

# Chapter Ten

## The Research Essay

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### **A “Research Essay” or a “Research Project” instead of a “Research Paper”**

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Throughout this book, I’ve purposefully avoided the term “research paper” for three reasons. First, while teachers assign and students write essays in college classes that are commonly called “research papers,” there is no clear consensus on the definition of a research paper. This is because the definition of “research” differs from field to field, and even between instructors within the same discipline teaching the same course.

Second, while the papers we tend to call “research papers” do indeed include research, most other kinds of college writing require at least some research as well. All of the exercises outlined in Part Two of the book, “Exercises in the Process of Research” are examples of this: while none of these assignments are “research papers,” all of them involve research in order to make a point.

A third reason has to do with the connotations of the word “paper” versus the word “essay.” For me, “paper” suggests something static, concrete, routine, and uninteresting—think of the negative connotations of the term bureaucratic “paperwork,” or the policing mechanism of “showing your papers” to the authorities. On the other hand, the word “essay” has more positive connotations: dynamic, flexible, unique, and creative. The definitions of essay in dictionaries I have examined include terms like “attempt,” “endeavor,” and “a try.” As a writer, I would much rather work on something that was a dynamic and creative endeavor rather than a static and routine document. My hope is that you, as a student and a writer, feel the same way.

This chapter is about writing a research essay. While I cannot offer you *exact* guidelines of how to do this for each and every situation where you will be asked to write such a paper or essay, I can provide you with the general guidelines and advice you’ll need to successfully complete these sorts of writing assignments. In the next chapter, I’ll describe a few alternatives to presenting your research in a conventional essay.



## **Getting Ready: Questions to Ask Yourself About Your Research Essay**

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If you are coming to this chapter after working through some of the writing exercises in Part Two, “Exercises in the Process of Research,” then you are ready to dive into your research essay. By this point, you probably have done some combination of the following things:

- Thought about different kinds of evidence to support your research;
- Been to the library and the internet to gather evidence;
- Developed an annotated bibliography for your evidence;
- Written and revised a working thesis for your research;
- Critically analyzed and written about key pieces of your evidence;
- Considered the reasons for disagreeing and questioning the premise of your working thesis; and
- Categorized and evaluated your evidence.

In other words, you already have been working on your research essay through the process of research writing.

But before diving into writing a research essay, you need to take a moment to ask yourself, your colleagues, and your teacher some important questions about the nature of your project.

- **What is the specific assignment?**

It is crucial to consider the teacher’s directions and assignment for your research essay. The teacher’s specific directions will in large part determine what you are required to do to successfully complete your essay, just as they did with the exercises you completed in part two of this book.

If you have been given the option to choose your own research topic, the assignment for the research essay itself might be open-ended. For example:

Write a research essay about the working thesis that you have been working on with the previous writing assignments. Your essay should be about ten pages long, it should include ample evidence to support your point, and it should follow MLA style.

Some research writing assignments are more specific than this, of course. For example, here is a research writing assignment for a poetry class:

Write a seven to ten page research essay about one of the poets discussed in the last five chapters of our textbook and his or her poems. Besides your analysis and interpretation of the poems, be sure to cite scholarly research that supports your points. You should also include research on the cultural and historic contexts the poet was working within. Be sure to use MLA documentation style throughout your essay.



Obviously, you probably wouldn't be able to write a research project about the problems of advertising prescription drugs on television in a History class that focused on the American Revolution.

- **What is the main purpose of your research essay?**

Has the goal of your essay been to answer specific questions based on assigned reading material and your research? Or has the purpose of your research been more open-ended and abstract, perhaps to learn more about issues and topics to share with a wider audience? In other words, is your research essay supposed to answer questions that indicate that you have learned about a set and defined subject matter (usually a subject matter which your teacher already more or less understands), or is your essay supposed to discover and discuss an issue that is potentially unknown to your audience, including your teacher.

The “demonstrating knowledge about a defined subject matter” purpose for research is quite common in academic writing. For example, a political science professor might ask students to write a research project about the Bill of Rights in order to help her students learn about the Bill of Rights and to demonstrate an understanding of these important amendments to the U.S. Constitution. But presumably, the professor already knows a fair amount the Bill of Rights, which means she is probably more concerned with finding out if you can demonstrate that you have learned and have formed an opinion about the Bill of Rights based on your research and study.

“Discovering and discussing an issue that is potentially unknown to your audience” is also a very common assignment, particularly in composition courses. As the examples included throughout *The Process of Research Writing* suggest, the subject matter for research essays that are designed to inform your audience about something new is almost unlimited.

• **Hyperlink:** See “Chapter 5: The Working Thesis Exercise” and the guidelines for “Working With Assigned Topics” and “Coming Up With a Topic of Your Own Idea.”

Even if all of your classmates have been researching a similar research idea, chances are your particular take on that idea has gone in a different direction. For example, you and some of your classmates might have begun your research by studying the effect on children of violence on television, either because that was a topic assigned by the teacher or because you simply shared an interest in the general topic. But as you have focused and refined this initially broad topic, you and your classmates will inevitably go into different directions, perhaps focusing on different genres (violence in cartoons versus live-action shows), on different age groups (the effect of violent television on pre-schoolers versus the effect on teen-agers), or on different conclusions about the effect of television violence in the first place (it is harmful versus there is no real effect).

- **Who is the main audience for your research writing project?**

Besides your teacher and your classmates, who are you trying to reach with your research? Who are you trying to convince as a result of the research you have done?



What do you think is fair to assume that this audience knows or doesn't know about the topic of your research project? Purpose and audience are obviously closely related because the reason for writing something has a lot to do with who you are writing it for, and who you are writing something for certainly has a lot to do with your purposes in writing in the first place.

In composition classes, it is usually presumed that your audience includes your teacher and your classmates. After all, one of the most important reasons you are working on this research project in the first place is to meet the requirements of this class, and your teacher and your classmates have been with you as an audience every step of the way.

Contemplating an audience beyond your peers and teachers can sometimes be difficult, but if you have worked through the exercises in Part Two of *The Process of Research Writing*, you probably have at least some sense of an audience beyond the confines of your class. For example, one of the purposes "Critique Exercise" in Chapter 7 is to explain to your readers why they might be interested in reading the text that you are critiquing. The goal of the "Antithesis Exercise" in Chapter 8 is to consider the position of those who would disagree with the position you are taking. So directly and indirectly, you've probably been thinking about your readers for a while now.

Still, it might be useful for you to try to be even more specific about your audience as you begin your research essay. Do you know any "real people" (friends, neighbors, relatives, etc.) who might be an ideal reader for your research essay? Can you at least imagine what an ideal reader might want to get out of reading your research essay?

I'm not trying to suggest that you ought to ignore your teacher and your classmates as your primary audience. But research essays, like most forms of writing, are strongest when they are intended for a more specific audience, either someone the writer knows or someone the writer can imagine. Teachers and classmates are certainly part of this audience, but trying to reach an audience of potential readers beyond the classroom and the assignment will make for a stronger essay.

• **What sort of "voice" or "authority" do you think is appropriate for your research project?**

Do you want to take on a personal and more casual tone in your writing, or do you want to present a less personal and less casual tone? Do you want to use first person, the "I" pronoun, or do you want to avoid it?

My students are often surprised to learn that it is perfectly acceptable in many types of research and academic writing for writers to use the first person pronoun, "I." It is the tone I've taken with this textbook, and it is an approach that is very common in many fields, particularly those that tend to be grouped under the term "the humanities."

For example, consider this paragraph from Kelly Ritter's essay "The Economics of Authorship: Online Paper Mills, Student Writers, and First-Year Composition," which appeared in June 2005 issue of one of the leading journals in the field of composition and rhetoric, *College Composition and Communication*:



When considering whether, when, and how often to purchase an academic paper from an online paper-mill site, first-year composition students therefore work with two factors that I wish to investigate here in pursuit of answering the questions posed above: the negligible desire to do one's own writing, or to be an author, with all that entails in this era of faceless authorship vis-à-vis the Internet; and the ever-shifting concept of "integrity," or responsibility when purchasing work, particularly in the anonymous arena of online consumerism. (603, emphasis added)

Throughout her thoughtful and well-researched essay, Ritter uses first person pronouns ("I" and "my," for example) when it is appropriate: "I think," "I believe," "my experiences," etc.

This sort of use of the personal pronoun is not limited to publications in English studies. This example comes from the journal *Law and Society Review* (Volume 39, Issue 2, 2005), which is an interdisciplinary journal concerned with the connections between society and the law. The article is titled "Preparing to Be Colonized: Land Tenure and Legal Strategy in Nineteenth-Century Hawaii" and it was written by law professor Stuart Banner:

The story of Hawaii complicates the conventional account of colonial land tenure reform. Why did the land tenure reform movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries receive its earliest implementation in, of all places, Hawaii? Why did the Hawaiians do this to themselves? What did they hope to gain from it? This article attempts to answer these questions. At the end, I briefly suggest why the answers may shed some light on the process of colonization in other times and places, and thus why the answers may be of interest to people who are not historians of Hawaii. (275, emphasis added)

Banner uses both "I" and "my" throughout the article, again when it's appropriate.

Even this cursory examination of the sort of writing academic writers publish in scholarly journals will demonstrate my point: academic journals *routinely* publish articles that make use of the first person pronoun. Writers in academic fields that tend to be called "the sciences" (chemistry, biology, physics, and so forth, but also more "soft" sciences like sociology or psychology) are more likely to avoid the personal pronoun or to refer to themselves as "the researcher," "the author," or something similar. But even in these fields, "I" does frequently appear.

The point is this: using "I" is not inherently *wrong* for your research essay or for any other type of academic essay. However, you need to be aware of your choice of first person versus third person and your role as a writer in your research project.

Generally speaking, the use of the first person "I" pronoun creates a greater closeness and informality in your text, which can create a greater sense of intimacy between the writer and the reader. This is the main reason I've used "I" in *The Process of Research Writing*: using the first person pronoun in a textbook like this lessens the distance



between us (you as student/reader and me as writer), and I think it makes for easier reading of this material.

If you do decide to use a first person voice in your essay, make sure that the focus stays on your research and does not shift to you the writer. When teachers say “don’t use I,” what they are really cautioning against is the *overuse* of the word “I” such that the focus of the essay shifts from the research to “you” the writer. While mixing autobiography and research writing can be interesting (as I will touch on in the next chapter on alternatives to the research essay), it is not the approach you want to take in a traditional academic research essay.

The third person pronoun (and avoidance of the use of “I”) tends to have the opposite effect of the first person pronoun: it creates a sense of distance between writer and reader, and it lends a greater formality to the text. This can be useful in research writing because it tends to emphasize research and evidence in order to persuade an audience.

(I should note that much of this textbook is presented in what is called second person voice, using the “you” pronoun. Second person is very effective for writing instructions, but generally speaking, I would discourage you from taking this approach in your research project.)

In other words, “first person” and “third person” are both potentially acceptable choices, depending on the assignment, the main purpose of your assignment, and the audience you are trying to reach. Just be sure to consistent—don’t switch between third person and first person in the same essay.

- **What is your working thesis and how has it changed and evolved up to this point?**

If you’ve worked through some of the exercises in part two of *The Process of Research Writing*, you already know how important it is to have an evolving working thesis. If you haven’t read this part of the textbook, you might want to do so before getting too far along with your research project. Chapter Five, “The Working Thesis Exercise,” is an especially important chapter to read and review.

Remember: a *working* thesis is one that changes and evolves as you write and research. It is perfectly acceptable to change your thesis in the writing process based on your research.



### Exercise 10.1

Working alone or in small groups, answer these questions about your research essay before you begin writing it:

- What is the specific research writing assignment? Do you have written instructions from the teacher for this assignment? Are there any details regarding page length, arrangement, or the amount of support evidence that you need to address? In your own words, restate the assignment for the research essay.
- What is the purpose of the research writing assignment? Is the main purpose of your research essay to address specific questions, to provide new information to your audience, or some combination of the two?
- Who is the audience for your research writing assignment? Besides your teacher and classmates, who else might be interested in reading your research essay?
- What sort of voice are you going to use in your research essay? What do you think would be more appropriate for your project, first person or third person?
- What is your working thesis? Think back to the ways you began developing your working thesis in the exercises in part two of *The Process of Research Writing*. In what ways has your working thesis changed?

If you are working with a small group of classmates, do each of you agree with the basic answers to these questions? Do the answers to these questions spark other questions that you have and need to have answered by your classmates and your teacher before you begin your research writing project?

Once you have some working answers to these basic questions, it's time to start thinking about actually writing the research essay itself. For most research essay projects, you will have to consider at least most of these components in the process:

- The Formal Outline
- The Introduction
- Background Information
- Evidence to Support Your Points
- Antithetical Arguments and Answers
- The Conclusion
- Works Cited or Reference Information

The rest of this chapter explains these parts of the research essay and it concludes with an example that brings these elements together.



## **Creating and Revising a Formal Outline**

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Frequently, research essay assignments will also require you to include a formal outline, usually before the essay begins following the cover page. Formal outlines are sort of table of contents for your essay: they give the reader a summary of the main points and sub-points of what they are about to read.

The standard format for an outline looks something like this:

- I. First Major Point
  - A. First sub-point of the first major point
    - 1. First sub-point of the first sub-point
    - 2. Second sub-point of the first sub-point
  - B. Second sub-point of the first major point
- II. Second Major point

And so on. Alternatively, you may also be able to use a decimal outline to note the different points. For example:

- 1. First Major point
  - 1.1. First sub-point of the first major point
    - 1.1.1 First sub-point of the first sub-point
    - 1.1.2 Second sub-point of the first sub-point
  - 1.2. Second sub-point of the first major point
- 2. Second Major point

Sometimes, teachers ask student writers to include a “thesis statement” for their essay at the beginning of the outline.

Generally speaking, if you have one “point,” be it a major point or a sub-point, or sub-point of a sub-point (perhaps a sub-sub-point!), you need to have at least a second similar point. In other words, if you have a sub-point you are labeling “A.,” you should have one labeled “B.” The best rule of thumb I can offer in terms of the grammar and syntax of your various points is to keep them short and consistent.





Now, while the formal outline is generally the first thing in your research essay after the title page, writing one is usually the **last** step in the writing process. Don't start writing your research essay by writing a formal outline first because it might limit the changes you can make to your essay during the writing process.

Of course, a *formal* outline is quite different from a *working* outline, one where you are more informally writing down ideas and "sketching" out plans for your research essay before or as you write. There are no specific rules or methods for making a working outline-- it could be a simple list of points, it could include details and reminders for the writer, or anything in-between.

Making a working outline is a good idea, particularly if your research essay will be a relatively long and complex one. Just be sure to not confuse these two very different outlining tools.

If you're having trouble starting to write your research essay, revisit some of the tips I suggest in the "Brainstorming for Ideas" section of Chapter Five, "The Working Thesis Exercise."

### Exercise 10.2

- Working alone or in small groups, make a formal outline of an already completed essay. You can work with any of the sample essays in previous chapters in *The Process of Research Writing* or any other brief sample. **Don't** work with the sample research essay at the end of this chapter, though-- there is a sample formal outline included with it.
- If you and your classmates made a formal outline of the same essay, compare your outlines. Were there any significant differences in your approaches to making an outline? What were they?

### The Introduction

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Research essays have to begin somewhere, and this somewhere is called the "introduction." By "beginning," I don't necessarily mean *only* the first paragraph—introductions in traditional research essays are frequently several paragraphs long. Generally speaking though, the introduction is about 25 percent or less of the total essay; in other words, in a ten-page, traditional research essay, the introduction would rarely be longer than two and a half pages.

Introductions have two basic jobs to perform:

- To get the reader's attention; and
- To briefly explain what the rest of the essay will be about.



What is appropriate or what works to get the reader's attention depends on the audience you have in mind for your research essay and the sort of voice or authority you want to have with your essay. Frequently, it is a good idea to include some background material on the issue being discussed or a brief summary of the different sides of an argument. If you have an anecdote from either your own experience or your research that you think is relevant to the rest of your project or will be interesting to your readers, you might want to consider beginning with that story. Generally speaking, you should avoid mundane or clichéd beginnings like "This research essay is about..." or "In society today..."

The second job of an introduction in a traditional research essay is to explain to the reader what the rest of the essay is going to be about. This is frequently done by stating your "thesis statement," which is more or less where your working thesis has ended up after its inevitable changes and revisions.

A thesis statement can work in a lot of different places in the introduction, not only as the last sentence at the end of the first paragraph. It is also possible to let your readers know what your thesis is without ever directly stating it in a single sentence. This approach is common in a variety of different types of writing that use research, though traditionally, most academic research essays have a specific and identifiable thesis statement.

Let's take a look at this example of a **WEAK** introductory paragraph:

In our world today, there are many health problems, such as heart disease and cancer. Another serious problem that affects many people in this country is diabetes, particularly Type II diabetes. Diabetes is a disease where the body does not produce enough insulin, and the body needs insulin to process sugars and starches. It is a serious disease that effects millions of people, many of whom don't even know they have the disease. In this essay, I will discuss how eating sensibly and getting plenty of exercise are the most important factors in preventing Type 2 Diabetes.

The first two sentences of this introduction don't have much to do with the topic of diabetes, and the following sentences are rather vague. Also, this introduction doesn't offer much information about what the rest of the essay will be about, and it certainly doesn't capture the reader's attention.

Now, consider this revised and **BETTER** introductory paragraph:

Diabetes is a disease where the body does not produce enough of insulin to process starches and sugars



effectively. According to the American Diabetes Association web site, over 18 million Americans have diabetes, and as many as 5.2 million of these people are unaware that they have it. Perhaps even more striking is that the most common form of diabetes, Type 2 Diabetes, is largely preventable with a sensible diet and exercise.

This introduction is much more specific and to the point, and because of that, it does a better job of getting the reader's attention. Also, because it is very specific, this introduction gives a better sense to the reader where the rest of the essay will be leading.

While the introduction is of course the first thing your readers will see, **make sure it is one of the last things you decide to revise in the process of writing your research essay.** You will probably start writing your essay by writing an introduction—after all, you've got to start somewhere. But it is nearly impossible to write a very effective introduction if the rest of the essay hasn't been written yet, which is why you will certainly want to return to the introduction to do some revision work after you've written your essay.



### **Exercise 10.3**

- Working alone or in small groups, revise one of the following “bad” introductions, being sure to get the reader’s attention, to make clear what the essay being introduced would be about, and to eliminate unneeded words and clichés. Of course, since you don’t have the entire essay, so you may have to take certain liberties with these passages. But the goal is to improve these “bad beginnings” without changing their meaning.

#### **Example #1:**

In society today, there are many problems with television shows. A lot of them are not very entertaining at all. Others are completely inappropriate for children. It’s hard to believe that these things are on TV at all. In fact, because of a lot of the bad things that have been on television in recent years, broadcasters have had to censor more and more shows. They have done some of this voluntarily, but they have also been required to do this by irate advertisers and viewers as well. For example, consider Janet Jackson’s famous “wardrobe malfunction” at the 2004 Super Bowl. I contend that Jackson’s performance in the 2004 Super Bowl, accident or not, has lead to more censorship on television.

#### **Example #2:**

There are a lot of challenges to being a college student. We all know that studying and working hard will pay off in the end. A lot of college students also enjoy to cheer for their college teams. A lot of colleges and universities will do whatever it takes to have winning teams. In fact, some colleges and universities are even willing to allow in students with bad test scores and very low high school grades as long as they are great athletes and can make the team better. All of this leads to a difficult to deny observation: college sports, especially Division I football, is full of corruption and it is damaging the academic integrity of some of our best universities.



## Background Information (or Helping Your Reader Find a Context)

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It is always important to explain, contextualize, and orientate your readers within any piece of writing. Your research essay is no different in that you need to include background information on your topic in order to create the right context for the project.

In one sense, you're giving your reader important background information every time you fully introduce and explain a piece of evidence or an argument you are making. But often times, research essays include some background information about the overall topic near the beginning of the essay. Sometimes, this is done briefly as part of the introduction section of the essay; at other times, this is best accomplished with a more detailed section after the introduction and near the beginning of the essay.

How much background information you need to provide and how much context you need to establish depends a great deal on how you answer the "Getting Ready" questions at the beginning of this chapter, particularly the questions in which you are asked to consider your *purpose* and your *audience*. If one of the purposes of your essay is to convince a primary audience of readers who know little about your topic or your argument, you will have to provide more background information than you would if the main purpose of your essay was to convince a primary audience that knows a lot about your topic. **But even if you can assume your audience is as familiar with the topic of your essay as you, it's still important to provide at least some background on your specific approach to the issue in your essay.**

It's almost always better to give your readers "too much" background information than "too little." In my experience, students too often assume too much about what their readers (the teacher included!) knows about their research essay. There are several reasons why this is the case; perhaps it is because students so involved in their research forget that their readers haven't been doing the same kind of research. The result is that sometimes students "cut corners" in terms of helping their audience through their essay. I think that the best way to avoid these kinds of misunderstandings is for you to always remember that your readers don't know as much about your specific essay as you do, and part of your job as a writer is to guide your reader through the text.

In Casey Copeman's research essay at the end of this chapter, the context and background information for the subject matter after the introduction; for example:

The problems surrounding corruption in university athletics have been around ever since sports have been considered important in American culture. People have emphasized the importance of sports and the significance of winning for a long time. According to Jerome Cramer in a special report published in Phi Delta Kappan, "Sports are a powerful experience, and America somehow took this belief of the ennobling nature of sports and transformed it into a quasi-religion" (Cramer K1).



Casey's subject matter, college athletics, was one that she assumed most of her primary audience of fellow college students and classmates were familiar with. Nonetheless, she does provide some basic information about the importance of sports team in society and in universities in particular.

### **Weaving in Evidence to Support Your Point**

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Throughout your research essay, you need to include evidence that supports your points. There is no firm rule as to "how much" research you will want or need to include in your research essay. Like so many other things with research writing, it depends on your purpose, the audience, the assignment, and so forth. **But generally speaking, you need to have a piece of evidence in the form of a direct quote or paraphrase every time you make a claim that you cannot assume your audience "just knows."**

• **Hyperlink:** See "Chapter 3: "Quoting, Paraphrasing, and Avoiding Plagiarism" for more details on how to effectively introduce quotes and paraphrases into your research writing.

Stringing together a series of quotes and paraphrases from different sources might show that you have done a lot of research on a particular topic, but your audience wants to know your *interpretation* of these quotes and paraphrases, and your reader wants and needs to be guided through your research. To do this, you need to work at explaining the significance of your evidence throughout your essay.

For example, this passage does a **BAD** job of introducing and weaving in evidence to support a point.

In America today, the desire to have a winning team drives universities to admit academically unqualified students. "At many universities, the tradition of athletic success requires coaches to produce not only competitive by championship-winning teams" (Duderstadt 191).

The connection between the sentence and the evidence is not as clear as it could be. Further, the quotation is simply "dropped in" with no explanation. Now, compare it with this revised and **BETTER** example:

The desire to always have a winning team has driven many universities to admit academically unqualified student athletes to their school just to improve their sports teams. According to James Duderstadt, former president of the University of Michigan, the corruption of university athletics usually begins with the process of recruiting and admitting student athletes. He states that, "At many universities, the tradition of athletic success requires coaches to produce not only competitive but championship-winning teams" (Duderstadt 191).



Remember: the point of using research in writing (be it a traditional research essay or any other form of research writing) is not merely to offer your audience a bunch of evidence on a topic. Rather, the point of research writing is to interpret your research in order to persuade an audience.

### **Antithetical Arguments and Answers**

Most research essays anticipate and answer antithetical arguments, the ways in which a reader might disagree with your point. Besides demonstrating your knowledge of the different sides of the issue, acknowledging and answering the antithetical arguments in your research essay will go a long way toward convincing some of your readers that the point you are making is correct.

• **Hyperlink:** See “Chapter 8: “The Antithesis Exercise,” which offers strategies for researching, developing, and answering antithetical arguments in your research writing.

Antithetical arguments can be placed almost anywhere within a research essay, including the introduction or the conclusion. However, you want to be sure that the antithetical arguments are accompanied by “answering” evidence and arguments. After all, the point of presenting antithetical arguments is to explain why the point you are supporting with research is the correct one.

In the essay at the end of this chapter, Casey brings up antithetical points at several points in her essay. For example:

To be fair, being a student-athlete isn't easy. They are faced with difficult situations when having to juggle their athletic life and their academic life at school. As Duderstadt said, "Excelling in academics is challenging enough without the additional pressures of participating in highly competitive athletic programs" (Duderstadt 190). So I can see why some athletes might experience trouble fitting all of the studying and coursework into their busy schedules.



## The Conclusion

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As research essays have a beginning, so do they have an ending, generally called a conclusion. While the main purpose of an introduction is to get the reader's attention and to explain what the essay will be about, the goal of a conclusion is to bring the reader to a satisfying point of closure. In other words, a good conclusion does not merely "end" an essay; it wraps things up.

It is usually a good idea to make a connection in the conclusion of your essay with the introduction, particularly if you began your essay with something like a relevant anecdote or a rhetorical question. You may want to restate your thesis, though you don't necessarily have to restate your thesis in exactly the same words you used in your introduction. It is also usually not a good idea to end your essay with obvious concluding cues or clichéd phrases like "in conclusion."

Conclusions are similar to introductions on a number of different levels. First, like introductions, they are important since they leave definite "impressions" on the reader—in this case, the important "last" impression. Second, conclusions are almost as difficult to write and revise as introductions. Because of this, be sure to take extra time and care to revise your conclusion.

Here's the conclusion of Casey Copeman's essay, which is included at the end of this chapter:

As James Moore and Sherry Watt say in their essay "Who Are Student Athletes?", the "marriage between higher education and intercollegiate athletics has been turbulent, and always will be" (7). The NCAA has tried to make scholarly success at least as important as athletic success with requirements like Proposition 48 and Proposition 16. But there are still too many cases where under-prepared students are admitted to college because they can play a sport, and there are too still too many instances where universities let their athletes get away with being poor students because they are a sport superstar. I like cheering for my college team as much as anyone else, but I would rather cheer for college players who were students who worried about learning and success in the classroom, too.





#### Exercise 10.4

- If you worked with the examples in Exercise 10.3 on page xxx, take another look at the revised introductions you wrote. Based on the work you did in that exercise, write a fitting conclusion. Once again, since you don't have the entire essay, you'll have to take some liberties with what you decide to include in your conclusion.

#### “Works Cited” or “Reference” Information

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If I were to give you one and only one “firm and definite” rule about research essay writing, it would be that you **must** have a section following the conclusion of your essay that explains to the reader where the evidence you cite comes from. This information is especially important in academic essays since academic readers are keenly interested in the evidence that supports your point.

If you're following the Modern Language Association rules for citing evidence, this last section is called “Works Cited.” If you're following the American Psychological Association rules, it's called “References.” In either case, this is the place where you list the full citation of all the evidence you quote or paraphrase in your research essay. **Note that for both MLA and APA style, research you read but didn't actually use in your research essay is not included.** Your teacher might want you to provide a “bibliography” with your research essay that does include this information, but this is not the same thing.

☛ **Hyperlink:** For guidelines for properly citing your evidence and compiling “Works Cited” or “Reference” pages, see “Chapter 12: Citing Your Research Using MLA or APA Style.”

Frankly, one of the most difficult aspects of this part of the research essay is the formatting—alphabetizing, getting the spacing right, underlining titles or putting them in quotes, periods here, commas there, and so forth. Again, see the appendix for information on how to do this. But if you have been keeping and adding to an annotated bibliography as you have progressed through the process of research (as discussed in chapter six), this part of the essay can actually be merely a matter of checking your sources and “copying” the citation information from the word processing file where you have saved your annotated bibliography and “pasting” it into the word processing file where you are saving your research essay.

☛ **Hyperlink:** See the assignment for constructing an annotated bibliography in “Chapter 6: The Annotated Bibliography Exercise.”



**A Student Example:**  
**“The Corruption Surrounding University Athletics” by Casey K. Copeman**

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The assignment that Casey Copeman followed to write this research essay is similar to the assignment described earlier in this chapter:

Write a research essay about the working thesis that you have been working on with the previous writing assignments. Your essay should be about ten pages long, it should include ample evidence to support your point, and it should follow MLA style.

Of course, it's also important to remember that Casey's work on this project began long before she wrote this essay with the exercises she worked through to develop her working thesis, to gather evidence, and to evaluate and categorize it.



## The Corruption Surrounding University Athletics

By Casey Copeman

### Outline

- I. Introduction
- II. Origins and description of the problem
  - A. The significance of sports in our society
  - B. The drive and pressure for universities to win leads to admitting academically unqualified student athletes
- III. The Eligibility Rules Proposition 48 and Proposition 16
  - A. Proposition 48 explained
  - B. Proposition 16 explained
  - C. Proposition 16 challenged but upheld in the courts
  - D. Academic eligibility rules still broken
- IV. Rules Broken At School
  - A. The pressures faced by athletes and universities
    - 1. The pressures of being a student athlete
    - 2. The pressures put on universities to recruit "good players"
  - B. "Athletics" emphasized over studies indirectly and directly
    - 1. The indirect message is about sports above academics
    - 2. Occasionally, the message to emphasize sports is direct
    - 3. Student-athletes often steered into "easy" classes
  - C. Good student athletes, mostly in sports other than football and men's basketball, get a bad name
- V. Conclusion



Most young people who are trying to get into college have to spend a lot of time studying and worrying. They study to get good grades in high school and to get good test scores, and they worry about whether or not all of the studying will be enough to get them into the college of their choice. But there is one group of college students who don't have to study and worry as much, as long as they are outstanding football or basketball players: student athletes.

Issues involving student athletes with unsatisfactory test scores, extremely low grade point averages, special privileges given to them by the schools, and issues concerning their coaches' influence on them academically, have all been causes of concern with university athletics. The result is a pattern where athletics at the university level are full of corruption surrounding the academic standards and admittance policy that are placed upon some university athletes. In this essay, I will explain what I see as the source of this corruption and the ways in which academic standards are compromised in the name of winning.

The problems surrounding corruption in university athletics have been around ever since sports have been considered important in American culture. People have emphasized the importance of sports and the significance of winning for a long time. According to Jerome Cramer in a special report published in Phi Delta Kappan, "Sports are a powerful experience, and America somehow took this belief of the ennobling nature of sports and transformed it into a quasi-religion" (Cramer K1). Cramer also says,

"The original sin of sports in United States society seems to have been committed when we allowed our games to assume too much of our lives. It was as if we could measure our



moral fiber by the won/lost record of our local team. Once schools began to organize sports, winning became a serious institutional consideration. Our innocence vanished when we refused to accept losing" (Cramer K1).

This importance of sports and winning in the United States today is what has led to this corruption that we now see in our top universities when it comes to athletes and how they are treated by their schools.

The desire to always have a winning team has driven many universities to admit academically unqualified student athletes to their school just to improve their sports teams. According to James Duderstadt, former president of the University of Michigan, the corruption of university athletics usually begins with the process of recruiting and admitting student athletes. He states that, "At many universities, the tradition of athletic success requires coaches to produce not only competitive but championship-winning teams" (Duderstadt 191). This, in turn, "puts enormous pressure to recruit the most outstanding high school athletes each year, since this has become the key determinant of competitive success in major college sports"(Duderstadt 192).

According to Duderstadt, "Coaches and admissions officers have long known that the pool of students who excel at academics and athletics is simply too small to fill their rosters with players who meet the usual admissions criteria" (Duderstadt 193). This pressure put on coaches to recruit the best athletes "leads them to recruit athletes who are clearly unprepared for college work or who have little interest in a college education" (Duderstadt 193). This obviously leads to a problem because although most universities have standards that must be met for students to be admitted, "in all too many cases, recruited



athletes fail to meet even these minimum standards" (Duderstadt 193).

The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) set some minimum standards for admission in January of 1986. They had decided that "the time had come to make sure that college athletes were not only athletically qualified, but that they also were academically competent to represent schools of higher learning" (Cramer K4). Proposition 48 required that "all entering athletes score a minimum of 700 on their Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and achieve a minimum high school grade point average in core academic courses of 2.0, or sit out their first year" (Duderstadt 194). This seemed like a fairly reasonable rule to most universities around the country, and some even thought, "a kid who can not score a combined 700 and keep a C average in high school should not be in college in the first place" (Cramer K4).

In 1992, the NCAA changed these requirements slightly with the introduction of proposition 16. According to the document "Who Can Play? An Examination of NCAA's Proposition 16," which was published on the National Center for Educational Statistics in August 1995, Proposition 16 requirements are "more strict than the current Proposition 48 requirements. The new criteria are based on a combination of high school grade point average (GPA) in 13 core courses and specified SAT (or ACT) scores."

Some coaches and college athletes have argued against proposition 48 and proposition 16 because they claim that they unfairly discriminate against African-American students. According to Robert Fullinwider's web-based article "Academic Standards and the NCAA," some "black coaches were so incensed that they toyed with the idea of boycotting NCAA events." Fullinwider goes on:



John Thompson, then-coach of Georgetown University's basketball team, complained that poor minority kids were at a disadvantage taking the "mainstream-oriented" SAT. "Certain kids," he noted just after the federal court's decision, "require individual assessment. Some urban schools cater to poor kids, low-income kids, black and white. To put everybody on the same playing field [i.e., to treat them the same in testing] is just crazy."

Fullinwider writes that the legality of Proposition 16 was challenged in March 1999 on the basis that it was discriminatory to African-American student athletes. However, in its summary of the case *Cureton v. NCAA*, the Marquette University Law School [You Make the Call](#) web site explains that the federal courts ultimately decided that Proposition 16 was not a violation of students' civil rights and could be enforced by the NCAA.

With rules like Proposition 48 and Proposition 16, "the old practice of recruiting athletes who are clearly unqualified for admission with the hope that their contributions on the field will be sufficient before their inadequacy in the classroom, slowed somewhat" (Duderstadt 195). However, as facts show today, it seems as if these rules are harder to enforce in some universities than the NCAA originally thought.

There have been many documented instances of athletes being admitted to a university without even coming close to meeting the minimum requirements for academic eligibility set by the NCAA. One such instance happened just one year after Proposition 48 was enacted. North Carolina State University signed Chris Washburn, "one of the most highly recruited high school seniors in the nation" (Cramer K4). Although Washburn proved to be valuable to the team, it was later found out that "his combined score on the SAT was a whopping 470," and that he had "an abysmal academic record in high school" (Cramer K4). Both his



SAT score and his poor grades in high school all fell much lower than the standards set by the NCAA.

According to Art Padilla, former vice president for academic affairs at the University of North Carolina System, student athletes like Chris Washburn are not uncommon at most universities (Cramer K5). He states, "Every major college sports institution has kids with that kind of academic record, and if they deny it, they are lying" (Cramer K5).

The admitting of unqualified students is not the only place where colleges seem to step out of bounds though. Once the athlete has been admitted and signed with the university, for some, a long list of corruption from the university is still to follow when it comes to dealing with their academics.

Furthermore, many universities face a lot of pressure to recruit good players to their schools regardless of their academic skills. Debra Blum reported in 1996 about the case of a star basketball player who wanted to attend Vanderbilt University. As Blum writes, "Vanderbilt denied him (basketball player Ron Mercer) admission, describing his academic record as not up to snuff. So he enrolled at Kentucky, where he helped his team to a national championship last season" (A51). The case of Vanderbilt losing Mercer caused a lot of "soul searching" at Vanderbilt, in part because there was a lot of pressure from "other university constituents, particularly many alumni ... to do what it takes to field more-competitive teams, especially in football and men's basketball" (A51).

But these pressures are also the point where school officials are tempted to break the rules. As John Gerdy wrote in his article "A Suggestion For College Coaches: Teach By Example," in universities where the purpose of recruiting a great athlete is to improve the team, they often claim, "intercollegiate athletics are about education, but it is





obvious that they are increasingly about entertainment, money, and winning" (28).

Mixed messages are sent when some student-athletes "are referred to as "players" and "athletes" rather than "students" and "student-athletes" (Gerdy 28). It is clear that these student-athletes are sometimes only wanted for their athletic ability, and it is also clear that there are sometimes many pressures to recruit such students. As Austin C. Wherwein said, many student athletes "are given little incentive to be scholars and few persons care how the student athlete performs academically, including some of the athletes themselves" (Quoted in Thelin 183).

In some cases, coaches directly encourage students to emphasize their athletic career instead of their studies. One such instance, reported in Sports Illustrated by Austin Murphy, involves an Ohio State tailback, Robert Smith, who quit the football team "saying that coaches had told him he was spending too much time on academics" (Murphy 9). Smith claims that offensive coordinator Elliot Uzelac "encouraged him to skip a summer-school chemistry class because it was causing Smith, who was a pre-med student, to miss football practice" (Murphy 9). Smith did not think this was right so he walked off the team (Murphy 9). Supposedly, "the university expressed support for Uzelac, who denied Smith's allegations" (Murphy 9).

Another way some universities sometimes manage the academic success of their student-athletes is to enroll them in easier classes, particularly those set up specifically for student-athletes. The curriculum for some of these courses is said to be "less than intellectually demanding"(Cramer K2). Jan Kemp, a remedial English professor at the University of Georgia who taught a class with just football players for students, was "troubled by the fact that many of her students seemed incapable



of graduating from college" (Cramer K2). This seems surprising, but in fact some athletes from the University of Georgia "were described as being given more than four chances to pass developmental studies classes" without ever being successful (Cramer K2). Also, "school records show that in an effort to keep athletes playing, several were placed in the regular academic curriculum without having passed even the watered-down classes" (Cramer K2). Although this particular story comes from the University of Georgia, it is not just unique to that school. Many universities have been guilty of doing such things for their athletes just so they could continue to play on the team.

Of course, not all student-athletes are bad students. Many student-athletes actually do well in school and excel both athletically and academically. But although these true "student-athletes" do exist, they are often overshadowed by those negative images of athletes who do not do as well in school. And while all sorts of different sports have had academic problems with their athletes, the majority of corruption at the university level exists in football and basketball teams (Cramer K3). According to Duderstadt, "football and basketball are not holding their own when it comes to student academic honors" (Duderstadt 190). He says "Football and basketball have developed cultures with low expectations for academic performance. For many student-athletes in these sports, athletics are clearly regarded as a higher priority than their academic goals" (Duderstadt 191). So although this label of the bad student-athlete does not even come close to applying to all athletes, some universities are still considered, as John Thelin wrote in his book Games Colleges Play, "academically corrupt and athletically sound" (199).

As James Moore and Sherry Watt say in their essay "Who Are Student Athletes?", the "marriage between higher education and



intercollegiate athletics has been turbulent, and always will be" (7). The NCAA has tried to make scholarly success at least as important as athletic success with requirements like Proposition 48 and Proposition 16. But there are still too many cases where under-prepared students are admitted to college because they can play a sport, and there are too still too many instances where universities let their athletes get away with being poor students because they are a sport superstar. I like cheering for my college team as much as anyone else, but I would rather cheer for college players who were students who worried about learning and success in the classroom, too.



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