

How to Write a Good Research Paper

1. Good research begins with a “do-able” topic. Most students’ problems with research papers stem from their failure to focus their topic on an area small enough to cover effectively within the space limitations of a class paper.

Take a look at the breadth of the topics chosen by authors in journals, such as the Academy of Management Review, and see how small and extremely specific these authors’ topics are. If most of these articles were presented in typed and double-spaced format, they would be thirty to forty pages long. This should give you some idea of how small and specific your topic should be, given the length of paper you will be writing.

Topic choice is one of the most difficult aspects of writing good research, but time spent selecting a topic will pay for itself when you begin to write the paper. The first step in determining a paper topic is to familiarize yourself with the area that you would like (or are required) to write about. Go to the library, look up your interest area, and see what people are writing about. If you are very thorough at this stage of your paper, you will begin to see that your subject area breaks out into smaller sub-areas, and that there are a number of topics discussed within each of these sub-areas as well. If you are interested in international business, you will quickly see that there are articles about international finance, international accounting, international management, etc. Then in any one of these sub-areas, there will be additional topic areas; in international management, there will be articles on international strategy, international business ethics and international human resource management. Within any one of these topical areas, there will be further sub-topics in compensation, staffing, and planning and development. Your paper topic should be focused at this level of your area of interest.