On the back (lined) side of the card, write down the specific points that you want to make or discuss on that topic. Then, arrange your note-cards in an order that makes sense to you. This exercise may also help you to identify and set aside interesting-but-irrelevant topics from your research.

**\*Establish a particular color for each topic that you need to address.** Go through your research notes and paper drafts and assign each sentence, sometimes each part of a sentence, its corresponding color. This will give you a visual indicator of how similar ideas may be grouped together. You may then wish to subdivide groups.

**\*Cut and paste your paper, both physically and electronically.** Print off a copy of your notes or draft and cut it into paragraphs, chunks of paragraphs, sentences, or words. Then (in a room where there is not a fan or wind flow), rearrange the slips of paper in a way that makes sense to you; tape or glue them down in an order that you like. You could then electronically make those readjustments and reassess how this new structure contributes to building up your argument.

**\*Once you have composed some paragraphs, try writing a one-sentence summary in the margin next to each.** Look at your one-sentence summaries, and see if you need to re-order paragraphs or parts of paragraphs to help establish continuity in your thought.

Adapted from Bruce Ballenger’s *The Curious Researcher: A Guide to Writing Research Papers, Fourth Edition*. NY: Pearson-Longman, 2004.