

Research Paper Outline

(Your paper should be written in narrative form in APA style—this outline is simply for you to make sure that you include all of these items.)

I. Introduction (2 pages maximum)

- A. Statement of the problem—rationale—hypotheses
- B. Significance of the problem—Why is this problem important to examine? You may want to cite relevant statistics, *e.g.*, “In 1996, juveniles between the ages of 12 and 18 committed nearly 25% of the violent crime in the U.S. (U.S. Department of Justice, 1997).”
- C. Purpose of the study-What are you trying to answer? Why are you undertaking this study (other than, because I have to do it if I want to graduate and get my MSW)?

II. Literature Review (5 pages maximum)

- A. This is where you link theory to your problem. Present a review of at least 10 journal articles that summarize some previous research in the topic area. This should include conceptual articles regarding theory that relates to the problem and previous empirical research that has been done on this problem. Only articles published in professional journals can be used. Examples include *Social Work*, *Families in Society*, *Journal of Social Work Education*, etc.
 1. Organize your literature—you do not need for all of your articles to support your research—search for balance.
 2. Keep in mind the point you are making about each article. It may help to write an introductory sentence to the paragraph that contains the details about the article
 3. Note patterns among the articles — understanding why you are including a study gives you a better idea of how to include it.
 4. Integrate your literature review---do not simply summarize each article in one paragraph....tell the readers a story that you want them to understand so that they can follow your thinking about the problem.
- B. Intervention description—**if you are evaluating a program**, for example, a group for aggressive children, a parenting program, *etc.*, then you need to have a brief explanation of the intervention. What is it? How often do participants meet and for how long? Who leads it? If you are not evaluating a program, you do not need this section.
- C. Research Question and Hypotheses – clearly state your hypotheses, including your null and alternative hypotheses. State your overarching question.

III. Methodology

- a. Subjects/participants—population, sampling, descriptive traits
 1. Identify your target population (the group to whom the study’s results are expected to apply).
 2. Explain how you have drawn your sample from this population.
 3. Discuss procedures you used to **protect the rights of research participants**. Discuss consent forms and include one as an appendix to your paper. Discuss confidentiality/anonymity and benefits/risks of the project on the participants.

- b. Instrumentation—
 - 1. Define the measures that you used to collect data.
 - 2. If your research used an existing instrument, describe what it should accomplish (including any subscales) and justify your use of the instrument. Discuss reliability and validity. Include some sample items in your narrative. Attach a copy to the paper as an appendix.
 - 3. If you developed your own instrument, describe its purpose and relevance. Provide a copy of the instrument. Justify your use of the instrument and describe how you assessed reliability and validity.
- c. Data Collection Strategy
Describe the research design you plan to use, i.e., describe the specific, concrete steps that you will take to collect the data. For example, you may interview people door-to-door in a neighborhood, or you may ask teachers to complete measures on children in school, etc. **Be specific and detailed** in your response. The reader should be able to replicate your study. Discuss why you chose this method to examine your research question.

IV. Results

- A. Make sure to tell me details of the final sample, how many out of how many, etc. Make sure that you use tables, graphs, charts, information related to your analysis of the variables belongs in this section. All results should be reported here. You may need to integrate findings for reporting. See APA manual for guidelines on developing tables. **Do not use SPSS tables.**

V. Discussion

- A. Evaluation of the results. Indicate how the analysis supports or doesn't support your hypotheses. Acknowledge negative findings. Offer explanations when you have information that may not fully support your propositions. Discuss what might be interesting about your findings such as alternative explanations that might be plausible.
- B. Discuss methodological strengths and limitations of your study. Directions for further study.
- C. Implications for social work practice.

VI. Conclusion

VII. **References**—alphabetical order in APA style.

VIII. **Abstract**—summary of the study. Tells the purpose of the study, the method, results and conclusions. It is a brief but comprehensive overview of the contents of the paper and **it belongs at the front of the paper.**

IX. Your final paper –

- A. Must be stapled in the upper left hand corner.
- B. Make sure all pages are numbered as per APA format.
- C. Papers will be collected along with CD on the day of the in class presentations. No excuses will be accepted for late work.