

Summary of *The Craft of Research*

Students are asked to write dozens of papers while they are in college. But where are they supposed to get the training to write solid, well-researched reports? *The Craft of Research* is a guide to researching, structuring, organizing, writing, and documenting *any* topic of interest. My research methods students (COMM 250) are required to buy it and read it. Here is a summary of the main points.

Booth, W., Colomb, G., & Williams, J. (1995). The craft of research. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Part 1: Research, Researchers, & Readers

Chap. 1 – Thinking in Print: The Uses of Research, Public & Private

What is Research?

Gathering information needed to answer a question

Who does research?

Most of us do (informal) research every day

Why do research?

Research by others determines most of what each of us believes about the world

Why write it up?

1. To remember
2. To understand
3. To gain perspective

Why turn it into a formal paper? (and learn new rules for presenting the information?)

1. It will give you new ways of thinking
2. Since it is more demanding to write for other, your ideas and connections among them will be clearer

Chap. 2 – Connecting with Your Readers: (Re-)Creating Your Self and Your Audience

Conversations among researchers:

1. Research papers and “term” papers are conversations
2. You must be aware of your audience
3. What type of relationship do you want with them?
4. You get to create a “role” for yourself and your reader

Think about your readers:

1. We know things about them:
 - they have their own interests and preconceived ideas
2. Is your question is a “live” issue in your community or readers?
3. Where do your readers stand in respect to your answer?
4. What do you expect of your readers:

- accept new knowledge
- change beliefs
- perform an action

Writers and their common problems:

1. Experts have the same problems as novices, but are better equipped
2. Be aware uncertainties will arise
3. Master your topic by writing about it along the way
4. Control the complexities of your task
5. Count on your teacher to understand your struggles
6. Keep at it

Part 2: Asking Questions, Finding Answers

Three keys for working in groups:

1. Talk together a lot
2. Agree to disagree, then to agree
3. Organize yourself into a team with a leader

Three strategies for working in groups:

1. Divide, delegate, & conquer
2. Write side-by-side
3. Take turns

Chap. 3 – From Topics to Questions

The process of choosing what to research:

1. Interests: Choose an interest in a broad subject area
2. Topics: Narrow the interest to a plausible topic
3. Questions: Question that topic from several points of view
- :
4. Problems: Define a rationale for your project

Each step requires getting more specific. There are four perspectives on research topics that can help you narrow your interest to a research question:

1. Identify the parts and whole of your topic and questions
2. Trace the history and changes of your topic
3. Identify its categories and characteristics
4. Determine its value

Making the case for the significance of a research question:

1. Name your topic
2. Suggest a question
3. Motivate the question

Chap. 4 - From Questions to Problems

The research cycle:

Practical problems lead to research problems, and the answers are intended to help solve the practical problems.

Practical problems:

1. originate in the world
2. Are based on some cost to society
3. Are solved by taking action in the real world

Research problems:

1. originate in your mind
2. Are based on incomplete knowledge or flawed understanding
3. Are solved by gathering useful information

Applied Research:

1. The rationale for the research defines what you wish to DO
2. The consequences of the research are tangible
3. The research is “applied” because knowledge gained will be applied to solve an immediate practical problem

“Pure” Research:

1. The rationale for the research defines what you wish to KNOW
2. The consequences of the research are conceptual
3. The research is “pure” because knowledge is pursued for its own sake

Chap. 5 - From Questions to Sources

Three types of sources:

Primary	Materials that you are directly writing about; data
Secondary	Books and articles in which others report their research
Tertiary	Books and articles that describe or synthesize the research of others

NOTE: Your instructor disagrees with the above categories. Scholars in communication and most other social sciences generally agree on the following dichotomy:

Primary	First-hand reports of research (e.g., journal articles)
Secondary	Second-hand reports of the research of others (e.g., textbooks)

Chap. 6 – Using Sources

Using secondary sources:

1. One good source is worth more than dozens of mediocre sources
2. One accurate summary of a good source is worth more than the source itself

Read critically:

1. Evaluate your sources
2. Take full notes
3. Get complete bibliographical information
4. Get attributions right
5. Get the context right
6. Get help – ask others to review your ideas and writing

Part 3: Making a Claim and Supporting It

Chap. 7 - Making Good Arguments

4 components:

Claims	what the reader is asked to accept (believe)
Evidence	why
Warrants	why the evidence is (necessary &) sufficient
Qualification	limits on the claims

Qualifications - (pay me now or pay me later)

- can qualify in the hypotheses
- can qualify after evidence doesn't fully support the hypotheses

Chap. 8 - Claims and Evidence

Anticipate the “So What?!” question

The nature of claims - must be . . . (or readers will dismiss . . .)

- substantive
- contestable (non-intuitive, requires convincing)
- specific

The nature of evidence - must be . . . (or readers will dismiss . . .)

- accurate
- at right level of detail (precision)
- sufficient
- representative (properly generalizable)
- authoritative (methods, literature citations, constructs, etc.)
- perspicuity (clear; plainly understood due to clarity of presentation; the proper level of detail/explanation)

Evidence is esp. Important because readers predisposed to reject your claims will question your evidence carefully.

OUTLINE YOUR ARGUMENT !

Chapter 9 - Warrants

Warrants:

- if X then Y

Warrants - 3 criteria:

- describe the (general kind of) evidence
- describe the general kind of claim that follows
- describe the connection (cause/effect, correlation, intervening)

Clear thinking required !!!

- false warrants
- unclear warrants
- inappropriate warrants
- inapplicable warrants

Chap. 10 - Qualifications

Be Reasonable! (In your claims)

- anticipate and address objections
- concede (if you can't rebut)
- stipulate limiting conditions
- limit the scope and certainty of claims & evidence

Part 4: Preparing to Draft, Drafting, & Revising

Chap. 11 - Pre-Drafting and Drafting

It's easy to put off writing. But if you write as you go (as you read, organize, and plan) starting the first draft is much easier. You know you are ready to start the first draft if you have thought about:

1. Your major research question
2. A possible answer
3. A body of evidence to support the answer
4. The major warrants
5. The objections you will have to rebut
6. The objections you cannot rebut

A plan for drafting:

1. Write out your main point, then determine where to put it (typically, the last sentence of your introduction)
2. Formulate a "working" introduction (but plan to write a final version of the introduction LAST!)
3. Follow the intro with the information needed for readers to understand the rest of the paper
4. Rework your outline. Try different approaches. Reliable approaches include:
 - old to new
 - shorter & simpler to longer & more complex
 - uncontested to more contested

Some people write “quick & dirty” drafts, others need to write “slow & clean,” perfecting the paper sentence by sentence. Quick & dirty writing has several advantages:

1. Going with the flow; getting ideas down as you think of them (not stopping to fix spelling and sentence structure)
2. When the flow stops, you have other tasks to do

Pitfalls to avoid at all costs:

1. Straightforward plagiarism of words (quote the source!)
2. Straightforward plagiarism of ideas (cite the source!)
3. Indirect plagiarism of words (changing a few words is still plagiarism!)
4. Become aware you are plagiarizing. One test:
 - if your eyes are on the source work, not your paper or computer screen, as you type - you are probably plagiarizing

The biggest difference between good and poor writing is the attitude about the first draft:

- poor writers see the first draft as a triumph – they are near the end!
- Good writers see the first draft as a sketch – now comes the equally important work of refining the paper

Chap. 12 - Communicating Evidence Visually

No summary is provided here since it requires accompanying examples. Please see the text.

Chap. 13 - Revising Your Organization and Argument

Again, keep the *reader* in mind.

More important than punctuation and spelling is the big picture:

- how well do the major elements fit together?
- Does it tell a complete story?

Four steps in analyzing and revising the organization of the paper:

1. Identify sentences that clearly summarize your introduction, conclusion, and main claim
2. Identify the major sections of the paper and the “main point” sentences for each
3. Identify in the introduction your central concepts and be sure you’ve focused on them throughout
4. Step back to examine the overall shape of your paper

Revising your argument:

1. Identify your argument
2. Evaluate the quality of your argument
 - Is the evidence clearly connected to your claim?
 - Have you qualified your argument?
 - Do you provide reasons and anticipate objections?
 - What warrants have you left unexpressed?
(What else must the readers believe before they accept your claims?)

Chap. 14 - Revising Style: Telling Your Story Clearly

Three principles of clear writing:

1. Stories and grammars (advice about making sentence subjects the main “characters” in your paper, avoid “nominalizing” verbs, etc.)
2. Old before new (present new information after familiar information)
3. Complexity last (present simple information before complex information)

Chap. 15 - Introductions

The structure of a good introduction:

1. Provide context for your ideas
2. State the problem
 - Incomplete knowledge about some topic
 - The consequences of that incomplete knowledge
3. Provide a solution or response too the problem
 - This is your main point and main claim