# Research Is Back

## Handbook on Academic Writing for Students of Humanities

Edited by
Tara Pešić &
Jovana Milovanović

NAUKA SE VRAĆA
RESEARCH IS BACK

Продукција
Алумни
Филолошког
Факултета

United States Embassy
Serbia

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## Handbook on Academic Writing for Students of Humanities

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# Contents

# Foreword

# Academic and Personal Maturation During Graduate Studies

**Jelena Filipović & Ana Kuzmanović Jovanović**
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Learning process at all educational levels, and even more so in the master's and PhD programs, implies high levels of not only expertise in the academic knowledge of both educators and their students, but also interpersonal communicative competence and capacity for team work. Moreover, it is always a chance for personal growth and academic maturation of all members of the advanced learning communities. The way which leads to the final outcome of graduate programs is always paved with challenges. It exposes our vulnerabilities and shortcomings (both as educators and as students) on emotional, psychological, social and cognitive levels. However, if understood and carried out properly it makes us not only better scientists but also better human beings. The fact that teaching and learning processes are always connected to our personal and academic experiences is not a recent development: "we learn from books or the sayings of others only as they are related to experiences" (Dewey, 1907: 31). Therefore, academic maturation is also "integral to the capacity for reflection on the world, on the human position in the world, and on the human power to transform the world" (Freire, 2005: 75, cit. in Filipović, Jovanović & Gets, 2021: 2). The knowledge that we acquire all throughout our educational experience

impacts our identities and shapes our understanding of the world and interpersonal relationships we develop in different stages of our lives (Filipović, 2020).

Recent educational theories focus on sociocultural contexts of education and on the idea that knowledge is not something "served on a platter" by the almighty teachers from the heights of their academic ivory towers (to apply all the most commonly known metaphors). They emphasize the need to step away from an educational model in which the teacher is the source of all knowledge that must not be questioned and to discard with the so-called "banking model" of education as defined by the Brazilian educator Paolo Freire (2005) which glorifies the teacher who is a subject in the process of "pouring" knowledge into the "empty" vessels (i.e., heads) of their students. This model of education, which has been shaping our educational history since the 18th century and the creation of the ideology of Modernity, values pure reproduction of knowledge, and measures achievements by standardized tests and the outcomes of the educational process by skills that can be "cashed in" on the labor market: The less we ask, the less we doubt, the more we are worth to employers and society, which sets before us goals defined by the seemingly absolute chances of each of us (Filipović & Kuzmanović Jovanović, 2020).

Modern constructivist theories of knowledge creation emphasize the fact that there is no absolute knowledge of academic truth, which is, as everything else in our worlds, shaped by the contexts in which is produced. Every scientific fact (historical, linguistic, technical, medical, etc.) cannot be taken for granted without an application of a critical analysis of the history and circumstances of its creation (including political and economic contexts, academic and overall ideologies, as well as personal strategic interests of the researchers themselves).

Consequently, when designing our learning communities at the graduate level, we must be ready to think critically about the facts that the educational system confronts us with, to evaluate them and, when necessary, revalue or revise them. Critical thinking, based on purposeful application of the already existing academic knowledge joined with the researchers' personal and collective cognitive cultural models, needs to be meaningful and contextualized (in time and space), and needs to be useful in organizing data into information in order to construct relevant and purposeful models and theories of knowledge construction which can be then shared with other members of larger academic communities.

In times of great technological advancements (IT tools and AI in the first place), when the access to raw data and information (often not critically constructed) has become a norm in our educational systems, the challenges of creating a learning, teaching and maturation environment in which individual needs and collective objectives of current and future Master's and PhD students are addressed adequately, has never been more difficult. To all those educators and their students torn between the extremes of factual knowledge

received and processed axiomatically, on one hand, and the AI supported and produced academic narratives adopted without critical interaction with bodies of academic literature (and often applied mechanically without ever being properly read in the process of academic writhing), the handbook *Research Is Back* presents itself as an excellent and innovative tool which helps all learning communities learn to think critically, to select and classify data and shape them into information, and to become competent writers and presenters of systematic and competent arrangement of information into a body of old and new knowledge. This further encourages leadership and autonomy in learning and teaching, and at the same time clearly leads to the development of critical self-awareness regarding the respect of rights and obligations at the level of not only academic communities, but within the broader social contexts (which include social class, gender, ethnicity, race, etc.) as well. New knowledge becomes created through a constructive dialogue with all interested parties who not only respond to the generally outlined outcomes of encyclopedic knowledge, but also acknowledges the knowledge that students bring from their own life experience, as well as knowledge from the environment that recognizes both good experiences and identifies painful spots in our societies, thus weaving innovative social nets required for emancipatory social action.

*Research Is Back* is written by a group of PhD students who thoroughly and systematically guide their readership through the process of academic maturation. They selflessly share their experiences and provide their readership with extremely valuable pieces of carefully selected existing academic knowledge when referring to the concepts of academic writing, academic literature, research hypotheses and design of methodological procedures, effective article preparation with clear rationale and the need to convince your academic audiences of the relevance of your findings. Moreover, the authors address psychological aspects of academic maturation (procrastination in academic writing) as well as ethical issues of copyright and plagiarism and autoplagiarism in preparation of academic texts and delivery of scientific results. Furthermore, it provides clear instructions on academic paper writing which empower their peers to effectively communicate their research, meet the expected standards of their discipline, and develop crucial skills that will serve their academic and professional careers.

Consequently, this is not yet another handbook about technicalities in academic writing: this is a valuable document targeting academic communities "characterized by a sense of 'interpersonal responsibility'" (Lincoln & Denzin, 2005: 1118), in which self-reflection upon all academic and social practices, and critical evaluation of the ways we learn and teach" (Filipović, 215: 120) is the key to a  better understanding of different roles that we perform in a number of learning communities of practice that we engage in throughout our academic and professional lives.

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# Chapter 1
# Introduction to Academic Writing

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*If we knew what it was we were doing, it would not be called research, would it?*
**Albert Einstein**

This handbook was created as a result of a team of PhD students working together towards the same goal – to bring students closer to academic writing and to help them not feel intimidated by the workload. It was designed as peer-to-peer support for students who wish to learn how to navigate research, develop their academic-writing skills and publish (and also present) their papers for academic purposes.

But first, a little bit of background: the idea to publish a handbook for students came out of an ongoing project, Research Is Back, which is now in its second year of realization and is sponsored by the U.S. Embassy in Belgrade through the English Language Small Grant Program. Our team consists of alumni of the Faculty of Philology, most of whom are currently working toward their PhDs and all of whom teach at educational institutions in Serbia.[1] Driven by the fact that university students in Belgrade, and beyond, have little to zero experience with actual academic writing and research, we decided to use our alumni network as a platform to apply for a grant and realize four cycles of eight-week peer-to-peer workshops on academic writing for undergraduate, master, and PhD students at the Faculty of Philology. Following up on positive feedback from the participants, we took a step further and decid-

1 You can meet our team at the end of the handbook.

ed to combine all the workshops into a useful, accessible handbook students can easily digest before they throw in the towel and give up on their writing. More importantly, we believe this handbook could reach a much larger audience of students who may not be able to attend Research Is Back workshops in person but still need that extra push that would help them turn their academic plans and ideas into a professional, academic piece of writing, be it a paper for a journal or a master's thesis. It is no secret that writing often feels like a lonely process, but it may not be so with a little bit of help from our team whose tips you can go back to time and again.[2]

Subject-wise, our team tried to cover all the relevant elements in the process of academic writing. Each chapter in the handbook was written by one member of our project team. In this introduction, you are going to learn about the importance of academic writing – why do we conduct research, and why do we publish our findings? This is something we will discuss a bit further. In the remaining chapters, we guide you through the processes of finding the right literature, crafting hypotheses, setting up a methodology framework, collecting and analyzing data, structuring your article, using proper citations and references, and finally, applying for academic conferences and presenting and publishing your paper(s).

Our focus rests both on the perspective of linguistics and literature. In this handbook we tried to highlight the specificities related to language research on one hand and literature research on the other. We would also like to emphasize that, just like the workshops, this handbook was created with university students of philology in mind, and it is, therefore, adapted to the field of humanities. It may also be used by students from other areas of study, but we understand it is important for the reader to be familiar with the approach taken before turning to the next page and using this handbook in their own work.

## Laying the Foundation

The main idea behind this introductory chapter is to, as its name says, introduce you to the world of academic writing, and let you take the first steps towards having your own work published and/or presented to the global academic community. In the following paragraphs, you will read about some of the aspects of academic writing we believe are crucial for students to learn before they dive into their own research:



2 To find information about our academic community at the end of this handbook, join or follow our social media pages for more research content.

- how to discern scientific information from other information
- what makes scientific research relevant and why we do it
- what forms of academic writing are commonly written by students
- why peer support is important
- why research skills matter beyond formal education.

In the process of conducting academic research and preparing ourselves for the actual process of writing, we primarily work with scientific information. The aim of scientific information is to serve a specific scientific purpose, namely, to help explain phenomena and processes. However, no matter how reliable, valid, or valuable this information is, it cannot be scientifically relevant until it is made public. That is where the writing and publishing bit comes in. It is therefore of utmost significance for all members of the scientific community to inform both the public and the experts in their field about their findings, or, in other words, share their knowledge with the world (Kundačina & Banđur, 2007). According to Bordens and Abbot, each piece of scientific work should consist of an optimal amount of information necessary to develop one's attitude or further validate or confirm the veracity of such information. Scientific knowledge is characterized by its empirical nature, susceptibility to change, methodological framing, possibility of validation and evaluation, and general relevance (Bordens & Abbot, 1991). In order for information to be construed as scientific, it should be reliable, specific, and collected in a systematic way (Silobrčić, 2003).



Once we begin sorting through the information available within our field of interest is when the research has started. Nowadays, researchers participate in what Filipović refers to as the "industrial intellectual process," meaning that very little research is performed as an individual endeavor. When studying a topic, our work is often collective, combined with or related to the research performed by other researchers across the world (Filipović, 2004: 136). However, much of the research process rests on an individual's intellectual capacity (Kundačina & Banđur, 2007). Research is complex and requires careful organization, which means that a researcher should have a knack, or rather, a certain aptitude for academic study in order to be able to locate, register, collect, analyze, store, and utilize the research material appropriately. In terms of skillfulness, or what Kundačina and Banđur (2007: 12) refer to as research and communication competence, there are three elements we should bear in mind:

(1) motivation – one's personal and professional curiosity, interest, and ability to follow through;

(2) ability – specific know-how in terms of using information technology, taking notes, looking up relevant information, storing and using the information found in their own writing;

(3) competence – accumulated knowledge about both their field of interest and about academic writing, as well as research experience (an outcome of active engagement in one's studies and practice).

Now that we know how to discern scientific information from other types of information, as well as the prerequisites for successful participation in research and writing, we can move on to the first phases of the creative process in academic writing. It all starts with finding the right literature. You will read about this process in more detail in Chapter 2, but here we would like to lay out some of the founding principles to guide you along the way. Jelena Filipović et al. (2002) underline four main rules to abide by when choosing your sources for academic writing. The first one is relevance, meaning that the material has to be directly related to your research topic and research goals. The second one refers to how current the information is – if it is too dated, its relevance is diminished. The next one is reliability – are we working with objective information, and can we confirm or verify it in any way? Or, has anyone else already tried to do so? And finally, availability. A researcher must have access to certain information in order to use it.

## Types of Scientific Sources and Publications

All sources of scientific literature, our research sources, according to Kundačina and Banđur (2007) can be divided into two main categories – primary and secondary publications. Primary publications contain "first hand" information, which means that authors themselves have conducted the research in question. Primary publications include books, newsletters, memorials, reviews, journals, proceedings, etc. Secondary publications, on the other hand, deal with the content found in primary publications by presenting, analyzing, or summarizing information published in the primary sources. Some of the secondary publications include encyclopedias, dictionaries, critical literature reviews, referential journals, bibliographies, etc.

If we narrow the focus even more, we can differentiate between two types of academic writing – scientific and expert (srb. *naučni i stručni radovi*). Scientific work is done by an individual or a group and is a result of original research and/or study. It may be written for the purpose of being shared with an audience at an academic conference or a scientific journal (Filipović, 2004). As indicated earlier, the goal is to make the scientific and expert community aware of the findings of one's research, to make them public and available for further analysis and validation, thus inspiring further research. If an academic piece of writing does not contain new or original research findings, it is not considered scientific but expert. Expert articles can be rather useful as

they look into the already published information and present it in a new light, giving it a new perspective. What both types have in common is that they shed light on new knowledge, even if it's merely an inkling of "the new" (Suzić, 2004). According to Suzić, academic writing facilitates the process of disseminating scientific ideas across time and space, thus making it part of the global science community and enabling further research. In order to meet the scientific criteria, academic writing must be original in its nature, either with regard to new data analysis or the presentation of the already known.

Prolific authors and experienced researchers will rightfully tell you that the pre-writing process is half the work. Before you find yourself sitting at your work desk and opening a new blank page, make sure to do the reading homework. Not only will you discover and collect relevant factual information to jot down, but it will also get your creative juice flowing and reconfigure your thoughts toward a better result. Note that, if you are conducting original research, at this stage you will also be actively collecting data for your own analysis. When it comes to being original in research, conducting one from scratch is unmistakably the way to go – as you will soon learn in Chapter 3 in a more elaborate manner.

Bearing in mind that this handbook is primarily designed for the needs of university students, we would now like to focus on three particular formats of academic writing most students find themselves confronted with – final thesis in undergraduate studies (which many faculties do not require anymore, but others still do), master's thesis, and doctoral dissertation. Each of these is characterized by a different level of academic gravity (and the number of pages to be written), responsibility, and independence. By juxtaposing them, we would like to help you grasp the expectations before you take the first steps toward producing any of these. We will also discuss the characteristics and structure of an academic article – something you will find yourself confronted with once you get to the doctoral stage.



## Final Thesis in Undergraduate Studies

Working on a final thesis in undergraduate studies is the pinnacle of the first level of higher education. By choosing a specific topic and the corresponding methodology, a student demonstrates his or her ability to present and critically analyze an issue, with varying degrees of originality in research (Kundačina & Banđur, 2007). A final thesis should total about 50 pages, depending on the rules of an individual faculty. Technical information (rules of academic writing, formatting, and citation) is often available on the institution's website and discussed with a designated mentor – a professor who is familiar with the topic of your research interest. These criteria should be read by the student prior to

beginning the writing process, to avoid unpleasant surprises and, ultimately, a waste of one's time. In a final thesis, the student presents an issue, proposes definitions, related terms, and theoretical perspectives, and compares the existing research to their own approach. The research should meet methodological criteria, and be well-founded with reliable sources and references to relevant authors. Finally, the text should be written professionally and correctly in terms of language and tone, grammar and structure, and academic integrity. To be more precise, we are talking about plagiarism, for which there is zero tolerance in the academic community (Chapter 7).

Writing a thesis is a back-and-forth type of process with your mentor, and this applies to all final theses in academic studies. Your mentor will not only recommend quality literature but will also share feedback on the material you send along the way. Once both you and your mentor are satisfied with the final product, your thesis defense is approved, and you are then expected to present the thesis (orally, often with a PowerPoint presentation) in a systematic way and "defend" your methodology and findings. However, this entire process takes time. Sometimes your mentor will take a while to send feedback, due to everyday obligations and other students on their roster. Sometimes administrative procedures at the faculty take time, while in other cases you may be preoccupied by other aspects of your professional and private life or may momentarily lack the motivation and drive to write. This is fine – writing is not a linear sequence from A to Z. There will be days when you will feel more interested in writing the theoretical section, reading a lot and taking notes, while on others, you will dig into your sources and work on the analysis. Regardless of the reason for the delay, bear in mind that delays are an expected part of the process and that setting a strict deadline for yourself may not be the right choice (though tentative deadline goals are always a plus).

According to Kundačina and Banđur, students are prone to making slip-ups in their final theses – an outcome of insufficient experience. For instance, they do not use the right tone, they do not know how to format the text, they make grammar and punctuation mistakes, they omit references, and write incomplete bibliography entries (Kundačina & Banđur 2007). And we cannot blame them. We used to be just like them. Writing courses for specialized purposes such as academic writing are not a widespread practice in Serbia, which is why it takes projects like Research Is Back to help students set the foundations and start practicing.

## Master's Thesis

Master's thesis means leveling up, in every way. The very fact that you are in your master's studies demonstrates an increased interest in your field and

bears greater relevance as an academic degree. Master students are more independent than undergraduate students and the majority have an idea which academic direction they see themselves going in, and which aspect of their field of study sparks enthusiasm in them. As in the previous case, a student works with his or her mentor. However, at the master's level, the student is expected to conduct original, independent research and present his or her own take on the issue analyzed by other researchers. At this stage, a student is expected to understand the principles of setting up research methodology, ensure reliability and validity of the collected data, and be able to not only organize definitions and explanations, but also compare and contrast them – or even pose new research questions (Kundačina & Banđur, 2007). Being able to produce a master's thesis, in 80-100 pages, shows that you are now capable of finding valuable research sources, are familiar with the prominent authors in the field, understand the theoretical basis of the issue at hand, are cognizant of methodology principles, and are well acquainted with the steps you need to take in data collection. In addition, it is a reflection of your writing and analytical skills, combined with the indispensable know-how in terms of citations and referencing. To take the burden off your chest, it is generally not expected of a master student to unearth or bring to light something monumentally important to the academic community, though monumental discoveries are always welcome. We could say that such a burden is borne a bit more by doctoral students. A master student, as the name suggests, is expected to "master" his or her field of studies and show extensive knowledge of the topic tackled in the thesis. Upon submission and approval, defense ensues, in a similar fashion as in undergraduate studies. Yet, after this one, you leave the faculty with a new degree and a sense of mastery.



## Doctoral Dissertation

And finally, we get to the third level of higher education – doctoral studies. Doctoral students go beyond description and classification, they expand their discovery, search for explanations, and anticipate new knowledge (Vujević, 2002). Although still a novice at research, a doctoral student is a genuine researcher. He or she is actively engaged in attending lectures, reading scientific literature, writing course papers and preparing himself or herself for the ultimate challenge. A doctoral thesis is, thus, an embodiment of their scientific work and their independence in research activities (Kundačina & Banđur, 2007). It is an original piece of contribution in research – a final step in one's education, but the very first step into the wider academic community. Rules and principles are much the same as in undergraduate and master's studies; what is different is the level of gravity and responsibility. Once pub-

lished, your research results and findings are open to the public for discussion, validation, and even criticism. They bear responsibility as they may be used by other students and researchers for their own purposes, which is why such strong emphasis is placed on thoroughness and reliability. What is also different is the complexity of the pre-thesis process.

First of all, over the course of doctoral studies, a student is expected to be actively engaged in their field and produce (numerous!) research papers for individual courses. As you now understand, a doctoral student spends a significant amount of time performing research. Upon successful completion of all courses, the student is matched with a potential mentor, a professor who is active in the same field and has published books and articles on the same or related topic. However, in order for you to be able to actually start working on your doctoral dissertation, you need to submit an application form, a detailed elaboration of your research plan, expected outcomes, and a bibliography. The application form for dissertation approval is submitted at the faculty, upon which a commission, appointed by the Teaching and Professional Councils of the Faculty, writes a report on the compatibility of the topic, the candidate, and the mentor. The final decision is made by the University Senate which, upon request from the University's Teaching and Professional Council, adopts a final decision on compatibility. The waiting period may take several months – the perfect time for you to start working on the reading portion and anticipate a positive response. The total period in which you are expected to complete your dissertation is three years from the date it was officially approved. A typical doctoral dissertation has 150 to 250 pages. By the time you get to your third or fourth year of doctoral studies, and find yourself writing an elaboration of your topic, you will already have gained some degree of experience and completed a series of research papers for various courses (some of them even published). The accumulation of all the reading and writing behind you will have certainly paved the way to your doctoral dissertation, helping you gain confidence for the ultimate challenge – the finalization of the dissertation and its defense.[3]

To end with a useful tip, if you ever enroll in doctoral studies, make sure to read the Rule Book on Doctoral Studies published by your faculty and get acquainted with all the rules and expectations for doctoral students on time.



3 In the same vein, make sure that the courses you choose in your doctoral studies are somehow related to your doctoral thesis. Students often make the mistake of opting for courses only to their liking, just because they sound interesting or fun. Of course you want to like the course you attend, but be wise. At the level of doctoral studies, why invest time on the reading you won't even use in the future? Given the extensive reading that awaits you anyway, wouldn't it be a smart choice to focus on the materials you will ultimately need and can go back to when you get down to thesis writing? Some food for thought.

## Scientific Article

One could say that a scientific paper or article is a miniature of a thesis – the structure and rationale are similar, but the form is a lot more digested. In general, scientific articles are written for either scientific journals, which have a certain thematic orientation and accept new submissions, or an academic conference, with a specific call for papers. Such calls always contain information on the overall theme, technical rules, and deadlines. Writing instructions are normally shared with the applicants, who are expected to submit their paper in a designated manner. If they fail to do so, their paper may not be accepted for further reading, especially if they miss the deadline. For this reason, procrastination is not welcome. However, in most cases you will only be asked to send the abstract of your paper (usually no more than 300 words) which is why the application process is often manageable.

According to Marušić et al., information in a scientific article should be presented in a unique yet approachable manner, with well-designed arguments and evidence, with the aim of supporting a finding and introducing something new (Marušić et al, 2004). We have already discussed the importance of the new, haven't we? An article should be executed in accordance with the principles of research methodology, so that the presented findings could be available and (re-)used by other members of the academic community. It can be a primary or a secondary type of publication, that is, original in its nature or a synthesis of other authors' work with a fresh take on the already familiar issue (Kundačina & Banđur, 2007). Some say writing an article is harder than writing a thesis, though an article is a lot shorter. Nevertheless, writing an article requires you to write concisely and to the point. You should not say too little or too much. Just enough. If uncertain, start by reading other researchers' work and soon you will get the gist of what amount of information is appropriate. If still not sure, take another look at the writing instructions (also because your paper will have to meet all the technical criteria – number of characters, formatting, citation style, etc). You can also develop an outline of your paper before you start typing. Having a structure to hold on to will give you a better sense of how much information is appropriate and how to distribute such information. And lastly, write whenever you get the chance, and do not shy away from any opportunity to practice and publish your work. Practice will gradually turn into routine.



## The Role of Peers

While in undergraduate studies in Serbia we seem to be surrounded by many of our peers, in master's and doctoral studies this may not be the case.

Lectures are not as frequent and we may not know everyone we share the classroom with. Regardless of the level of study, peer support through peer learning has become an important educational goal, as it shows to correlate with improved performance (Bitzer, 2009; Tinto & Pusser, 2006). Peer learning provides opportunities to help those struggling with their studies, as well as a role model for academic achievement (Goff, 2011). Peer learning is officially defined as "the acquisition of knowledge and skill through active helping and supporting among status equals or matched companions" (Topping, 2005: 63). In terms of academic writing and research, what does this mean? It means reaching out. Extracurricular activities, student groups and clubs are not the strongest point of the Serbian education system, which means we are the ones who need to take initiative and find the above-mentioned "matched companions" by joining the groups available at the faculty.

Student Parliaments are the place to begin – their representatives will point you to available student activities and help you with social integration. Research shows that faculties can benefit significantly from establishing community groups of like-minded people who have face-to-face activities, even if supported by online platforms (Byl et al., 2016: 299-304). One example of such groups are alumni organizations. The Faculty of Philology of the University of Belgrade boasts a rather active alumni community who are, above all, involved with video production, but are also engaged in projects, local and international. A separate community within the alumni organization has been developed as an outcome of the Research Is Back project to support students academically and assist their research development, to solve some of the dilemmas they may have and prevent rookie mistakes. New generations genuinely understand the importance of such groups and are thus getting increasingly invested in forming them. All it takes is a bit of (in this case) informal research to find like-minded people and help you feel less lonely. If research is your cup of tea, make sure to find out if there are more people like you at your Faculty or University.

To emphasize, when you are working on a final thesis in undergraduate studies, a master's thesis or a doctoral dissertation, your mentor will always be the main source of advice and guidance along the way. However, peers can be of key assistance in giving a second opinion, sharing their own experience, helping you find respondents for data collection, pointing you towards relevant literature, sending you articles they have already found for their own purposes, etc. At the end of the day, peers can be there for you when you burn out and just need a place to let off some steam before you find the motivation to go back to writing.[4]

4 Speaking of peer perspective, watch this video of a fellow researcher in her TED Talk on "things no one tells you about" when working on a thesis. She address the issue of writing a doctoral thesis, but it can be applied to all academic research: Things about a PhD nobody told you about | Laura Valadez-Martinez | TEDxLoughboroughU - YouTube

## Advantages of Research Skills

Yes, we have said that academic writing and research skills are skills applied to very specific purposes, but their application is wider than it would first appear. Research requires analysis, and analysis requires critical thinking. Filipović defines critical thinking as the combined abilities of understanding, evaluation, and decision-making based on facts from various sources and perspectives including all types of context (time/space, speech/text, etc.) (Filipović et al., 2020). Critical thinking, she adds, is indispensable for functioning in all spheres of life. Knowledge is constructed on multiple levels, and, in order to be able to think critically, we need to know how to differentiate between endless pieces of information, and classify and systematize them into what we may refer to as attitudes or opinions. When our opinions are completed and whole, we internalize them as knowledge and may continue absorbing new content. In other words, simple data turns into complex information, while information grows into knowledge.

It is of utmost importance for us to bear this in mind since knowledge is not absolute. Knowledge, and hence science, is dependent upon time – that is, the time period in which it exists (Filipović & Kuzmanović, 2020). We always have to be prepared to critically analyze the information presented to us by the education system(s), (re)evaluate it and, if necessary, revise and update it. Filipović additionally stresses the role of critical pedagogy and states that quality education is a platform uninhibited by authority, in which learning is intertwined with social activism, community engagement, and the advancement of all participants in the system. Once our brains are wired to analyze issues critically, all doors of research are open. This is just a reminder that the seed of research should be planted in early education so that the fruits of such a mindset can successfully be harvested in higher education, career, adult life, etc. This handbook will guide you to just that – understanding the applicability of research in general, in an effort to support you beyond higher education and grow your confidence for whatever lies ahead.

Going back to the original idea, the first step is to help you not feel intimidated by research and the academic writing that typically accompanies it. When you overcome that hurdle, you can move on to stage one of your exploration – finding the right literature. The following chapter will help you get acquainted with some of the most useful academic sources and learn how to discern the relevant from the irrelevant in the vast ocean of scientific knowledge.

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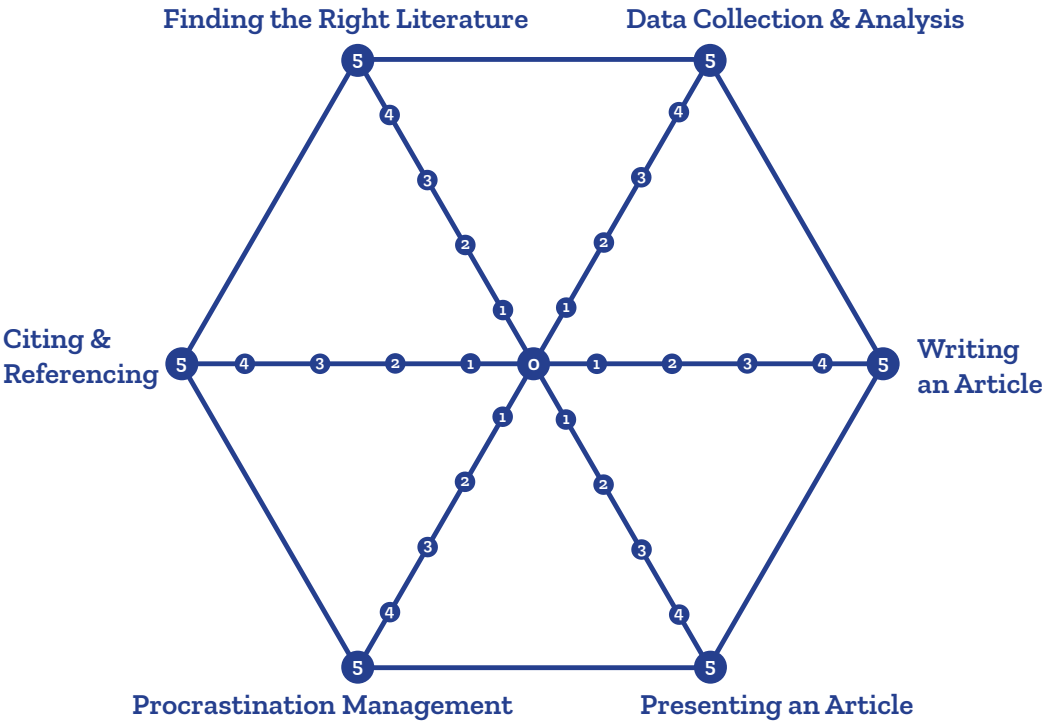
# Food for Thought




Please take a look at the hexagon in front of you. Each corner is one of the important topics covered in the handbook (or an academic skill, for that matter). Take a red pen (or any color other black) and grade yourself for each of the skills. Draw a dot on 1, 3 or 5. Once you draw all the dots, connect the dots. Take a look at your hexagon again. Analyse it and think about which areas of academic writing you need most improvement in. This will give you an insight into your strengths and weaknesses.

Let the drawing rest for now. At the of the handbook, we will do the same exercise and plan the steps for future improvement. As you go through the handbook and enjoy the text, think about your skills and which directions you would like to grow in.

# Chapter 2
# Finding the Right Literature

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*Everyone you will ever meet knows something you don't.*
**Bill Nye**

## Introduction: Why Do We Need the Right Literature?

In the complex process of writing an academic paper, finding the right literature is crucial because it makes the writing process easier and more exciting; it provides us with new and useful information that enables us to think more deeply about the topic we are exploring (Kuzmanović Jovanović et al., 2012: 16). Even before we start designing our research methodology, we should have read about the topic we are interested in to gather more information about the previous investigations on the matter and set the foundations for our work (Kuzmanović Jovanović et al., 2012: 17).

As academic citizens, it is our duty to be aware of other researchers in our field of study (Filipović & Jovanović, 2016: 1447). To do so, we have to interact with the scientific community, both through lectures and conversations with colleagues and professors and the literature they have written (Filipović & Jovanović, 2016: 1449). Nowadays it is hard to imagine that we are the only people who have come up with the idea of exploring a certain phenomenon. Sometimes it happens that we think our idea is original, but when we look up the literature, we find a disappointing fact that it isn't. We cannot know that a theory exists if we have not read or heard about it. If you

were to right now type into any search engine the keywords related to a topic you want to explore, you will certainly get numerous results. We cannot reinvent the wheel, but what we can do is use the existing literature as a basis for innovation in that particular field of research. We can lean on previous research and enrich the existing knowledge with a different point of view or a novel theoretical approach (Filipović & Jovanović, 2016: 1446).

When you produce knowledge – that is, when you write an academic paper – it is of great importance to reference the existing expert work in the field you are exploring. For example, if you are researching intercultural communicative competence, you are definitely going to read and cite some of Michael Byram's work. Without citing the proper authority to support your stance, you run the risk of sounding frivolous. Furthermore, citing the right paper, apart from lending credibility to your work, allows the reader to delve into these sources as well (Fernández Mendez, n.d.: 1).

For the young researcher, there is always opportunity to shed new light on a previously researched phenomenon. They would not have been able to perform this research without having read the insights of others, and discussed them with other scholars (Filipović & Jovanović, 2016: 1446). Thus, the first thing to do is to explore and **read** different perspectives on the topic and its variations. Viewing a problem or a phenomenon from different angles broadens our perspective. It helps us develop critical thinking skills that involve "analyzing, judging, hypothesizing, explaining," as well as decision-making, problem-solving and other cognitive processes (Lipman, 2014: 5; The Foundation for Critical Thinking website). According to Lipman (2014: 5, 6), critical thinking has three characteristics: (a) *self-corrective thinking*, which is in line with logical thinking; (b) *thinking with criteria*, which implies that we adhere to some logical formal criterion when making decisions and reasoning about the phenomena we are researching; (c) *thinking sensitive to context*, which concerns the circumstances and limitations within which a phenomenon is researched, as well as the impossibility of transferring meaning from one context to another. Hence, we need to **critically think** about what we've read and **discuss it with** our **colleagues** in order to synthesize the information and get a (new) perspective. Readings and interactions will help you assume a certain point of view on the matter you're exploring. That is how you **produce** knowledge. You are also very welcome to think (i.e., read) outside the box. You are encouraged to search the literature about the phenomenon you are exploring outside your field of study. That way, you will get an interdisciplinary approach to the phenomenon and therefore make more space for creativity and innovation. Knowledge construction is an interactive and creative process which involves a dynamic relationship between students, professors and academic literature, characterized by its critical nature (Filipović & Jovanović, 2016: 1443, 1447, 1449).

When entering the academic waters, every student faces the inevitable task of academic writing. Very often there is the expected doubt in one's own abilities regarding academic expression, one's academic voice, the quality of one's own text, one's contribution to (academic) society and so on (Cameron et al., 2009). To combat these concerns, planning your research is a good start. One of the key planning elements is the literature search (Whitaker, 2009: 4). Therefore, in this chapter, we will deal with performing searches in scientific literature databases, and identifying reliable academic sources and ways of reading academic articles to determine whether they are suitable for our research.

## Searching the Literature

For a researcher, searching (and reading!) the literature is an exciting process, but if it is not well organized, it could become an exhausting activity. Therefore, it is important to answer some questions before we start the quest for the right literature. The crucial ones concern the topic of the paper, the type of the work (e.g., seminary paper, essay, critical review, journal article, master's thesis, dissertation, etc.) and the intended audience (cf. Kuzmanović Jovanović et al., 2012).



The first step in academic writing is determining the topic of the work (Kuzmanović Jovanović et al., 2012: 10). In that sense, "What are we learning about?" is the first question to be asked. Usually, at the undergraduate level, the topic is already set – which can make the student's job less complicated. It is assumed that during their undergraduate studies, students have yet to discover certain phenomena and the theories that deal with them, and they are assigned topics that they should research in order to get familiar with the broader context. In contrast, postgraduate students are expected to already be familiar with basic phenomena and current theories, and are accordingly given space to independently research within their fields of interest. Thus, they are expected to provide a title of their academic paper themselves, since determining the topic independently is an indicator of academic maturity (Filipović & Jovanović, 2016: 1445, 1446, 1449). The title of the research paper should be explicitly and precisely defined to provide the reader with clear information about who or what is being researched, by what method, and in what context (Kuzmanović Jovanović et al., 2012: 25). As a matter of fact, "you should come up with *a well-defined research question* before you even begin your work" (Kuzmanović Jovanović et al., 2012: 10). Keep in mind that, in order to formulate an effective research question and, consequently, the title of the paper, it is necessary for a student to be familiar with the appropriate literature (Kuzmanović Jovanović et al., 2012: 10). Therefore, some literature should be read even before the topic is set.

The second question should be "What type of the academic paper or publication are you planning to produce?". There are different types of academic papers, and each has a predetermined structure that, as a student just learning the rules of academic writing, you should follow. If the paper is a seminary work or an essay for a certain course, you should think about the subject of the course that gives you the framework for your own research. Besides that, the course professor will probably provide you with writing guidelines that should be followed. If you are writing an article for an academic journal or a chapter for a book, the author's guidelines will provide all the necessary information on the structure of the paper and writing specifications (how many characters or words there should be, what citing style should be used, information about the font, spacing, etc.). The types of academic writings mentioned here are shorter than master's theses and doctoral dissertations, which require much more space and time to complete. Nevertheless, the structure remains pretty much the same. They all have an introduction, elaboration, and conclusion, with the list of references at the end. Therefore, in the majority of cases the structure of the paper will be pre-set. However, once you have fully mastered the rules of academic writing, you will be able to modify them in accordance with your own writing style and self-expression.

Knowing the type of paper should help you in planning the writing schedule, which includes literature search as well. It seems like a less important aspect of the writing process, but it is actually one of the main preparatory tasks of academic research. When it comes to literature search, different researchers have different approaches. From our experience, the literature search rarely happens once during the writing process. On the contrary, it is more likely for researchers to do it repeatedly in order to gather relevant literature (Whitaker, 2009: 6). Here we offer our own example of the literature search schedule for writing an article:

- Phase 1: The first draft phase. During the first week of the research, find 10 to 15 relevant articles using the keywords.
- Phase 2: Rewriting phase. After the first draft, find another 10 articles on the topic. Enrich your paper with new information.
- Phase 3: At the finishing stages of the research, find a few articles to clarify fuzzy areas and refine the text.

The given example should be moderated according to the type of academic work. Obviously, writing a thesis will demand more literature search phases than writing an article or a seminary paper. However, the literature search should not be endless. It is important to know when to stop. Once again, you should refer to the author's guidelines or ask a professor or a more experienced colleague for direction.

"Who is the audience?" is the third important question, and it is directly linked to the previous two. Undergraduate students write papers as a part

of their courses, which means that their audience is the professor and potentially the classmates. In this case, a student should follow the course curriculum and acquaint themselves with the academic interests and needs of their colleagues in order to make the paper more appealing to them. The same process should happen with papers submitted to journals; every academic journal has its audience, e.g., applied linguists, sociolinguists, foreign language teachers, literary theorists, ethnographers, economists, etc. Such information is usually available at the journal website under the label *Scope* or *About the journal* or *Editorial policy*. Therefore, in accordance with the topic you are working on and the audience you are addressing, you choose the appropriate journal for the paper.

When you have the title (which can be changed during the writing process, but not drastically!), and know the nature of your work and who your audience is, we can proceed.

## Where and How to Search

At the beginning of a researching process, it is more than useful to talk to professors who are experts in your field of interest. They can provide you with names of the authors you should familiarize yourself with. The professors' bibliography should also be part of your preliminary search, since it is there that you can find articles related to your topic. Additionally, you can select academic materials within learning management system courses (e.g., Canvas, Coursera, edX, FutureLearn, Moodle, Olat, etc.). At the end of every academic paper there is **a list of references**, with all the works the authors have referenced in one place. This list can provide you with the sources you might need and guide you to the origins of the topic.



University and faculty libraries are excellent resources for academic literature. Nowadays all of them boast online catalogs that allow you to browse from the comfort of your home and, should you find something that you need for your work, reserve it instantly. Furthermore, there is a lot of digitized material that can be easily accessed. As a library member, you can borrow not only the books from one library, but also request an interlibrary loan. An interlibrary loan is a process of borrowing or lending a book from one library to another on a specific request. If the needed literature is not available at your university library, and you have found it in another library in another city or in another state, then you can request an interlibrary loan. In almost every case, especially when the book is ordered from another country, the postage is paid by the library member who requested the publication. In *Table 1* below, we offer a list of important libraries in Serbia.

| *Table 1.* Prominent libraries in Serbia |
|---|
| Central Library of University of Novi Sad, [https://www.uns.ac.rs/index.php/c-clanice/centri/centralna-biblioteka] |
| Digital Library of University of Novi Sad, [https://digitalna.ff.uns.ac.rs/] |
| Matica Srpska Library, Novi Sad, [http://www.bms.ns.ac.rs/] |
| National Library of Serbia, Belgrade, [https://www.nb.rs/] |
| Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts Library, Belgrade, [https://www.sanu.ac.rs/en/sasa-library/] |
| University Library "Svetozar Marković", Belgrade, [http://www.unilib.rs/] |
| University Library in Kragujevac, [https://www.ub.kg.ac.rs/] |
| University Library "Nikola Tesla", Niš, [https://www.ubnt.ni.ac.rs/] |

At the university libraries that also have *eduroam*[1], you can connect to some **digital knowledge databases** for free. In the context of Serbia, we use **KoBSON**, which is an acronym for the *Serbian Library Consortium for Coordinated Acquisition*. It is a complex platform that provides us with scientific materials paid for by the Serbian Ministry of Education for the benefit of students and researchers. It grants access to electronic journals, books, dissertations and digital knowledge platforms from a variety of fields. We can receive the login credentials from the University for free, and thus can use this platform outside of the university network.

One of the most commonly used searching tools for academic literature is **Google Scholar**. It is a search engine that aggregates data from multiple platforms and their databases, facilitating scholarly literature searches in the global network. Google Scholar gives you the options to narrow your search (e.g., you can search for articles published from 2020 to 2023, search for reviews only, or include citation and patents in the search). The difference between the default Google search engine and Google Scholar is that the first one offers results from all the resources indexed on the web, including newspapers, blogs, social networks, etc., while the latter limits the results to academic sources.

**Web of Science** (WoS) is a website by Clarivate Analytics that provides bibliometric data for different disciplines (e.g., Science, Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities). It contains the Journal Citation Report tool, which tracks how often papers and authors from a journal listed in the WoS are cited, and

1 It is an educational network that enables researchers to stay connected for free even though they are visiting another higher education institution. See more information at https://eduroam.org/.

calculates which journals are the most cited in a certain discipline over a given period of time (University of Michigan Library website). Although, the WoS behaves like a search engine, it is subscription-based, which means that you have to register an account and pay a fee in order to access the data.

Besides the aforementioned tools and platforms, there are many other digital databases that compile academic literature from a variety of disciplines, as well as publishers' websites and research communities that you can use to locate academic sources and follow researchers and topics of interest to you. Some of them are free to access, while others are behind a paywall. In *Table 2* below, we offer a list of commonly used websites and platforms. For each one we provide a functional link, the context in which they operate, and a description.

***Table 2.* Academic Platforms and Databases**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Academia.edu, [https://www.academia.edu/] | International | A portal where researchers can make a profile and upload their academic papers. It functions as a network for a wide research community. |
| BASE, [https://www.base-search.net/] | International | Bielefeld Academic Search Engine is a search engine developed by Bielefeld University. It contains more than 300 million documents and about 60% of them are Open Access materials. |
| COBISS, [https://sr.cobiss.net/] | Regional – The Balkans | Co-operative Online Bibliographic System & Services is a database that contains catalogs of all the libraries in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Slovenia & Kosovo*. Currently, 1459 libraries across the region are participating. |
| Dart-Europe, [https://www.dart-europe.org/basic-search.php] | European | A platform that provides access to European research theses from 579 European universities across 29 countries, including Serbia, Slovenia, Croatia, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland, UK and others. |
| DOAJ, [https://doaj.org/] | International | The Directory of Open Access Journals contains nearly 19 thousand Open Access journals. Provides options to search for journals and articles. Please note that DOAJ does not include all the existing Open Access journals. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| DoiSerbia, [http://www.doiserbia.nb.rs/] | Serbian | A list of all Open Access journals published in Serbia. |
| Elsevier, [https://www.elsevier.com/] | International | An academic publisher whose website features paid as well as Open Access journals. It also offers bibliometric data. |
| ERIH PLUS, [https://kanalregister.hkdir.no/publiseringskanaler/erihplus/] | European | A European Reference Index for the Humanities and Social Sciences with access to over 10 thousand journals. |
| Hrčak Srce, [https://hrcak.srce.hr/] | Croatian | A Portal of Croatian Scientific and Professional Journals offers more than 270 thousand Open Access papers. |
| JSTOR, [https://www.jstor.org/] | International | A digital library with more than 12 million journal articles, books, images, and primary sources in 75 disciplines. |
| NaRDus, [https://nardus.mpn.gov.rs/] | Serbian | National Repository of Dissertations in Serbia is a database of doctoral thesis evaluation reports and dissertations defended at Serbian universities. |
| ORCID, [https://orcid.org/] | International | Open Researcher and Contributor ID is a database that contains information about researchers and their research. |
| Redalyc, [https://www.redalyc.org/] | International | Red de Revistas Científicas de América Latina y El Caribe, España y Portugal is a bibliographic database of 1575 Open Access journals from 31 countries. |
| REMASTER, [http://remaster.ff.uns.ac.rs/] | Serbian | A repository of final theses at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Novi Sad. There you can access the information about successfully defended theses (and download them) as well as see the approved topics. |
| Researcher, [https://www.researcher-app.com/] | International | A mobile application that alerts the subscriber to notifications about journals and topics followed. |
| Research Gate, [https://www.researchgate.net/] | International | A website for researchers to create profiles and upload their academic papers. It is a network for a wide research community, same as Academia.edu. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Routledge, [https://www.routledge.com/] | International | A part of Taylor & Francis Group. Routledge is one of the leading publishers of academic books, journals and online resources in the humanities and social sciences. |
| Sage Publications, [https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/home] | International | A prominent academic publisher that features paid and Open Access journals, books, and other academic materials. |
| SciELO, [https://scielo.org/] | International | Scientific Electronic Library Online is a bibliographic database and digital library of predominantly Latin American Open Access journals. There you can find articles in English, Spanish, and Portuguese. |
| Scopus, [https://www.scopus.com/home.uri] | International | Scopus is part of Elsevier citation database. It features more than 87 million documents from over 7 thousand publishers. The journals in Scopus are reviewed according to four types of numerical quality measures: H-Index, Cite Score, SJR (SCImago Journal Rank) and SNIP (source normalized impact per paper). |
| Springer, [https://www.springer.com/gp], [https://link.springer.com/] | International | A prominent academic publisher that features paid as well as Open Access literature (articles, book chapters, books, conference papers, etc.) from a wide variety of disciplines. |
| SSRN, [https://www.ssrn.com/index.cfm/en/] | International | Social Science Research Network is Elsevier's search engine for Social Sciences. |
| Wiley, [https://www.wiley.com/en-us], [https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/] | International | John Wiley & Sons, Inc., commonly known as Wiley, is an American multinational company that publishes books, journals, and encyclopedias, in print and as well as electronically. |
| Taylor & Francis, [https://www.tandfonline.com/], [https://taylorandfrancis.com/] | International | A well-known academic publisher that features commercial literature, mainly journals and book collections, in print and as well as electronically. |
| WorldCat, [https://worldcat.org/] | International | A huge database that compiles library catalogs from libraries all over the world. It includes European university libraries as well as libraries from the United States. |

In the above table, we listed a few index databases such as: DOAJ, ERIH PLUS, Redalyc, SciELO, Scopus, etc. Like Web of Science, they serve as a kind of quality check for the academic material available in the database. In order for a journal to be included in a database, it must meet the certain criteria prescribed by the database and apply to be indexed. Then, the database measures the number of times a certain article has been viewed and downloaded, plus the citation rate of the given article. With this function, index databases allow you to find articles that are more widely read than others, keeping you up to date with current research trends.

Regardless of the type of platform where you perform your literature search, the search method is identical. You can search by the last name of the author, the title of the work, the title of the journal, or the year of publication, if you know any of the above data (Kuzmanović Jovanović et al., 2012: 18). Also, you can search the literature by DOI (a digital object identifier). A DOI is like the ID of an academic paper (a journal article, a chapter in a digitized book) in a digital environment. It is a stable web address that leads you to a specific academic work. In order to have a DOI, an academic paper must be available in digital form. However, not all digitized papers have DOIs.

If you do not have complete information about the paper or if you are not searching for anything in particular, then you should search using keywords related to your topic. Keyword searches are most effective when you don't know exactly what you are looking for. It is necessary, however, to define the keywords well. Keep in mind that keywords are always nouns or noun syntagms. When plugged into a search engine, keywords should be separated by a comma. If you want a specific term to be detected in the results of the search, that term should be enclosed in quotation marks (e.g., "communicative competence"). These steps are applicable to almost all literature databases, sometimes with small variances. In order to utilize the full potential of a database, you should familiarize yourself with the search instructions.

## The Use of ChatGPT in Literature Search[2]

As an Open AI tool and part of the Generative Pre-trained Transformer series of models, ChatGPT is designed for written conversation. It can

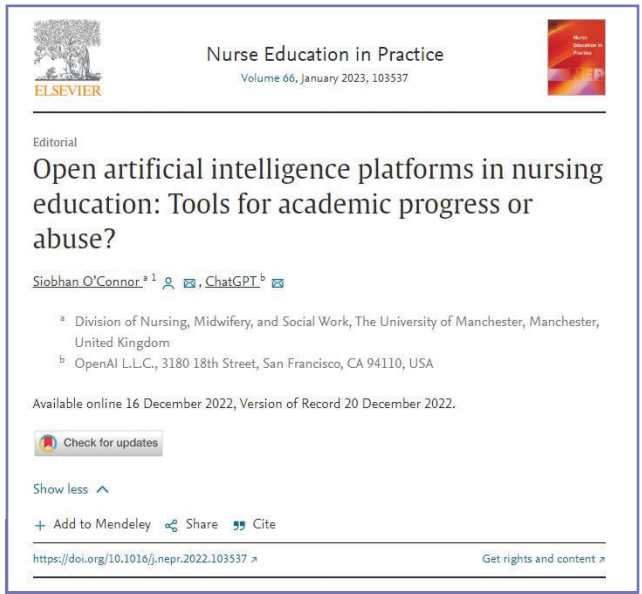


2 This subsection was written with the help of ChatGPT May 12 Version, 2023, [https://chat.openai.com/auth/login]. For this purpose, ChatGPT answered following questions:

1. What is ChatGPT?
2. Can we use ChatGPT for academic literature search?
3. Please, suggest two academic articles about intercultural communicative competence.
4. Who is the most cited author on intercultural communicative competence?

be used for a variety of applications; for instance for providing information, answering questions, engaging in conversation, offering suggestions, and assisting with creative-writing tasks. It has the capability to understand and generate text in multiple languages and can adapt to different domains and topics. The academic domain does not seem to be an exception.

Namely, in December 2022, an article appeared on the Elsevier's journal website, one of whose authors is ChatGPT (cf. *Image 1*).



ELSEVIER

Nurse Education in Practice

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Editorial

Open artificial intelligence platforms in nursing education: Tools for academic progress or abuse?

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Available online 16 December 2022, Version of Record 20 December 2022.

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*Image 1: ChatGPT as co-author of academic article*



Since it is clearly possible for this AI model to be an author of an academic article, we thought it might also serve as an academic literature search tool. However, ChatGPT has self-evaluated that it is not the best tool for searching academic literature. In *Image 2*, you can see the full answer. Nevertheless, when you ask ChatGPT for a literature suggestion or the most cited author in a field of research, it will provide you a well-elaborated answer. In order to get a more specific answer, the question or a petition needs to be asked with precision.

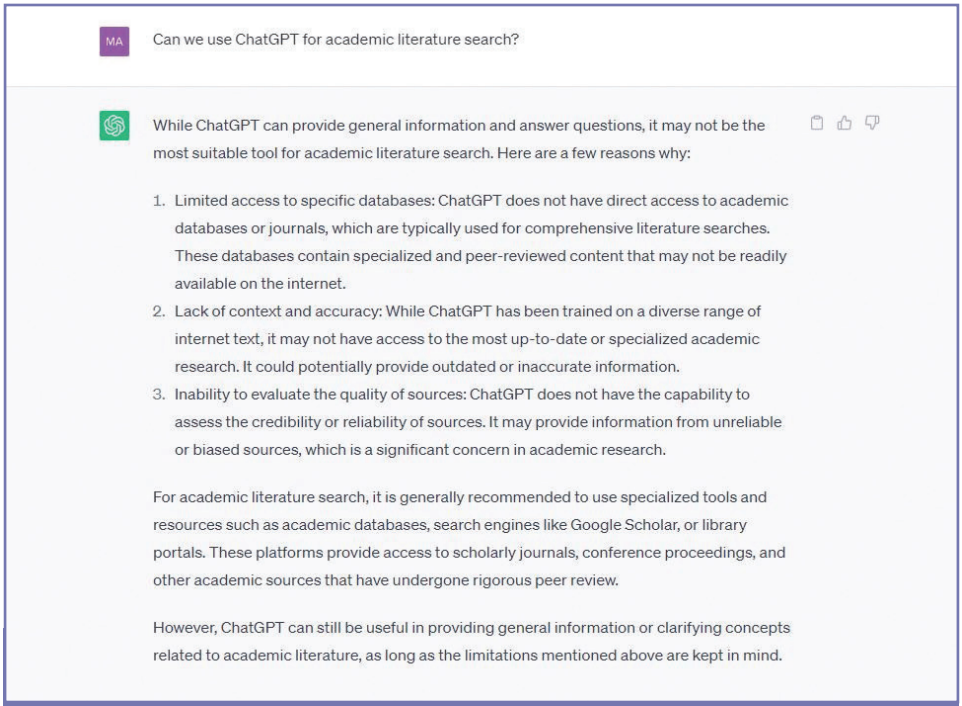


*Image 2: Can we use ChatGPT for academic literature search?*

Currently, it is difficult to avoid using ChatGPT in academic writing, and respectively in literature search, but we have to ask ourselves about the credibility of information we get and be aware of the fact that "ChatGPT may produce inaccurate information about people, places, or facts", as indicated in the Chat itself.

## The Importance of Professional and Research Centers and Associations

For young students and experienced researchers alike, professional and research centers and associations are of great importance since they support our professional development in a variety of ways. They have their own libraries that you are welcome to use; they have their own publications (journals, monographs, etc.); they lead national and international projects in which you can participate; they organize events (conferences, seminars, workshops, lectures, etc.) where you can meet professors and colleagues and exchange your ideas with them. In *Table* 3 below, we offer a short list of professional and research centers and associations in the arts and humanities relevant to the Serbian academic community. Some of them are also listed in Kuzmanović Jovanović et al., 2012, Appendix 2 and Appendix 3.

| *Table 3.* Academic Platforms and Databases |
| --- |
| American Corner,<br>[https://www.facebook.com/AmerickiKutakBeograd/],<br>[https://www.facebook.com/ackragujevac/?locale=sr_RS],<br>[https://www.facebook.com/AmericanCornerNis/],<br>[https://www.facebook.com/acnovisad/?locale=sr_RS] |
| Association of Foreign Languages and Literatures of Serbia,<br>[https://www.dsjksrbija.rs/] |
| Association of German Language Teachers of Serbia,<br>[https://www.unnjs.org/] |
| Association of Literary Translators of Serbia,<br>[https://www.ukps.rs/] |
| Association of Professors of the French Language in Serbia,<br>[https://apfs.edu.rs/] |
| Association of Professors of the Spanish Language in Serbia (APES),<br>[https://www.apes.edu.rs/] |
| Association of Scientific and Technical Translators of Serbia,<br>[https://prevodi.rs/en/] |
| British Council,<br>[https://www.britishcouncil.rs/] |
| Cervantes Institute,<br>[https://belgrado.cervantes.es/rs/default.shtm] |
| Center for Intercultural Communication (CINK),<br>[http://www.cink.rs/] |
| English Language Teachers' Association (ELTA),<br>[https://elta.org.rs/] |
| European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture Serbia,<br>[https://eriac.org/eriac-serbia/] |
| European Society for Modern Greek Studies,<br>[https://www.eens.org/] |
| Foundation Tempus,<br>[https://tempus.ac.rs/] |
| French Institute,<br>[http://www.institutfrancais.rs/fr/] |
| Goethe Institute,<br>[https://www.goethe.de/ins/cs/sr/index.html] |
| Hellenic Foundation for Culture,<br>[https://hfc-worldwide.org/belgrade/] |
| Ibero-American Center, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Novi Sad (CIBAM),<br>[https://www.ff.uns.ac.rs/en/faculty/about-faculty/centres/ibero-american-center] |
| Indian Cultural Center in Serbia,<br>[http://indian-cultural-center.rs/en/] |

| |
|---|
| Institute for Balkan Studies SASA, [https://www.balkaninstitut.com/] |
| Institute for Ethnology and Anthropology (IEA), [https://www.f.bg.ac.rs/sr-lat/instituti/IEA/o_centru] |
| Institute for Literature and Art, [http://www.ikum.org.rs/] |
| Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, University of Belgrade, [http://www.bg.ac.rs/sr/clanice/instituti/IFT.php] |
| Institute for the Serbian Language SASA, [http://www.isj.sanu.ac.rs/] |
| Institute of European Studies, [https://ies.rs/en/] |
| Institute for Educational Research (IPI), [https://www.ipisr.org.rs/] |
| Institute of Ethnography SASA, [https://etno-institut.co.rs/] |
| Italian Institute for Culture, [https://iicbelgrado.esteri.it/iic_belgrado/sr/] |
| Matica Srpska, [https://www.maticasrpska.org.rs/] |
| The Russian House — Russian Centre of Science and Culture, [https://ruskidom.rs/sr/] |
| Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SASA), [https://www.sanu.ac.rs/en/] |

Above we show a narrowed list of relevant associations, centers, foundations, and institutes that could support and enrich your work, since there are many other national, regional, and international institutions that we could add there.

When it comes to membership, researchers are usually part of several professional associations and collaborate with different centers and institutes. Which institution they are going to associate with depends mainly on what benefits the institution offers. "Professional associations, like all organizations, must provide value in order to attract and retain members" (Markova et al., 2013: 492). For younger people, it could be a desire to build their professional identity and stay connected with the community, while older members will probably look for tangible benefits such as the opportunity to participate in conferences or projects, to publish a paper, to receive a scholarship for a professional training, etc. (Markova et al., 2013: 496, 505).

## Source Evaluation Techniques

As we live in a world of mass production, which characterizes every domain of modern life including academia, a literature search may become an overwhelming activity. Every day, thousands of new articles, books, reviews, etc. are published all over the globe. This puts us in a position where we constantly have to choose. In this chapter we offer some techniques for overcoming the issues of choice paralysis, also known as "too many interesting articles in a day" and "no time to read everything."

The first thing you should do, even before downloading the article, is check whether it is scholarly or academic literature. Check the components of the article, that is, check if:

- The name(s) of the author(s) and the institution (research center or university) they are affiliated with are provided on the front page;
- The title of the journal or book is visible;
- The year of publication is provided;
- It features an abstract and keywords on the front page;
- The text contains references in footnotes or in bibliographic parentheses;
- There is a comprehensive list of references at the end of the article.

If these are present, you are likely dealing with a reliable source of information.



Scholarly or academic papers are considered reliable and credible sources because the information they offer is based on empirical research of a phenomenon or on thoroughly examined literature on the phenomenon in question, and they almost with no exception go through a peer review process (USC Libraries website A). Apart from scholarly literature (e.g., monographs, academic journal articles, conference announcements, collections of papers, annotated bibliographies, dictionaries, encyclopedias, etc.), government documents (e.g., constitutions, laws, decrees, statistical reports, speeches, etc.) are also considered reliable sources (Kuzmanović Jovanović et al., 2012: 16).

On the other hand, popular sources of information (e.g., newspapers, magazines, blogs, websites, etc.) are not considered reliable, since many times we do not know who wrote them and they certainly don't have a list of referenced works, nor do they undergo a review process (USC Libraries website A). One of the examples is Wikipedia – a free encyclopedia that cannot be used as an academic source of information since it can be edited by anyone and the content is not reviewed by scholars, as in the case of academic literature (USC Libraries website A). However, you can use it to inform yourself about the topic, to find keywords, names, further links, etc. Despite all of that, popular sources and artistic works (e.g., literary works, novels, poetry, theater, sculpture, photography, film, TV shows, etc.) can be used in research as a primary source of information or as a corpus to be examined (Kuzmanović

Jovanović et al., 2012: 16, 17).

There are many techniques you can use to check whether the source is reliable, but almost all of them focus on evaluating identical criteria (cf. Kuzmanović Jovanović et al., 2012: 21; Sapiro Library website A; USC Libraries website A). Here we share a C.R.A.A.P.O. source evaluation technique, based on the C.R.A.A.P. Test created by Sarah Blakeslee at the Meriam Library at the University of California at Chico (Shapiro Library website B). It can be used for any kind of source: printed, digitized, or online. The C.R.A.A.P.O. stands for (Shapiro Library website B):

- **Currency** – this refers to the date the information was created and/or updated and, if we are examining a website, whether the link is functional. Some papers published ten years ago will probably not be relevant for today's research, but keep in mind that knowing the origins of the topic may be helpful in understanding how a theory was developed and how newer theories evolved.
- **Relevancy** – this means that the information provided is relevant to your work.
- **Authority** – this refers to the criteria for examining who wrote the paper, their affiliation, whether the author is a specialist in the field, etc. In the case of websites, you should check the URL to see what the extension is. It is more likely to be a relevant source if it represents a formal entity like a university or other educational institution (.edu); NGO, charity organization or some other non-profit organization (.org); government bodies like ministries, institutes, etc. (.gov).
- **Accuracy** – this refers to the criteria that will help you determine whether the information is verifiable, that is, that you can find citations and references in the text and verify the information in other sources.
- **Purpose** – this refers to why the author wrote the article: to inform, to sell, to persuade, etc.
- **Objectivity** – this refers to the criteria that will help you determine what institution supports this information and whether there is any advertising that affects the content of the paper. This helps you evaluate whether the source presents unbiased and impartial information.

Shapiro Library of Southern New Hampshire University offers *C.R.A.A.P.O. Source Evaluation Rubric* for students to practice this technique. A source can get a maximum score of 24 points, and if it scores between 20 and 24, it is considered a good source of information (Shapiro Library website C). Nevertheless, you should take a critical attitude towards everything you read, even the top-rated sources.

It may seem that the source evaluation takes a lot of time, since there are many things to consider while reading a paper. Luckily, you do not have to do it all the time. Once you have mastered the source evaluation technique,

you will be aware of the proposed criteria and consider them while reading. It will become a natural part of your critical apparatus.

## Tips for Reading a Scholarly Article

Since reading literature is a demanding and time-consuming task, especially since the articles you are going to find will not always meet your needs, i.e., they won't always be relevant to your work, in this section we offer some tips for reading and selecting academic literature.

The first suggestion is do not download every paper you think is interesting or potentially useful, because you could find yourself lost in a jungle of wild papers. Instead, read the title, keywords, and abstract carefully in order to determine the major ideas of the article, the examined variables, what kind of paper it is (review or research paper), what methodology was used (quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods), and what the findings of the paper are (Pennsylvania State University website, USC Libraries website B). If it fits your study, i.e., the relevance criterion, go ahead and place it in your research database. If you are still not sure whether it is relevant for your work, skimming the introduction and the conclusion or the summary will help you decide.

When you have downloaded a few papers, you might stop searching and take the time to explore the literature you have collected. Again, do not read the entire article in detail yet. First skim for a general overview: look for important concepts and their definitions; review the tables and figures; selectively read the method and results to capture the information about the procedures used in the research (Pennsylvania State University website). Now, when you have a clearer picture about the paper, you will decide if the second, more thorough reading is necessary. Usually it is, especially when we find a paper that is very useful for our own work (Pennsylvania State University website).



## Tips for Storing Digital Academic Materials

It is very possible to do several researches and write multiple papers during your academic career. This includes downloading and saving a number of electronic articles, monographs, collections of papers, and other materials necessary for research. In order to avoid endlessly looking for the documents on your computer, you should organize the materials by creating your own digital library.

There are many different ways to make a digital library, but the key is that the file names are uniform, meaning that they follow a common rule. For that, you can use APA, Chicago, or another citation style. Have in mind that

sometimes your computer will not allow long titles, so you need to originate some abbreviations. In the picture below, there is an example of naming files for a digital library.

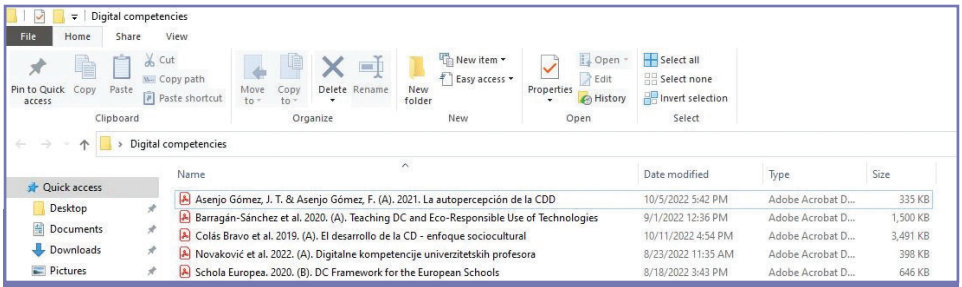


*Image 3: Example of uniform file titles*

In *Image* 3, files are named according to:

- author's last name
- his or her initial
- publication year
- (A) for an article or (B) for a book
- abbreviated title of the work.

The materials are also grouped in a folder that you can name using your research keywords (e.g., Digital competencies). You can use different strategy to group the materials in your computer. Some students keep papers in folders titled by subjects in which these papers are part of the required literature. Others, however, classify the literature by research areas or projects. There is an option to store the literature on a cloud, through Box, Dropbox, Google Drive, Icedrive, One Drive or another platform in order to always have it at your disposal.

## Conclusion

Finding (reading and citing!) the right literature is an integral part of research and the writing process, a mandatory step that cannot be skipped. It gives you information about the scope of the previous investigations that you should use as a basis for your own work. It also lends your work reliability and credibility.

In order to find relevant sources, search within academic databases and join the university and research centers' libraries. Do not miss the opportunity to participate in events organized by professional and research institutions where you could meet experts in your field of study and exchange ideas with them. Participation in an academic community is a good foundation for knowledge creation (cf. Filipović & Jovanović, 2016).

When you find a paper, be sure that it is relevant, current, and a reliable source of information. Familiarize yourself with some source evaluation techniques to make that process easier and more concrete. Over time, it will become an automated process and a part of your critical apparatus. In line with that, read the papers critically and discuss them with your peers and professors. Develop your ability to survey all the facets of other investigations and capture what is in line with yours while leaving space for innovation.

Lastly, keep in mind that there is always space for you to be creative and innovative in your field of study. The key is to be critical, open minded, and rely on proven sources of information.

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# Chapter 3
# Hypothesis and Methodology Development

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*Research is to see what everybody else has seen, and to think what nobody else has thought.*
**Albert Szent-Gyorgyi**

Conducting research is never an easy task. Therefore, developing the right hypothesis, asking and answering fundamental questions, and choosing the proper methodology that will guide you through your research must be the bases of your academic work. Nevertheless, before focusing on a hypothesis or hypotheses – which are usually defined as potential answers to your research ideas or predictions about the future findings[1] – there are certain steps that you must go through in order to structure the questions you are asking. Defining your topic is the first step, and doing so should be led by scientific integrity and significance. Remember: the more specific your subject and research problem are, the easier it will be to develop and prove your hypothesis, which will result in a coherent academic article.

1 Ratko Zelenika (2000: 114) states that there are various definitions for a hypothesis, but he decided that the simplest might be: "a hypothesis is a scientific assumption made to explain some phenomenon that needs to be verified and proven (or disproved) in order to become a credible scientific theory or law"

## From Ideas to... (Research) Problems

Marija Kleut (2008: 14–15) states that choosing a research topic might not always seem like a complicated matter – however, one can pursue interest in a specific topic only to find out that it has already been widely researched. Thus, before deciding on a research idea and developing it further, a student, researcher, or academic must be well-informed about the subject he or she would like to focus on. Kleut (2008: 15) emphasizes being familiar with the catalog of works published on a specific subject, as well as utilizing the expertise of the more experienced academic staff such as professors or mentors. She also cautions us to be mindful of the Discovering America syndrome (Kleut 2008: 15); in other words, you should be careful not to follow in the footsteps of Christopher Columbus and spend your time, effort, and focus on the topics and problems which have already been widely studied and discussed in secondary literature. Do not aim for the things you are already familiar with – aim for the things you do not know and wish to discover. Your ideas must be original and the purpose must be to prove something that no one else has – and even if they have, your perspective should be different, fresh and novel. Your approach must be meaningful, and it must contribute to contemporary science and scientific studies.

Unfortunately, even though valid contributions should be a rule in academia, this is not always the case. Midhat Šamić (1990: 22) evokes some unfortunate research examples based on studying Shakespeare's plays – various doctoral dissertations that were based on insignificant questions. One aims to prove whether the owner of Saint-Andrew boat – a boat referenced in *The Merchant of Venice* – really existed; while another questions the fertility of Lady Macbeth (Šamić, 1990: 22). Therefore, if you aim to prove a hypothesis related to a random character and its boat or an ability of a fictional character to have children, which does not in any way affect the play's storyline – your research is flawed[2]. Whatever the conclusion is, it does not make any scientific impact and that is why it is simply not worth it. Everyone in academia should be rational and strive to choose the topics which contribute to unknown issues that make a significant impact in today's science.

## Be Careful – the Road of Science is Not Always Paved

Umberto Eco, the prominent writer, philosopher, and literary theorist – as well as the author of an academic research guide titled How to Write a

2 One proof that academics have a good sense of humour is that by simply Googling them, you may find a variety of journals which publish only insignificant or negative research results, as a way of not just mocking them, but pointing out a possibility that can even happen to the most experienced academics.

Thesis (2015), dedicated a whole chapter to various problems that students face while choosing a topic or developing a hypothesis of their research (Eco, 2015: 9–44). The first problem that Eco (2015: 9) noticed is one that we can classify as too broad/loose. At the beginning of their research, many students operate with a misguided belief that they can pick any subject, which is why they choose general and broad topics, which are not specific enough and therefore impossible to do. As Eco (2015: 9) noted, many of his literary students would put themselves in *dangerous* positions by wanting to title their research "Literature Today," which would make even the most experienced academic staff *tremble*. What students are naming as a topic here is merely their general field of interest – to form a hypothesis, they must narrow their focus and choose a specific author, work, or motif, character, or narrative form they wish to analyze. That is why Eco (2015: 10) states that "specificity is also an act of shrewdness". To be specific, to have narrow, coherent, and focused research ideas is a necessary part of growing up as a researcher[3]. "The more you narrow the field, the better and more safely you will work," Eco emphasizes (2015: 13). Zemach and Rumisec (2005: 5) made a similar observation, but in spite of Eco's regard also cautioned that a research topic should not be too narrow either. The best answer probably lies somewhere in between – research must neither be too broad, nor so narrow that there is not enough material to process. For example, if you are writing a thesis or a dissertation, you certainly should not choose one Shakespeare's sonnet and analyze it on hundreds of pages (or can you? Don't take this as a challenge).



The other problems that Eco (2015: 13–16) discussed through his study vary from choosing the abstract or concrete ideas, which he named as division between theoretical and historical approach, to figuring out what should be the subject of research: discussing old or new problems. He stands on the side of already acknowledged and researched writers and says that "a thesis on a contemporary author is always more difficult" (Eco 2015: 16). Eco's approach differs from Šamić's, because the latter claims how topic should be contemporary, new and related to modern theories and disciplines; but he also concludes that these topics are not very frequent nor easy to conduct (Šamić 1990: 23). Nevertheless, the advice that Eco (2015: 17) offers sums up both possibilities: "Work on a contemporary author as if he were ancient, and an ancient one as if he were contemporary". No matter what you wish to discuss in your paper – either medieval literary experience or 21th-century piece – *how* you do it is what is the most important part, which we will discuss in more detail in the chapters yet to come.

One of the many problems that Eco (2015: 22) points to in his study is the

3 In their Pre-writing section, Zemach and Rumisec (2005: 5) offer some exercises that can help you narrow down your topic ideas and structure them.

language problem – namely, whether a student should be familiar with foreign languages in order to conduct a proper research. That is why he noted that "we should not choose a topic that involves foreign language skills that we do not currently possess, or that we are not willing to acquire" (Eco 2015: 23). An article or a thesis you wish to write must be feasible for you to do, which means sticking to languages that you already know. You should not choose a work by Proust or Mann if you are not fluent in French or German and if reading authors in their original language is crucial to your research. Some things do get lost in translation, after all. However, if you want to discuss how Mann's work influenced the writing of Ivo Andrić, that is possible to do even though you do not speak German, as the emphasis here would not be on Mann's work, but on the work of Ivo Andrić. In such a case, reading translations would be adequate.

The last problem that often appears when developing the foundations of your research is coming up with a salient and comprehensive title. This is a key part of the process because the title is what communicates your intent to the scientific audience – people choose (not) to read your article based on its title. Therefore, as Marija Kleut (2008: 20–21) states, the title of a paper should have a clear, precise, optimal, and linguistically appropriate form. It should also, as Zelenika (2000: 423) states, be attractive and informative. Sometimes, academics play with words, use quotes or utilize figurative language; in these cases, they should use a subtitle to specify or clarify the intention of their paper[4].

If you have overcome all of these obstacles – congratulations! You are ready for a new step in your research process: planning out your paper and establishing aims and hypotheses you wish to (dis)prove. You shouldn't get too excited, as you are still in the beginning stages of your work, but you have made a significant step – you have chosen *what* you want to do.

> After the topic has been selected, the author focuses all his/her attention to it, ponders upon it, thinks about it at all times and at every place: day and night, home or out, in the bath or at the kitchen table, walking or traveling around. For him/her, there is nothing else but the problem at hand, which should be resolved as soon as possible and as successfully as possible. And, in order to do so, he/she is forced to lead a life, sometimes even for years, of renunciation, regret, distress, trepidation and pain (...)[5]
>
> (Šamić, 1990: 25)

4 For example, the author of this article usually chooses title solutions like these, which are very frequent in literature and art studies: "Art – Crime or Illness: Goya and Kröger in a Comparative Study" (Arva, 2021), "Religion in Politics: Communist Party as God Almighty in Meša Selimović's Novel The Circle" (Arva, 2022).

5 Pošto je tema izabrana, autor usredsređuje svu svoju pažnju na nju, poklanja joj sve svoje misli, razmišlja o njoj u svakom času i na svakom mjestu: danju i noću, kod kuće i na ulici, za trpezom i u kupatilu, na šetnji i na putovanju. Za njega i ne postoji tako reći ništa drugo do

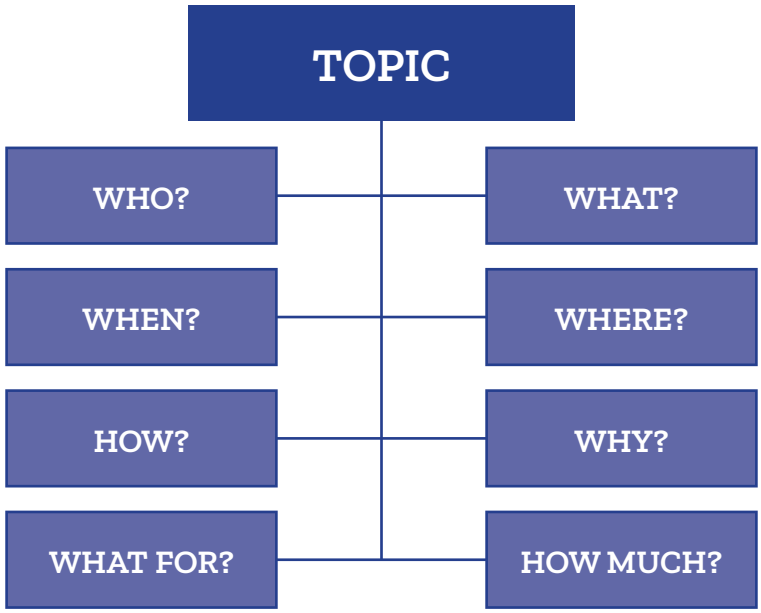
## You Have Your Research Topic, Now What?

Now that you have definitively chosen what you wish to discuss or prove in your paper, you must choose *how* to do it. This implies asking the right questions and choosing the proper methodology – your academic tools – that will guide you toward the solution and the conclusions in your work.

By trying to figure out which one is the more important tool in research process – either asking or answering – Martha Boeglin (2010: 132) emphasizes the importance of *asking* the (right) questions. She evokes a quote from Claude Lévi-Strauss on the significance of developing your critical thinking by constantly asking questions related to your research topic: "A scientist is not the one who gives good answers, but the one who asks good questions" (Boeglin, 2010: 123).

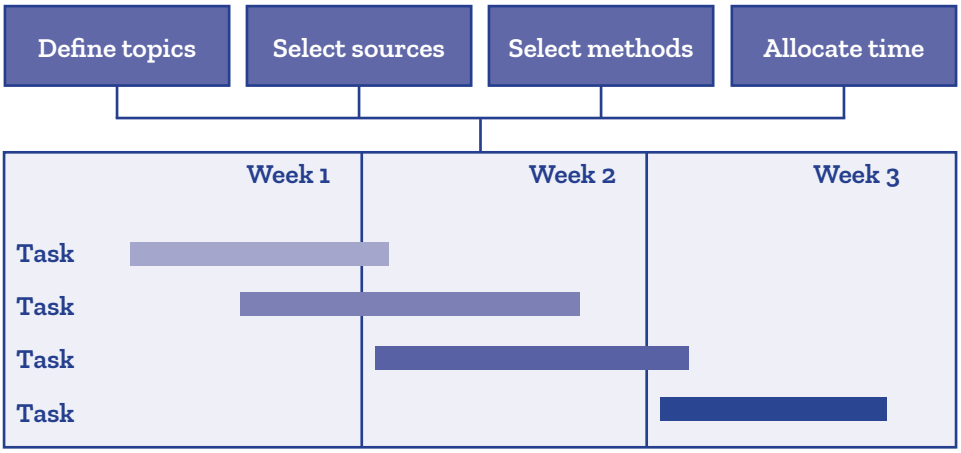
Boeglin (2010: 132–133) approaches the research process in a very creative and innovative manner, comparing it to a crime investigation: the researcher is just like a detective who must solve the crime – develop his hypothesis and find the answer by asking the right questions. Besides the crime investigation analogy, Boeglin (2010: 137) compares the researcher to a journalist as well: both of them must ask several questions about the problem they want to *investigate* in their paper. Therefore, asking a journalist's questions can be a great asset in obtaining the answers.






problem za koji se odlučio i koji treba što prije i što uspešnije da obradi. A da bi to postigao, osuđen je da vodi, ponekad kroz dugi niz godina, život pun odricanja, žaljenja, nemira, patnji, strepnji (...)

Everything that Martha Boeglin outlines in her book is just a step toward establishing your research guidelines. That is why planning your steps is always a good idea. Don't be afraid to use colors, sketches, graphics, illustrations, associations, key-words or mind maps.[6] They can be of great help when organizing your ideas and putting everything in a logical order or in its correct place. A good plan can help you find links between the things you wish to process or prove in your research. It can also help you avoid possible troubles that you are almost certain to come across in your research process.




When it comes to planning, Zoran Popović (1952: 42) offers several questions that can help you organize your research. We will highlight the ones that are crucial to your hypothesis and methodology development, so make sure to adopt them as part of your work process.

1. The first question that Popović (1952: 42) underscores is – ***Why did you choose this problem?*** Whether it is a subject you are fond of, a specific field in which you already have some skills and knowledge, or something interesting but unfamiliar that you now wish to explore, this question is very important because it leads you to your aim. You may have chosen your research question out of pure interest for the topic, but you also may have done it after weeks and weeks of hard work at the library while trying to figure out

6 For more advice on how to *visualize* your plan, you should consult Boeglin (2010: 138–141).

whether this specific question you have thought of already has its answers in previous scientific work. Or, even if it does, whether such answers were provided in a manner you deem more appropriate.

2. The next question that Popović (1952: 42) selects is – ***What was known, and what was unknown before you started your research?*** Setting the context of a certain issue is something you must do in your paper's introduction. By consulting appropriate references, you will find out what the other researchers have done related to your topic. When you start writing, you must point out what was already discussed, in which way, as well as what is missing (if there is something new that you would want to add) – that will help you establish a stable foundation for your academic work. Emphasizing how your approach differs from the others' will also contribute to the originality of your intentions. You must be familiar with the prominent researchers – the giants in your field of interest – who have already done something before you, which is why you must examine their work and reference their results, their contributions to a specific subject, and only then the things you consider doing in the future. In academia, disagreeing with someone's work is welcome as long as you can elaborate on why you disagree and introduce your results. Everything you choose to point out must be done in a clear, coherent, and precise way, so that the people reading your paper have no doubts as to your intent. The way of selecting others' work and referencing it in your introduction varies across different types of academic papers. For example, if you are writing a short article, you should only make an informative and precise frame of others' work, the theories and methods they have used, and the results they have found. Nevertheless, if you are writing your master's thesis or doctoral dissertation, you should have a more detailed approach to other academic work and give an elaborate theoretical introduction by focusing on the genesis of a problem or the different approaches to it, and then deciding which path you are going to follow in your analysis.



3. After pointing out the scientific context within which you plan to position your ideas, you should focus on what Popović (1952: 42) suggests next: ***What is this article expected to show, and which hypotheses is it expected to prove?*** Your hypotheses are essentially your expectations – assumptions that you have already made about the future and the principles you wish to (dis)prove and discuss in your work. Keep in mind that, as Boeglin (2010:138) says, a plan is just an orientation – you must focus on the *aim*. What you expect from your paper is what you're aiming at. To make sure you reach your goals or results, and not find yourself at a dead end, your hypotheses must be valid. Here you will find a few guidelines that can help you formulate your hypotheses in a manner that will minimize the possibilities of making a mistake.

**Tips and Tricks for Developing a Good Hypothesis**

Ratko Zelenika (2000: 417) has dedicated a lot of his writing to the question of hypotheses, which only proves how problematic this part of the research process is. Here, we will only highlight his ideas about formulating a valid hypothesis – what makes your assumptions worthy of research? Here is what Zelenika (2000: 417) emphasizes:

(1) *Relevance.* Your hypotheses must be related to your research question – the research problem that you aim to solve and discuss further.
(2) *Verifiability.* Based on your work, it must be clear whether you have (dis)proved your hypothesis in a manner that every other researcher can verify.
(3) *Compatibility*. Every hypothesis must be compatible with the other already verified and widely established hypotheses. Your hypothesis must not be absurd nor can it flout standardized scientific opinions.
(4) Productivity. It should be productive and directed to explaining various phenomena.
(5) *Simplicity*. Your hypothesis must be simple, comprehensible, specific, and concise.

4. After developing your hypotheses, Popović (1952: 42) states that you should elaborate on your literature review – ***What was the way of gathering materials?*** Gathering materials for research definitely differs from field to field, so if you plan on doing research on a literary work, this may not be part of your planning agenda. Nevertheless, if you didn't simply take a book from the library and read it, but actually had to visit archives and read manuscripts (which will, let's be honest, probably not happen, especially if you are at the beginning of your research career), then it is important to state this part as well. If you are writing a paper in the field of linguistics, psychology, sociology, etc. then this is a *must*. For example, if you are teaching a foreign language to a group of students and you want to check their mistakes in a grammar lesson, you must explain what you plan to do – how many students will participate in your research, what is their level of knowledge, what is their native language, and all the additional information that could act as important variables in your research. If you are analyzing different textbooks, then you should explain which textbooks you will be focusing on and why.

5. If you have outlined every step so far, then you should focus on the methodological framework or the question Popović (1952: 42) suggests next: ***Which methods were used?*** In Serbian, this step is usually named *teorijsko-metodološki okvir* or *metodološke osnove istraživanja* and it explains the specific methodology that you have chosen for your work. Keep in mind that

the methods you use must correspond to your field of research. There is a variety of established methods in science, and Midhat Šamić (1990: 12–15) names and explains some of them: normative, experimental, historical, and comparative methods, case studies, surveys, questionnaires, interviews etc. You should focus on already established and proven methods that yield unambiguous results. If you decide to use some questionable methods which are not often deployed, you can easily fall into a trap and make mistakes that will bring into question the quality of your research. Therefore, make sure you have chosen those methods that others already used and substantiated with their results.

## Your Research Check-list

If you have come this far, well done – it's the end of one struggle and the beginning of another one known as the writing process. The next step is not easy, but also not impossible. Before you take a leap into it, keep in mind that you have established all these things so far:

- ✓ The topic of your research
- ✓ The title of your research
- ✓ Proper literature
- ✓ Methodology
- ✓ Strategy and plan for using and maintaining all of the above.

Only five checks on your academic to-do list, and yet – you have done so much work already! Keep in mind that, once you know what you are doing and how to do it, the rest of it comes easy. Therefore, welcome to the new stage of your research – also known as: *you should be writing*.

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# Chapter 4
# Structuring a Coherent Academic Article

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*Reading furnishes the mind only with materials of knowledge;*
*it is thinking that makes what we read ours.*
**John Locke**

Academic writing represents a core activity of any researcher, whether they are at the beginning of their academic career or are more experienced in the matter. Once you have finished conducting your research and gathering data, you will find yourself in front of a blank paper that will eventually become your article. In order to enjoy the writing process and overcome any potential fears of the blank canvas, it is crucial to become familiar with the structure of an academic article, the main style features of academic texts, and the writing process itself.

## The Anatomy of an Academic Article

Academic articles, just like people, come in different shapes as they can present, among other things, the current state in a discipline, the results of empirical research or new considerations regarding an important issue.

However, it is possible to identify certain key features that most academic articles include. In the following illustration, we've presented an overview of the anatomy of a typical academic article.

***Illustration 1.* The Structure of an Academic Article.**

Title & Author(s)
Abstract & Keywords
Introduction
Methods
Results
Discussion
Conclusion
References
Summary

The first pieces of information that you will read in an article regard the authorship and the title. The authors' names are provided along with their affiliation (the institution they are currently working for) and their contact (their email address). The affiliation stands as a guarantee that the authors have conducted research at an accredited institution. The contact is usually cited so that the readers can reach out to the authors should they have any additional comments or questions regarding the article. The published article can therefore serve as a springboard for future scientific debates and potentially lead to forming new research ideas following its publication. Regarding the title, it is of great importance to choose one that showcases the article's main focus. The title should be clear, precise, and informative. When browsing through dozens of articles published within just one specific scientific field, the potential reader will select (or skip) certain articles based on the information received from the title. Depending on the subject at hand, you should choose a title that explains clearly and precisely what issue your research addresses, without exaggerating and having a five-line title that resembles a full paragraph. Certain researchers like to add some humor to the title by including a play on words or a pop-culture reference. While this may seem fun, you should carefully consider your audience and what kind of reception your article is likely to have with this kind of title.

Right below the title, you will find the abstract and keywords. The abstract is a short segment that announces to the potential reader what the article is essentially about. In approximately 200 words, the abstract explains what kind of problem your research addresses, what methods were used, and how the research was conducted. If your article were a movie, the abstract would

be its trailer: it provides enough information to keep a person interested in discovering more, but it does not reveal how the movie ends. The abstract is always followed by keywords which serve to highlight the main fields, issues, and questions your article discusses within the larger scientific community. Keywords facilitate search engine queries and help potential readers find your text when browsing for articles within a certain field or topic.

The introduction is the first section of your article. In this section, you are expected to introduce an issue that you are investigating in your paper that sparked your interest as a researcher and to present (to some extent) the general structure of your article. It is important to keep the introduction concise as you are not expected to go into details in this section.

The introduction is followed by the main body of the article, which includes at least three important sections: methods, results, and a discussion. The methods section offers a detailed and precise account of the methodology used in your particular research. It is essential to explain why and how specific methods were chosen and how they were implemented. This needs to be done in a clear and precise way, so that the readers understand that your research was predicated on a strong scientific basis. Furthermore, the methods section should allow another researcher to replicate the research at hand, whether as a full replication study or as a modified study relying on your methodology with different test subjects, for example. Without a proper explanation of your methods, the integrity of the entire article may be compromised. If your reader is not able to understand how the results were obtained, your entire research process may seem vague and unscientific.



When it comes to choosing the methods in the field of language studies, researchers can use quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods. Quantitative methods include all types of research that provide the researcher with quantifiable data as a result. They often rely on mathematical models and statistics (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994: 6). These methods make use of computer-assisted corpus analysis, questionnaires, tests, correlation studies, etc. The data obtained is exact by nature, quantifiable and, in the case of machine-assisted research, able to examine a significantly larger sample than any sample analyzed by humans alone. In order to understand and present this type of data, researchers use statistical analysis tools such as SPSS. It is of great importance to understand statistics before doing quantitative research so as to ensure that your research and, later, your article are in line with academic standards. If you are not familiar with statistics, you can find academic courses on statistics on online platforms for self-learning such as eDx, which offers numerous courses created by renowned universities. The second type of methods that you can use are qualitative methods, which rely on a different kind of approach. Qualitative research is non-numerical in nature, and includes narratives, first-person accounts, and photographs as some of its main tools (Denzin &

Lincoln, 1994: 6). It aims at obtaining a detailed account of a phenomenon, but does not necessarily have the ambition to reach a particularly high number of participants, for example. In other words, qualitative research usually provides more detail, but with a smaller span. It is often used in sociolinguistics, ethnolinguistics, and other related disciplines. While quantitative and qualitative methods can seem like a binary choice, in practice you will often need to combine the two. Research commonly relies on a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods, which can then provide a fuller account of an issue through numerical and non-numerical data. It is therefore important to thoroughly consider what kind of question you want to answer through your research and choose the methodology most appropriate for this question.

After the methods section, usually we move on to the results and their analyses. In this part of your article, you will present the data you obtained in your research. Depending on the type of research you have conducted, the results can be presented in the form of a chart, graph, or table, or, in the case of qualitative research, through quotes from the interviews you have conducted. Graphic illustrations of your results can be a useful tool for highlighting selected parts of the data you have obtained. They help readers quickly scan through your text and find the information they are looking for (Dunleavy, 2003: 90). They also help provide variety as they break up the monotony of your text (Gray & David, 2008: 134). Ideally, they should be able to communicate the meaning even without the knowledge of the accompanying text (Gray & David 2008: 90). Illustrations should be selected carefully and used in parts of your article where they seem fitting. The type of illustration should be chosen based on the type of data you are presenting. If you are unsure about which illustration to use, you can consult handbooks on academic writing which go into more detail. One such example is *Authoring a PhD* (Gray & David, 2008), *Chapter 7 Handling attention points for additional information*. Along with the graphic illustrations or your interpretation of the qualitative data, in this section, you will present your results in textual form. The communication between your text and illustrations will provide the reader with a complete picture of your results.

The third essential chapter of your article is the discussion. It is in this section that you can provide your readers with your original interpretation of the results and your understanding of the phenomenon you are researching. Every point of view you assume and every opinion you present in this section needs to be supported by arguments and has to be in a clear relation to the previous two sections. The arguments mentioned rely on your experience as a researcher and on the relevant literature from the field(s) in question. The discussion section is truly the heart of the article and will likely be the one cited by other researchers in their own work.

The discussion is followed by the conclusion. Even though the word conclusion itself can make you believe that in this section you are expected to

bring forward new conclusions, this is not the case. Your thoughts regarding the research results should be presented in the discussion, whereas the conclusion segment serves actually as a recapitulation of your article. It is expected that, in the conclusion, the readers will get a brief overview of the essential ideas stated in the entire article. It is not advisable to add any new ideas in this last portion of your text. Additionally, the conclusion serves as a platform to present new research questions that could be addressed in further research.

The last compulsory segment of any article are the references. In this part, you should present all the sources you have used throughout the article. If you did not mention a reference in the text itself, it should not appear in the references at the end of your article. Although this seems quite intuitive, it is a common error to find in the references some articles that the author has read, but did not end up using directly in the text. The references include not only print references such as articles or books, but also any type of multimedia sources used including videos, authentic documents, etc. If the reference was consulted online, it is common to include not only the website, but also the date when it was accessed. This section varies in style depending on the demands of the publisher. Each publication can choose their own referencing style, but they usually rely on well-known ones such as the APA, MLA, or LSA, which regularly publish the newest editions of their referencing guides on their websites.



At the end of many academic articles, you will find a summary. Although to some extent the summary resembles the abstract, which usually appears at the very beginning of an article, it bears one important difference. In the summary, you will not only state what your research is about, but will also present all the key findings and conclusions from your research. The summary serves one purpose: to inform the reader about the main points of your entire article. The summary is always published in a language different than that of the article itself. If your article is written in your first language, the summary will usually be written in English or some other widely used language such as French, German, Spanish, or Russian. If your article is in English and is published in a country where English is not the official language, the summary will usually be published in the official language of that country. By providing a short summary in a different language, you are opening your article to a potential new reader who would not otherwise become acquainted with your research. Just like the abstract, the summary is followed by keywords, the same as those used after the abstract, but this time in the language of the summary. If you are struggling to differentiate between the abstract and the summary, think in movie terms – the summary is like a synopsis of the entire plot including spoilers, while the abstract is, as we mentioned, similar to the trailer.

Lastly, an academic article can include one or more appendices, if the author wishes to provide additional materials which are not an integral part

of the article itself, but are deemed useful to potential readers. For instance, an original test created for a particular research can be published as an appendix so that other researchers can use it. However, it is not common to find appendices in journals nowadays, as tests, metadata, and results can be published in specialized digital repositories which are more user-friendly than a printed appendix. Moreover, appendices can take up numerous pages and journals usually have a strict limit regarding character or page numbers.

## Academic Language

The language used in academic publications has its specific traits and it is advisable to learn about these before writing your first article. There are numerous handbooks that present academic language and its features in detail; in this chapter, we will try to highlight only a handful of important features.

## Vocabulary

Academic vocabulary refers to the jargon that often appears in academic texts, while being rarely present in other types of works (Nation, 2001: 303). The term *academic vocabulary* is not necessarily related to the topic of the text itself, but rather functions as a universal trait of academic texts from different fields (Coxhead, 2000: 214). This indicates that, regardless of our field of interest, it is useful to become acquainted with some high-frequency words belonging to academic vocabulary. You can achieve this by reading other people's work, especially articles in peer-reviewed journals or handbooks in a field you find interesting. While reading such publications, you can take note of some recurring words and expressions that you can then use when writing your own article. You can also consult academic word lists, such as Coxhead's Academic Word List[1] (2000) or Xue and Nation's *University word list* (1984). There are even workbooks and websites based on these wordlists, which contain language activities that help you build your academic vocabulary skills. One such example is Academic Vocabulary in Use (McCarthy & O'Dell, 2008). Along with workbooks, there are many online resources developed from these lists. You can consult Coxhead (2011) for additional resources based on her AWL. Lastly, it is equally important to know that academic vocabulary can be challenging in your native language, and it is therefore necessary to work on your skills regardless of the language of your article (Milovanović, 2021).

1 https://www.wgtn.ac.nz/lals/resources/academicwordlist

## Style

Each author has their own writing style; however, some key features are characteristic for all academic texts. Firstly, most academic articles are usually written with a sense of objectivity that requires the author to maintain a certain neutrality. This means that you will often find verbs in neutral constructions (3rd person singular) or in the first-person plural. Most researchers do not refer to themselves using "I" but "we" in order to emphasize their objective stance. For instance, instead of saying "I recommend," you will often find expression such as "it is recommended that..." (Roberts, 2010: 153). This is, however, not always the case, as in some recent academic texts in fields such as sociolinguistics, critical discourse analysis, cognitive anthropology, etc., the authors purposefully choose to use the first person singular so as to establish their position as a researcher within their own research and to defend their results.

Secondly, academic texts have a strong focus on research and logical relations; therefore, verbs such as conclude, discover, or examine, to name a few, are in abundance. The use of linking words is also prominent due to their role in establishing logical relations between sentences and paragraphs. You will notice linking words such as firstly/secondly/thirdly, therefore/moreover/furthermore, thus/hence, etc. These transitions make your text more coherent and help readers navigate your text more easily (Roberts 2010: 154). Therefore, it is crucial to pay attention to the development of your thoughts and the connections between different statements and establish clarity and coherence by using the aforementioned verbs and linking words.



A third important point regarding style is the organization of sentences and paragraphs. Even though academic texts seem complex at first glance, the individual sentences should not be overly complicated. Some authors (Dunleavy, 2003: 115) suggest that the ideal sentence length is around 20 words, which allows the subject-verb-object core to remain clearly visible and connected. The length issue is present at paragraph level as well. Even though it is not always possible to achieve equally long paragraphs, ideally, you should try to write similarly-sized sections (Dunleavy, 2003: 77) as this will contribute to the dynamics of your text.

Proofreading is an important step that accompanies academic writing. You should always do a spell check, grammar check, and fact check of your text (Gray & David, 2008: 92). When it comes to proofreading your text, it is a good idea to leave it on the side for a while after you finish writing, and then return to the text to identify possible problems. Once you do, underline them, but do not correct them right away; rather, wait a bit and then come back to the underlined parts with a fresh set of eyes (Belleville 2014: 54). This will help you reach a more objective point of view regarding the text you wrote and will contribute to the quality of the final result.

## Time Management and Organization

The last element of academic writing that we deem essential for this short overview is related to the writing process itself. It is not only important to know what you are writing about and what kind of language you can use, but it is equally important to know how to best organize the writing itself. Although different researchers can adopt different writing approaches, we believe it is essential to understand that writing an article is never a linear process. It is actually highly unusual to start writing your article from the introduction. In fact, it is best to leave the introduction and conclusion for the very end. We would advise to first write the methods, results, and discussion, as you can write these sections as your research progresses. Therefore, your text will develop along with your research, and after the research is done, you can polish the final version of this part of your text. When you have completed these three sections, you can move on to the introduction and the conclusion because it is only at this stage that you will know exactly what information you will select for each of these sections. Afterwards, you can move on to the abstract, summary, references, and other sections of the article. The order of writing suggested here is optimal in our view, but it is not mandatory, and it is up to you to discover what kind of writing organization suits you as a researcher.

When it comes to organizing your time for writing, it is noticeable that there can be many challenges ahead. Writing can be stressful and time-consuming, and even with proper knowledge and good advice, managing your time is not always an easy task. One of the best pieces of advice you can deploy is to set aside a time specifically for writing on a regular basis. According to Belleville (2014), your writing process will progress with more ease if you reserve a time slot for your writing on a regular basis, turning off your devices and focusing solely on writing. Depending on your life situation, the duration of these time slots can vary. Whether it is 30 minutes per day or 2 hours per day, it can be highly productive to exclusively concentrate on your writing and respect this time even if you are uninspired and only manage to write three sentences in an hour. On the other hand, even when you are highly inspired to write more, Belleville (2014: 11) still insists on respecting the time set aside and stopping despite the surge of inspiration. By developing such a routine, you will overcome hardships on one hand, and save your energy in the long run on the other, while making gradual progress.

Another useful advice related to time management when writing is not to believe in inspiration. Although it may be encouraging when you feel inspired to write, most of the time it is better to start writing regardless of your level of inspiration. By doing so, you will allow yourself the space to make progress with your writing and to eventually have some moments of inspiration along the way (Boyle Single, 2010: 129). Free time, just as rare as

inspiration, is also a hurdle that you need to tackle. Ideally, every researcher wishes they had an unlimited amount of time they could dedicate to finishing their article. In reality, however, it is self-sabotaging to wait to write only when you have large blocks of time (Boyle Single, 2010: 129). It is more productive and realistic to write regularly, using the amount of time you have on workdays than to wait for a miraculous free day or a couple of days that you can dedicate exclusively to writing.

When starting out as a young researcher, it can be difficult to find your style and approach to writing. There are numerous publications on the topic, especially those aimed at master's or PhD students. Even though you might be writing a short article, advice from publications such as those found in the reference list in the present handbook can easily be applied to any level of academic writing.

## Conclusion

Even though the writing process may sometimes be challenging for any researcher – especially for young researchers – it is also a creative activity that allows you to share your findings with the world. With proper knowledge and tips on academic writing, you will certainly be able to overcome these difficulties and, with time, you will come to enjoy the process more and more! Whenever you find yourself having doubts along the way, remember that experiencing ups and downs is normal and expected, but in the end, your contribution will certainly outweigh the bumps you may face on your academic road.

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# Chapter 5
# Conferences and Presentation Skills

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*There are three things to aim at in public speaking: first, to get into your subject, then to get your subject into yourself, and lastly, to get your subject into the heart of your audience.*
**Alexander Gregg**

The process of conducting research and writing academic articles is often completed by presenting the outcomes of such work at conferences. This requires a specific set of skills and, to newcomers, attending conferences can seem like an intimidating experience. However, once you have gained a good understanding of how conferences work, you will discover the advantages of participating in them.

## On the Value of Conferences

The first question that arises with regard to academic conferences is whether this is the right place for a professional to be, why it is important (Ernst, 2004; Hay et al., 2005) and when the right time to start attending conferences is. In fact, academic conferences represent an inevitable part of your academic life. For academics, it is an important work activity. Taking

part in a conference gives you the opportunity to present your work to the academic community, keep up to date with the latest research, and network with other researchers in order to expand your knowledge and advance professionally. On the other hand, if you are a student pursuing an academic career, you should also consider going to a conference yourself.

Many students wonder if they should attend conferences, and if so, when is the right time to start. The good news is that you can sign up for a conference while you are still an undergraduate student. If you are interested in a particular field, you may find it useful to participate in a conference, as this will allow you to see and hear your field in action. In any given subject, there are always some questions and disagreements, and it can certainly be interesting to hear such discussions outside of the classroom. At large conferences, it is possible to select a specific topic or area and follow it throughout the program, which will help you improve confidence and develop skills in a particular area. Novices therefore gain experience as presenters and receive valuable feedback on their research or learn about the latest methods, tools, and topics (Tappe and Galer-Unti, 2009).

You can attend academic conferences at any level of your studies, usually in different ways. If you are an undergraduate student, your goal when attending a conference might be just to listen and learn new things in your field of study. As a student, you will probably not be invited to the conference, but there are always things you can hear and learn from experienced academics. Additionally, some conferences are organized solely for undergraduate students and it is worth considering taking part in such conferences. This experience is an invaluable introduction to the world of academic conferences and it will give you a clear sense of what presenting at conferences looks like. Besides attending conferences, you will always have the opportunity to attend smaller events, such as workshops and seminars. These kinds of events can help you build different skills and, similar to conferences, they are a good platform for networking.

Once you have graduated, participating in conferences will become of even greater importance for your future academic career. During your master's studies, it is recommended to attend a smaller national conference at your own university or another university in your country. There, you can learn about the latest findings in your field, which may help you conduct your master's research.

Even though conferences are invaluable at all levels of study, the most important time for students to attend conferences is during their doctoral studies. At this level, you should take advantage of the opportunity to give a talk or present a poster at a conference, especially if you are invited to do so. Inclusion in a leading professional organization's conference program improves doctoral students' chances of getting interviews and job offers. For university

employees, a respectable number of presentations at professional conferences plays an undeniable role in tenure and promotion. In addition, attending a conference can lead to gaining information about employment and funding opportunities as well. Remember, not everything learned at a professional conference takes place in formal sessions. In many cases, informal networking is just as important for career advancement (Vega and Connell, 2007).

## Conferences and Networking

If you are still hesitant about participating in conferences, one important factor you should never forget is that conferences are a meeting point for people from various universities, fields, and interests. You might believe there is no point in networking until you are further along in your career, but it can still prove worthwhile even at the undergraduate level. For instance, you might meet a professor who could be your mentor for your future dissertation. If you are a master's student, conferences can be a great venue to discuss different possibilities for pursuing a PhD. Finally, for PhD students, conferences offer a chance to meet peers and more experienced colleagues and to feel like an integral part of the academic community. Networking at conferences does not stop at the coffee breaks, but goes well beyond the conference itself. Don't forget to follow up with your new contacts by adding them on LinkedIn or exchanging emails. You can then occasionally reach out to them with questions or dilemmas that concern their fields of interest, for example.



## Good VS Bad Presentation

Everyone in academia has undoubtedly had positive and negative experiences with presentations. An analysis of these experiences can reveal what to do and what to avoid. It can be of great use to compile a list of the characteristics of the best and worst presentations you have attended. When describing the worst presentations, common mistakes cited are those that are due to a lack of preparation (e.g., uninformed presenter), inefficient pacing (e.g., spending 30 minutes on an introductory activity and rushing through the rest of the more important segments), insufficient evidence (e.g., recommending practices not backed by research-based evidence), and a lack of audience awareness (e.g., presenting something that was obviously developed for a different purpose or audience, such as a dissertation defense). Negative aspects also include personal traits such as distracting habits, insincerity, arrogance, impractical ideas, or dismissive behavior toward participants' questions (Renck Jalongo & Machado, 2016: 8).

When it comes to understanding the positive and the negative sides of a good presentation, do not hesitate to look up information in handbooks or online. For instance, helpful advice for professional presentations can be found in Michael E. Smith's Publishing Archeology blog[1]. In successful presentations, the presenter is knowledgeable, well organized, uses time effectively, and makes research-based recommendations. Effective presenters are polished, confident professionals and achieve a "meeting of the minds" with the audience. The audience feels as if they know the presenter and that the presenter cares about them. Mutual trust and respect are built in spite of the amount of time spent together being relatively short. If the conference is very formal, good presenters adjust to that level, and if the event is more casual, they adjust their tone accordingly.

## Finding the Right Conference and Getting Accepted

If you are looking for a suitable conference for yourself, there are numerous tools at your disposal. For instance, you can use engines like Google Scholar or conference databases like Conference Monkey. Additionally, it is always useful to regularly check university websites, as many universities traditionally organize annual conferences dedicated to various fields of study. Apart from websites, there are also newsletters that can be of use when searching for conferences. For instance, newsletters from university libraries can be a valuable tool in this regard. It is also a good idea to ask colleagues and professors to recommend conferences that are relevant to your field of interest. Their expertise and knowledge will help you become more familiar with the conference ecosystem of your region or country and decide which conferences are suitable for you as a researcher.

When applying, it is recommended to choose a conference that suits your personality as well as your research. While this may sound simple, it is highly important: the best way to get your work accepted is to direct it to an appropriate conference. Conferences can be large or small, extremely specialized or relatively broad, focused on a specific topic or more interdisciplinary. Which type of conference fits you best depends on a number of factors, including your personality and the topic of your research. In terms of personal factors, some people feel more comfortable at a smaller conference, while others, perhaps more extroverted, may prefer a busier environment expected at a very large conference. Sometimes, experienced colleagues and professors may suggest to you a conference suitable for your personal preferences and interests. The same criteria can be applied to your research; if you are a beginner, it may be better to find a large conference with a broad range of topics, because beginners typical-

1 http://publishingarchaeology.blogspot.com/

ly do not yet have very specific fields of research. By attending a big conference, you may be given the opportunity to hear a lot of ideas and later narrow your interests when you find specific research topics that spark an interest.

Another factor in choosing your conference should be whether it is local (national) or international. In the era of globalization, many local conferences are becoming international. Since large international conferences often receive more funding, they tend to have the best reputation. These conferences have a higher profile and, as such, offer a boost to your CV. However, if you have never participated in a conference before, it may be easier to present your work at a smaller one, as you will probably feel more comfortable delivering your presentation in a lower-pressure event. You can start small and work your way up to larger conferences as your confidence grows! Another important consideration is funding. It is important to ask yourself how you will pay for your travel and accommodation. The first step is to find out what budget your university can offer you, as you may be eligible for grants to attend a cheaper national conference, but not an expensive international conference. Sometimes, it is also worth asking outside your university, as occasionally an independent institution might offer funding. This requires some research, of course, but can be well worth it.

Once you have found a few conferences that you find interesting, it is advisable to review the requirements for abstract submissions and presentations. Sometimes there are multiple options – poster presentation, oral presentation, or a workshop. It is up to you to decide which form is the most suitable for you as a presenter. Another significant piece of information is the submission deadline. Deadlines are important to academic life in general, but especially in the context of conference planning. Besides the deadline, another thing to have in mind is the formatting. While you have autonomy over your presentation, it is necessary that the style falls in line with the organizer's requirements, which are always clearly stated to all participants. Be sure to take note of both the timing and the formatting rules in order to successfully apply for a conference.



After choosing a conference, your next step is to write a quality abstract/conference proposal. Although this may seem easy, it is sometimes the most difficult part due to the fact that there are no strict rules. Many people learn how to write a proposal through trial and error, while others have support from their peers or professors. Even though you will not have set rules for this part of the process, keep in mind that the language of your proposal has to be direct and clear. The abstract should consist of the goals, methodology, and the outcomes of your work, and it is usually followed by keywords. In the abstract, your aim is to inspire the organizers to want to hear more about your research and accept your proposal for their conference. In case of any doubts, you can refer to the *Chapter 4 Structuring a Coherent Academic Article* for more advice on writing an abstract. Lastly, do not forget that the language used is of high importance, so try to have your abstract proofread before submitting it.

Once the abstract is ready, it should be submitted before the deadline. There are numerous examples of problems with the conference platforms or with your email provider, so make sure that you have enough time to resolve such issues. After you have submitted your abstract, you have to wait for feedback. Every conference has a committee that reviews the abstracts and provides feedback. The answer may be yes or no and there is usually an explanation, especially if your abstract ends up being rejected. In this case, take your time to read the justification and use it to improve your work ahead of future conferences.

If you receive a positive answer and your abstract is selected for an oral presentation, you should prepare thoroughly for the conference. In this phase, be sure to review the conference program and schedule in order to plan your attendance at other presentations. It is advisable to attend different sessions and to listen to other presentations. It is often the case that parallel sessions take place at one conference, so you will have to decide which sessions to prioritize. You should read the conference program in advance and get to know who is speaking, when, and where, so that you can attend presentations that are aligned with your field(s) of interest. You also need to check the location, as some university buildings are not easy to navigate when you are on a tight schedule.

## Preparing for Your Presentation

With your abstract submitted and accepted, the time will finally come for you to take the stage and present your work at a conference. Preparation is key for successful presenting, and this is especially true for newcomers. Take your time to carefully plan your presentation and then work on your presenting skills. When it comes to your digital presentation, it is there to support what you are saying, but should not say everything on its own. The accompanying slides should be clear, simple, and should ideally refer to the key features of your research. Presentations usually last around 15 minutes, and it is of extreme importance to respect that time frame. It is a common mistake to disregard the time limit and then have a long and detailed introduction only to later have to go over the essential parts of your research in a hurry because you have already run out of time. In order to avoid this, you should aim at having no more slides than the minutes allowed. Each slide should have a few bullet points, an illustration or a quote, but should not be overfilled with text. Furthermore, every slide should have a clear function within your overall presentation, so it is always useful to ask yourself why each slide is there and what its role is.

Presentations have their own unique features. The academic presentation has specific discourse structures, choice of vocabulary and style of presenting, which are not identical to other academic oral forms such as lectures

or written forms such as academic papers (Rowley-Jolivet & Carter-Thomas, 2005; Zareva, 2009) (Barrett, Liu, 2016: 1230). For instance, presentations start off with a clear discourse structure that serves to establish a rapport with the audience, then moves on to a contextualization frame, which helps situate the research within the area of study, and finally explains the rationale for the research at hand (Rowley-Jolivet & Carter-Thomas, 2008) (Barrett, Liu, 2016: 1231). The speaker then moves on to the central part of the presentation where they will disclose the results obtained using both text and illustrations in the presentation. Finally, a conference presentation can finish with some relevant questions related to the research at hand. It can also announce the next steps related to the research, in the case of an ongoing research which will be completed after the conference.

The issue of language is another common problem that arises when preparing for your oral presentation. Language insecurities are one of the major reasons for opting out of participating at conferences for young researchers. Numerous conferences nowadays are organized in English, so many non native speakers don't feel confident presenting in a foreign language. However, you shouldn't worry about this, as the concept of the native speaker as an ideal speaker is no longer considered as necessary for attaining a high level of competence in communication (Barrett, Liu, 2016: 1229). English is the current lingua franca and you would certainly not be the only person who is not a native speaker. Nowadays, knowledge of the academic genre and discourse is more relevant for communication than being a native speaker (Barrett, Liu, 2016: 1229). It is more important to master presentation skills than to have a certain accent or to aspire to some ideal of perfection.



After finishing your slides, you need to practice giving an oral presentation. The best way to do so is in front of a mirror with a timer in your hand. The presentation needs to respect the allocated 15 minutes, and your rhythm should be clear and easy to follow. It might not seem like an easy task to achieve during your first presentation, but there is no need to worry – practice makes perfect! After all the practice, you will feel more confident at the conference. The only thing that remains is not to forget to make eye contact with your audience and to have fun presenting.

After your presentation is finished, you should expect some questions from the audience. Every presentation or block of presentations is followed by a discussion panel. This is the moment when your colleagues can ask questions related to your research. The purpose of these questions is not to cast doubt upon your work, but to show interest and reflect on some issues from another angle. It is desirable to have a lively debate and you should feel satisfied if your research has sparked new thoughts and ideas. This discussion can also help you further improve your work, as you can integrate some of the comments in the final version of your paper.

## Conclusion

Although conferences may seem like an intimidating place if you are participating for the first time, they are actually an intersection of different aspects of academic life. Besides giving you a chance to present your work to the world, conferences offer a great opportunity for meeting colleagues and expanding your professional networks. It is up to you to find a suitable conference for your research, to prepare in advance and, most importantly, to enjoy interacting with people while you present!

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# Chapter 6
# The Problem of Procrastination in Academic Writing

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*In a moment of decision, the best thing you can do is the right thing to do, the next best thing is the wrong thing, and the worst thing you can do is nothing*
**Theodore Roosevelt.**

One of the common pitfalls of academic writing, or any complex assignment for that matter, is the unpleasant occurrence of the procrastination phenomenon, i. e. putting tasks off for later. From only slightly postponing the start or the finish of any phase of research or almost missing paper deadlines to infinitely extending masters or doctoral studies and putting important life decisions and events on hold "until my thesis is finished," procrastination can take multiple forms and have varying degrees of severity. It is never the optimal way of getting things done, and it always wastes time and causes some distress. Society often considers this kind of behavior laziness; there are ongoing jokes at universities all around the world about distinguished academics and their last-minute paper submissions, and students pushing PhD deadlines, but one must wonder whether it's fair to say that so many of the most educated people who had put years of consistent effort into the development of their scientific fields are simply lazy. There is a lot of research in human psychology that links procrastination tendencies with deeper psychological

and emotional mechanisms, which often need more thorough reflection and better strategies for resolution than the simple time management tips and productivity advice that are widely accepted as the (often ineffective) cure for this unfortunate habit (though they are not to be dismissed).

When working in higher education, in a position that requires both scientific research and teaching, one can affirm that procrastination in different forms is very common in the academic setting, not only in students but also in senior researchers. It is thus safe to assume that a relatively large number of individuals would benefit from better understanding the phenomenon and implementing some of the research-based ways to address it, but also from somewhat normalizing and including this topic in the conversations between students and their mentors as a problem to be solved and not a personality trait to be judged.

With this mindset, in this chapter of the handbook we will try to present the phenomenon of procrastination and its typical manifestations, with a special emphasis on academic procrastination. We will present some of the most common reasons it occurs, and explore some practical advice for managing it, derived from research and experiential and anecdotal insights.

## What Exactly Is Procrastination?

The term *procrastination* is derived from Latin, where it has the literal meaning "forward motion tomorrow," but this meaning has been connotatively shaped by Greek notions of progress and "missing the mark" as its opposition (Ferrari et al., 1995: 8). This concept of missing the mark made its influence on the Western culture through the New Testament, where it was translated as the English word sin, therefore linking it to a moral category (Ferrari et al., 1995: 8–9). This influence is still present in the cultural view of this behavior as somewhat morally reprehensible, and this stance is manifested even in various dictionary definitions of the word. For example, the online Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines the verb *procrastinate* as "to delay doing something that you should do, usually because you do not want to do it" with a connotative remark *formal*, *disapproving*; and the online Merriam-Webster Thesaurus defines it as "to be slow or late about doing something that should be done; to delay doing something until a later time because you do not want to do it, because you are lazy, etc." This moral stance expressed in dictionaries and scientific literature about the phenomenon was noticed and critiqued even in the early works of some of the important names in the field. Joseph Ferrari and his colleagues note that it is not particularly useful to connect procrastination with personal morality, reminding readers that even various mental health issues like depression,

anxiety, and schizophrenia were believed to have a significant moral component, and that progress in scientific knowledge treatment was possible only once that our view was changed (Ferrari et al., 1995: 9).

Contemporary psychological definitions of procrastination usually recognize it as a self-defeating behavior and highlight, aside from the time management aspect, the feelings of anxiety and regret over the strategy of voluntarily delaying the start and/or completion of a task, despite recognizing probable negative consequences and worse outcomes of such tactics (cf. Ferrari et al., 1995; Díaz-Morales & Ferrari 2015). It is thus important to consider both behavioral delay and psychological distress when addressing the issue (Díaz-Morales & Ferrari, 2015). The emotional aspect is therefore an important part to be accounted for – to the extent to which one is capable of regulating feelings of aversiveness to task, one can stay on task – as it is emphasized by T. Pychyl, one of the relevant researchers on the topic (Jaffe, 2013; cf. Pychyl et al., 2016). Procrastination can take place in any area of life, and *academic procrastination* is the term usually used when speaking of students who delay work that is related to academic tasks (Svartdal et al., 2020: 2). Research says that 80%–95% of college students procrastinate sometimes, and about 50% do so repeatedly and to a greater extent (Steel, 2007: 65; Schouwenburg, 1995: 71), so when you catch yourself doing it, remember again that you are more the norm than the exception.



In the following section of this chapter, we will present some of the most common and relevant causes of procrastination, with suggestions of strategies on how to overcome it.



## Why Do We Procrastinate and What Can We Do About It?

***Perfectionism and the Fear of Failure.***

For many of those who struggle with academic procrastination, the self-imposed demand to be perfect is causing the problem. This can be an especially pronounced trait amongst PhD students, since the individuals who advance to this level of education are usually very high-achieving students and are used to striving for excellence in their academic performance, often imposing unrealistically high expectations upon themselves. Perfectionism is stated as one of the three points that make up the so-called "Procrastinator's Code," a list of unrealistic beliefs held by those who tend to engage in this kind of behavior (Burka & Yuen, 2008: 16). The list comprises some of the following assumptions: "I must be perfect"; "Everything I do should go easy and without effort"; "It's safer to do nothing than to take a risk and fail"; "If it's not done right, it's not worth doing at all" (Burka & Yuen, 2008: 16). This can lead to avoidance of tasks, especially those that are significantly more complex

than those previously successfully done by the individual (e. g. bachelor, master's, or doctoral thesis compared to few previously written papers or even none at all), for they evoke a deep-seated fear of failure and incompetence. This fear, paradoxically, ensures some level of failure through procrastination, because the student delays the work past the time limit for optimal performance, sabotaging their success. Some researchers view procrastination as a coping mechanism, a tactic for the management of academic stress and avoidance of failure (Covington, 1993, according to Schouwenburg, 1995: 80) – it is easier to accept not doing something perfectly because of lack of time and effort, than because we are simply not perfect despite our best efforts.

### *What Can We Do About It?*

**Reframe the way we think about the task.** For all of the perfectionists among us, there is hope. Before starting to write, we could try and reframe the way we think about it – it is not easy to begin the creation of the best thesis our university has ever seen, but if the goal is just to write a certain amount of text that is open for improvement, maybe it is not so daunting. We should allow ourselves to write badly – it is a rough draft and we will revise it later, but at first, it is only important to start. We can, for example, decide to polish and improve the text only after we have written a set number of pages – no looking back before that and no judging the quality before that. This is a way of ensuring there is progress – even if it is imperfect. Also, as one great thesis advisor once said – think of yourself as a scientific baby making your first steps in the world of science, whom no one expects to be flawless (except maybe yourself).

**Accept the concept of *good enough*.** It is helpful to be aware of our perfectionistic tendencies which include the propensity to never be completely satisfied with our work and to work on a paper for much longer than necessary for it to be sent for revision. If we know that it is never going to be perfect, it would be wise to try to warm up to the idea of *good enough* and decide to let our mentor or colleagues read the paper, or even submit it to a journal when we feel it is at 80% of the desired quality. For true perfectionists, chances are that their 80% would be someone's 95%, and even if that is not the case, this way we can receive some constructive feedback and make it better. One professor at the Department of Serbian Language at the University of Novi Sad likes to say that doctoral dissertations can be divided into two groups – those that are perfect and those that are finished! They can't be both.

**Try not to take feedback as criticism, and don't take criticism personally.** If you happen to get some negative reviews for your work, try to see it as constructive feedback, and not as criticism, and even if it comes in the form of explicitly harsh criticism (not all reviewers are subtle), try to think about it as information that can help make you a better researcher.

**Ask for advice and help from professors and colleagues.** It could be helpful to talk to others about our struggles with perfectionism and procrastination. Chances are that our advisor has at least some personal experience with these problems, or has seen enough students battling with them to offer some useful guidance and support. We might find out that he or she was not that different from us at our age or level of studies.

### *Task Aversiveness.*

Another major reason for procrastination often lies in the negative feelings associated with the task, which are then alleviated by avoiding the task and opting to engage in a more pleasant activity instead (Svartdal et al., 2020: 4). Tasks that induce feelings of aversion are characterized by low autonomy and task significance, difficulty, boredom, resentment, and frustration, and all of these characteristics can be present in academic assignments imposed upon the students by others (teachers and institutional rules) (Svartdal et al., 2020: 4–5). These tasks are often not chosen by the student, are not interesting or significant enough for the student, and are fairly complex and difficult, especially if the student perceives he or she lacks the skills for task completion, due to a lack of previous experience and concrete knowledge about management of structurally complicated work (e. g. academic writing).



### *What Can We Do About It?*

**Choose a research subject that we truly like.** Since we are likely to have less resistance towards activities that we like and that are intrinsically rewarding for us, even if they are difficult, it would be wise to choose a paper topic we are truly passionate about. This is usually possible with a master's or doctoral thesis, but not always with seminary papers for different courses, since we may not be equally invested in every course we take, and the topic might be assigned to us by the professor. In those cases, we could do our best to find an aspect of the topic we find somewhat interesting or meaningful and write about it from that angle, or if we do have the option to choose a topic within a certain field, we could try to choose one that we still find significant, even if it is not our favorite. Maybe we are not very interested in Medieval Serbian literature, but we are interested in feminism, so we can choose to write about the Hagiography of Queen Yelena, the only hagiography of a woman in Serbian literature, and her significance and contribution as a ruler. Even if the only objective is successfully passing the course, we can decrease chances for procrastination by reflecting deeply and at length on why it is so important to pass for our future education – and the peace of mind during the summer break. This sounds very simple, but it is not enough to just think about it superficially – we should reflect on this with deep focus. This leads us to the next point.

**Imagine the future.** Research confirms that it is important to develop compassion for the future self by vividly imagining how we will feel in the days leading to the deadline if we leave all the work for the eleventh hour (cf. Pychyl, 2009). Those feelings will likely be much worse with the deadline approaching than right now, and imagining them will make us want to avoid them more than we want to avoid present discomfort. Research shows that our brain is not always good at distinguishing reality from imagined scenarios – for example, visualizing yourself consuming food can decrease actual consumption (Morewedge et al., 2010), and imagined extinction of a threat can reduce the physiological and neural responses that the threat provokes (Reddan et al., 2018). If we try to create vivid mental images of the potential sleepless nights before the deadline, involving all of our senses – the feelings of anxiety in the stomach, the heavy eyelids and the headache, the darkness, the cold coffee in front of the blue light of the computer screen – our brain will probably choose to start writing on time to escape that scenario.

**Start working despite the unpleasant emotions.** When the task feels overwhelming and makes us anxious, we could try and start working anyway, instead of opting for a quick emotional regulation strategy by putting it off for later. Postponing will bring instant emotional relief, but we can instead acknowledge negative emotions and not act on them, and they will likely pass after we make some progress on the task (Pychyl, 2009).

**Work on our competence.** Since one of the reasons for task aversiveness is the difficulty of the task for which a student feels unprepared and incompetent, one of the potential solutions would be improving the skills needed for the completion of the task. If a student does not have any experience in writing academic papers and does not know how to start and plan the process, he could try to prepare himself by reading scientific literature or academic papers written by other students that received high grades, then draw out the common characteristics to gain an insight into what constitutes a good academic paper. Students should feel free to ask for help and advice from older colleagues, their professors, or thesis advisors. Attending a workshop or a course on academic writing could certainly be very helpful.

### *Long Deadlines and Lack of Structure.*

It is more likely for procrastination to occur if the rewards for the task at hand will arrive in the distant future, so when faced with longer deadlines, students are likely to prioritize short-term pleasures over work (Svartdal et al., 2020: 4). Long deadlines usually imply greater difficulty of the task (which was recognized as one of the factors in task aversiveness), so they can lead students to allocate more time to the task, but can also enable longer gaps between the intended and the actual start, and increase the probability of quitting (Svartdal et al., 2020: 4). This is especially problematic when dealing

with big projects like master's or doctoral dissertations, since deadlines can be months or years away. We are also more likely to procrastinate on tasks that lack structure and are not concrete enough because we are uncertain how to proceed (Pychil, 2009).

### *What Can We Do About It?*

**Break the task into sub-goals with separate deadlines.** In the absence of externally imposed deadlines, we can try to divide the task into small, manageable pieces and set reasonable deadlines for each of them. Although self-imposed deadlines are not as effective as external ones (Jaffe, 2013), they can still provide some level of motivation, especially if we reward ourselves after each sub-goal is achieved. When writing an academic paper, it can be useful to allocate a certain amount of time to each phase. The sub-goals can be as small as we need them to be for us not to feel threatened and to feel capable of achieving them – the only goal for the first day of working on a paper could be to try and formulate a working title that can be modified later, or several of them, and one could be chosen later. If the goal is achieved – even the smallest one – there should be a small reward (e.g., a favorite snack or a coffee break, so that the brain would link that behavior with pleasure and reinforce it – in behavioral psychology, this process is called *operant conditioning*, and it is, in fact, similar to training a dog or educating a child (according to APA Dictionary of Psychology).



**Make ourselves accountable to others.** Given that self-imposed deadlines are a bit less effective than external ones, it can be helpful to set minor informal deadlines with the course professor or thesis advisor and declare commitment to those goals. Deadlines can be even set between friends working on separate assignments with an agreement to hold each other accountable and keep reminding each other about the set goals.

**Our sub-goals should be made as concrete and as structured as possible.** It is not enough to set a goal of "working on the paper today for two hours", or even "writing the introduction" – these goals are not specific enough, especially for someone who does not have a lot of experience in writing. They should be further broken into explicit steps that make it clear how to begin and how to know when the goal is achieved. For the introduction, we need to introduce the topic and explain why we have chosen it. To give an overview of the existing research related to the topic, we need to explain our approach and specify the research problem, state the objectives of the paper, and set the structure of the paper. Each of these steps could be broken into smaller structured steps if necessary – for the overview of the literature on the topic, first, we need to choose what references we are going to mention and in what order, and what specific points we want to highlight in each of them, etc. When we go through all the planned steps, that sub-goal is attained, and we have a clear finish point.

### *Psychological Needs Are Opposed to Academic Goals.*

The rational reasons we tend to give for certain behaviors can sometimes be mere attempts to explain and justify what was motivated by the deeper psychological needs we are not aware of. There are three widely recognized basic psychological needs – the need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, while some researchers propose a broader set of candidate needs for this shortlist that can include security–safety, popularity, pleasure–stimulation, self-actualization, self-worth, physical thriving, money–luxury, novelty (or novelty-variety), morality, and beneficence (Vansteenkiste et al., 2020: 7–8). We may think we do our best work under time pressure, so we wait for the rush of adrenaline at the last moment (Ferrari, 2022a), but it can be that we are actually in need of excitement and novelty, which can be created in more optimal ways. We may be afraid to take responsibility for choosing to dedicate our time to a goal because we are not certain that this is what we want to do with our lives (e.g., do a PhD), so we find justifications for not doing it right now, instead of deciding whether we want to do it in general, which can be related to the need for security (for more about the relationship between procrastination and indecisiveness, cf. Tibbett & Ferrari, 2022). We can aspire to the goal of staying home and working on our paper, but may subconsciously feel a great unfulfilled need for social or emotional connection, with the end result of binge-watching a TV show that makes us feel connected to the characters (Gibson, 2019). In this scenario, we are neither working nor fully satisfying our true need for connection, so the cycle is likely to be repeated.

### *What Can We Do About It?*[1]

**Align our conscious goals with subconscious psychological needs.** When we engage in procrastination, which sabotages our conscious goal of working on a paper, we should pay attention to what kind of activities we are turning to instead. In the aforementioned example of binge-watching TV shows, we could gain insight by asking ourselves which need we are trying to fulfill through that specific activity. We could then realize that we have a strong but neglected need for relating to other people, and that the show is only a poor but convenient substitute. A better solution could be to gather friends and work together, which would better fulfill the need for connection, but would not conflict with our goal. For some, the sabotaging behavior could be playing an exciting computer game – and the deeper source for this could be the need for novelty and adventure. We could connect the fulfillment of this need to the goal by working in a different setting every day – one day at home, one day at the library, one day at a coffee shop, etc.

1 Ideas and solutions given in this section rely on Gibson, 2019.

**Fulfill the subconscious needs in advance.** This strategy requires quite a bit of introspection – we could analyze all the typical behaviors we engage in when procrastinating, try to discover which needs they are partially satisfying, and then reflect on better strategies to fulfill them to a greater extent. Once we find that out, we can incorporate these new behaviors in our everyday lives, not only as a response to procrastination. That way our important subconscious needs would generally be fulfilled and we will be better equipped to endure the periods when some of them may be put on hold. We could satisfy our needs for connection and adventure by regularly having deep conversations and fun activities with friends, and making sure we try new things and activities outside our comfort zone often, instead of doing it in virtual reality.

### *Distractions.*

An environment rich in stimulation and temptations that offer a lot of immediate pleasures is likely to facilitate procrastination. Research shows a high correlation between procrastination and distractibility, and chronic procrastinators are particularly vulnerable to the influence of this kind of environment since they tend to be rather impulsive, distractible, present-oriented, and susceptible to temptation (Svartdal et. al., 2020). Unrestricted Internet access is one of the major distraction sources because it offers endless possibilities for instant gratification, but it is also often needed for the work on the academic task itself, making it difficult to resist when procrastinating. It should be noted, as J. Ferrari, one of the pioneers in the research of procrastination, points out – the technology itself is not the problem, "it's how we use or abuse the technology that promotes procrastination" (Ferrari, 2022b).



### *What Can We Do About It?*

**Restrict internet access.** Decreasing leisure-related use of the Internet was shown to result in less procrastination and even in higher life satisfaction (Hinsch & Sheldon, 2013, according to Svartdal et al., 2020: 5). Procrastinators should not trust themselves to stay away from the Internet using willpower alone, but there are additional measures that can help. The temptation to diverge from academic topics online can be resisted by preparing and downloading necessary material and literature to your computer before starting to work on a paper and disconnecting the computer from the Internet while working. All the doubts and questions that emerge during the writing process can be written down and addressed after a goal is achieved (e. g. writing a certain chapter or a certain number of pages), and the Internet should be switched on only if it is impossible to continue working before resolving a particular problem for which we need online resources. Also, in Serbia, there are still libraries that do not have unlimited internet access,

and this situation can be used to our benefit if we are willing to leave our mobile phones at home, which leads us to the next point.

**Step away from the phone.** Most of us have mobile data packages that provide limited, but still excessive access to the Internet on our phones, but cell phones also hold the potential for other types of distractions – phone calls with last-minute invites to events, endless chats to make relatively simple arrangements, using them instead of a watch and accidentally seeing a new irrelevant message, etc. Total usage of mobile phones was proven to be negatively related to academic performance in undergraduate students (Lepp et al., 2015, according to Svartdal et al., 2020: 5). Procrastinators may then benefit from turning their phones off completely while working, or leaving them in another room, out of sight. Emergency calls are rare, and nothing terrible would happen if we decided to be completely offline for a few hours.

**Clear out the desk.** Not all distractions are related to technology. Physical clutter in the home harms personal well-being and life satisfaction, and it can be very distracting in the workspace, leading to stress and emotional exhaustion (Ferrari & Dao, 2020). Organizing and clearing out our desks, removing anything that is not related to the current task, and also organizing and cleaning the room in which we usually work can help us reduce distraction and procrastination, while improving efficiency and productivity.

### *Believing That We Work Best under Pressure.*

This is a common belief among people who tend to procrastinate – they are often convinced that they need the adrenaline high that emerges close to the deadline to be productive and that they do their best work under those conditions. We all probably know some of them who are even semi-proud of this and consider it an advantage. But data says this is a myth – in experiments, when working under time pressure, students who are chronic procrastinators performed worse, made more errors, and completed fewer of the tasks compared to non-procrastinators, yet claimed they did well and even better than the others (Ferrari, 2022b). Procrastinators tend to truly believe they are doing great under a tight deadline, but objectively it is not the case, and they handle it worse than people who are less prone to procrastinating.

### *What Can We Do About It?*

Simply be aware of this belief. If we tend to procrastinate on academic tasks by default, we might be chronic procrastinators and hold this false belief. When we start delaying the beginning of task-related activities because we want to wait for the last-minute adrenaline boost, we should remind ourselves that, although waiting sometimes pays off, in most cases it does not (Ferrari, 2022b), and we should recall all the times we did very poorly because of it.

## Conclusion

Procrastination can often interfere with the attainment of our academic goals, so it is important to understand it and develop behavioral strategies to overcome it. Some of the common underlying reasons for procrastination are, as previously stated, perfectionism and fear of failure, task aversiveness, misalignment of subconscious needs with conscious goals, long assignment deadlines, unstructured tasks, and an environment with a lot of distractions. Most of them can be reduced to problems in emotional regulation, so reflection and understanding deeper personal motivators for procrastination is an important step in overcoming it. Some of the advice given in the previous section may sound like basic common sense, but many of the strategies are scientifically supported and will work if we consider them on a deeper level as we apply them. After all, "Just start on time and do it" is the ultimate common sense advice for procrastinators, yet so many of us struggle to implement it. To close this topic on a high note, we can also find some consolation in knowing that even the researchers who study this phenomenon are not immune to it; we will thus leave you with a citation from the first edition of the book "Procrastination: Why you do it and what to do about it"(Burka & Yuen, 1983): "We know procrastination from the inside out: Between us, we have been through many college all-nighters, spent long years struggling with our doctoral dissertations, paid late tax penalties, and made up elaborate stories to excuse our delays (having to visit a sick grandparent in the hospital is an all-time favorite). We're still marveling that we finished this book only two years after the original deadline!"

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# Chapter 7

# Integrating Ethics: Navigating Academic Integrity in the Age of AI[1]

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*If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.*
**Isaac Newton**

## Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to present the concept of academic integrity in the era of Artificial Intelligence (AI). According to studies by Mittelstadt et al. (2019) and Gipp et al. (2015), AI-powered tools are becoming increasingly prevalent in academic and creative writing, raising questions about how these technologies are changing our understanding of authorship, originality, and intellectual property. As such, it is important to consider the potential implications of AI in the context of academic integrity and ethical scholarship.

1 GPT chat, an AI-powered chatbot, provided useful suggestions during the writing process of this chapter.

Academic integrity refers to the ethical principles and values that guide researchers, students, and academics in their work, including honesty, responsibility, and fairness (Fishman, 2016). By the end of the chapter, you will be able to answer the question, "What does academic integrity mean to me in the age of AI?"

In the first part, we will delve into the thoughts on academic integrity held by one of the greatest scientists in history. This section is designed to help you begin developing a mental image of yourself as a researcher and to understand your role in the academic community.

In the second part of the chapter, we will shift our focus to the implications of AI in the academic writing process. Specifically, we will explore the use of reference management software, paraphrasing software, and anti-plagiarism software. By examining these tools, you can gain a deeper understanding of how technology is changing the landscape of academic writing and research, and how you can best navigate this digital era as a researcher.

## Developing a Clear Mental Image of Yourself as a Researcher

It is crucial to recognize academic research as an integral component of a broader learning process and situate it within the framework of social constructivism as a learning theory (Vygotsky, 1978). The constructivist perspective acknowledges that academic research goes beyond the mere acquisition of information as it emphasizes the dynamic, interactive, and collaborative nature of knowledge construction (Palincsar, 1998). Researchers are not supposed to be passive recipients of information; they actively contribute to the development and advancement of their fields by collaborating with peers, discussing ideas, and challenging existing beliefs (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

To emphasize the connection between social constructivism and academic integrity, we used *Research Is Back* workshops to ask students about the scientists they most admire and believe to have made significant contributions to the development of humankind. The responses were varied, but some of the names that were frequently mentioned include Nikola Tesla, Albert Einstein, Marie Curie, Thomas Edison, and Isaac Newton. These scientists have left a lasting impact on their respective fields and are often celebrated for their original ideas and innovative contributions to science and technology. By examining the work of these pioneering individuals, we can gain a deeper understanding of the importance of originality, creativity, and ethical conduct in academic research and scholarship.

For example, Isaac Newton was a mathematician, physicist, astronomer, alchemist, and theologian (Westfall, 1980). His groundbreaking contributions transformed our understanding of the physical world and laid the foundation

for modern physics and mathematics (Cohen, 1999). In a letter he wrote in 1676, Newton states, "if I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants".[2] Now, here is a question for you to consider and give it some thought: how does Newton's quote relate to the concept of academic integrity? Why is it important to acknowledge and give credit to the work of others in your own research and writing? Can you think of an example from your own academic experience where you have built upon the work of others, and in what way did you ensure academic integrity in that process?

Newton's statement emphasizes the importance of recognizing and building upon the work of others who have come before us in the pursuit of knowledge. It highlights that progress in any field is a collective effort, and individual achievements are often possible because of the foundational work done by others. Academic integrity involves acknowledging the work and contributions of others through proper citation and giving credit where it is due. By doing so, researchers maintain a culture of trust, respect, and ethical behavior within the academic community. In this sense, "standing on the shoulders of giants" underscores the importance of honesty, respect, and collaboration in the pursuit of new knowledge and ideas.

The ancient Greek myth of the blind giant Orion carrying his servant Cedalion on his shoulders (*Image 1*) can serve as a powerful metaphor for visualizing yourself as a researcher. Just as Cedalion acted as the eyes for the giant, researchers must stand on the foundational work of others to gain a better perspective and see further. Therefore, it is essential to acknowledge the contributions of others and utilize their work as a starting point for new ideas and discoveries.

*Image 1:* Standing on the shoulders of a giant[3]



2 The original letter can be found in The Correspondence of Isaac Newton, a collection of Newton's letters edited by H. W. Turnbull.

3 Library of Congress. (1950). Handbook of descriptive cataloging. Retrieved April 14, 2023, from http://lccn.loc.gov/50041709

## Exploring the Technical Side of Academic Writing with AI-Supported Software

Having established the first mental image of ourselves as researchers, it is important to consider some of the technical aspects of academic writing. Many authors have discussed the technical aspects of the academic writing process, such as proper citation and referencing, clear and concise writing, and effective use of evidence and argumentation. For example, Swales and Feak (2012) have provided detailed guidance on the structure and language of research articles, while Murray (2006) has emphasized the importance of clarity and coherence. Other scholars have focused on specific aspects of academic writing, such as writing literature reviews (Galvan, 2017) or crafting effective abstracts (Hartley, 2004).

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become an increasingly popular technology in recent years, and its potential applications in academic writing are no exception (Mott & Lee, 2017). AI-based software tools can offer significant benefits to writers, including improved speed, accuracy, and consistency: there is a variety of software tools available that use AI to assist with different aspects of academic writing, such as grammar and style checking, summarizing and paraphrasing, and reference management (Phan & Nguyen, 2020). The purpose of this section of the chapter is to analyze the technical components of academic writing in relation to the incorporation of three different types of software powered by AI: reference management software, paraphrasing software, and anti-plagiarism software.

## Reference Management Software

Different disciplines have different conventions for citing sources and formatting research papers. For example, the American Psychological Association (APA) style is commonly used in social sciences, while the Modern Language Association (MLA) style is more frequently used in the humanities. Additionally, different publishers or academic journals may have their own citation styles or guidelines, which can vary in minor ways from the main citation styles.

The way we can speed up the process of proper referencing is through the use of reference management software. These programs are useful tools for researchers and writers, allowing them to organize and manage their references and citations in a streamlined and efficient manner. With a variety of features such as importing citations, organizing sources, and creating bibliographies, reference management software has become a crucial aspect of the academic writing process. Some popular examples of reference manage-

ment software are Zotero, Mendeley, EndNote, and RefWorks. By utilizing one of these programs, writers and researchers can free up time and focus on the more critical and creative aspects of their work.

The use of AI in reference management software has become more common in recent years, as it allows for greater efficiency and accuracy in the citation process. For example, Zotero uses AI algorithms to automatically extract and detect metadata from sources, such as journal articles, and suggest relevant tags and folders for organization (Kumar & Bhatia, 2020). Another software, Mendeley, utilizes machine learning to recommend articles to users based on their reading history and interests, providing a personalized experience (Nosek, 2016).

These examples demonstrate how AI can be used to improve the reference management process for researchers and writers which has brought up a new question: should researchers acknowledge the software they have used in their work as part of their obligation to uphold academic integrity? While some may argue that software should be treated as just another tool in the researcher's arsenal and need not be explicitly acknowledged, others think that such attribution is not only ethically required but also facilitates transparency and reproducibility in the research process (Jalali & Wohlin, 2012). Take a moment to reflect on whether you would include this category of software in the list of resources cited in your research papers.



## Summarizing and Paraphrasing Software

Some of the most creative aspects of academic writing are paraphrasing and summarizing. They are an essential skill for any researcher or writer, irrespective of the citation style they are using. Successful paraphrasing and summarizing of a source demonstrate our expertise and comprehension of the subject matter to readers.

While paraphrasing is "[t]he process of rephrasing a text or a statement in one's own words while retaining the meaning of the original text" (Hosseini & Barati, 2016: 28), summarizing involves condensing the main points and ideas of a longer text into a shorter, more concise version while still maintaining the original meaning (McEntyre, 2013). This skill can be particularly useful when writing literature reviews or research papers, as it allows us to provide a brief overview of a larger body of work without getting bogged down in details.

Given the significance of paraphrasing and summarizing in academic writing, a topic prioritized in *Research Is Back* workshops, there is one particular question that seems to be rather important. This question often elicits incorrect responses and is related to the proper citation and acknowledgement of sources when paraphrasing. When students are presented with an

example of a paraphrased sentence and inquired whether it was necessary to cite the author, (one's own words had been used to convey the original meaning), more than often they answer with "No, it is not necessary," but the correct answer, of course, is that authors should always be acknowledged, regardless of whether the wording is a direct quote or a paraphrase. When paraphrasing and summarizing are not done properly, this can be construed as plagiarism: presenting another person's work as your own, without proper citation or acknowledgement (Roig, 2001).

During *Research Is Back* workshops, students were asked to provide examples of their favorite English song lyrics in both their original forms and as summarized/paraphrased versions. After reviewing more than twenty summarized/paraphrased poems in shared Google Drive documents, it was concluded that some students exhibit proficiency in the art of paraphrasing and summarizing, while others do not perform so well, potentially due to their limited grasp of the English language.

This observation raises the question of whether paraphrasing and summarizing software could serve as a valuable tool for students struggling with these skills. Further investigation is necessary to determine the efficacy and appropriateness of such software in an academic setting. One study by Liu and Yang (2017) investigated the effectiveness of a paraphrasing tool called iParaphrase in helping non-native English speakers improve their paraphrasing skills. The study found that the use of iParaphrase led to significant improvements in the quality and accuracy of paraphrased text.

The integration of this kind of technology in academic writing could provide a means for students to develop their paraphrasing and summarizing skills, which are crucial components of academic writing and research. What do you think? Several paraphrasing programs, including Quillbot, Spinbot, Paraphrasing Tool, and Prepostseo, are currently available for use. Similar to the previous section where we discussed reference management software, the question remains the same: would you acknowledge the software utilized for paraphrasing and summarizing in your academic paper?

## Anti-Plagiarism Software

Anti-plagiarism software has become an essential tool in the fight against academic misconduct. Many of these software solutions use AI or machine learning algorithms to detect plagiarism in written work. These algorithms compare the submitted work to a large database of published works, as well as to other student submissions, to identify similarities in phrasing, sentence structure, and other linguistic features (Ullah & Butt, 2020). Some popular anti-plagiarism software brands that use AI or machine learning algorithms in-

clude Turnitin, iThenticate, and PlagScan, all of which offer various subscription plans and pricing options depending on the user's needs and requirements. There are free versions as well, including Quetext, SmallSEOTools Plagiarism Checker, Grammarly Plagiarism Checker, DupliChecker, and Paperrater.

These anti-plagiarism pieces of software can be a useful tool in the academic writing process by helping writers ensure the originality and integrity of their work (Howard & Davies, 2009). By comparing the submitted work to a large database of published works and other student submissions, these programs can detect instances of potential plagiarism and provide feedback to the writer. This feedback can help writers to identify areas where they need to revise or reword their work to ensure that it is original and properly cited. In this way, anti-plagiarism software can help writers avoid accidental plagiarism and ensure that their work is of the highest quality.

The question at hand is akin to those addressed in the previous two sections: in the event that you receive constructive criticism from such software, which aids in highlighting areas for improvement in your work, would you include this software in your list of references?

## Conclusion



Research has shown that the use of AI in different tools can improve the quality and efficiency of academic writing. For example, studies have found that AI-based grammar and style checkers can help identify and correct errors and inconsistencies in writing, as well as suggest improvements to sentence structure and word choice (Chandrasekaran et al., 2019). AI-based summarization and paraphrasing tools can also assist writers in condensing and rephrasing complex information in a clear and concise manner (Day & Chen, 2018). Furthermore, reference management software that utilizes AI can help researchers streamline the citation process by automatically generating references and bibliographies based on a given citation style (Yousefi & Alipour, 2020). This can save writers significant time and effort in manually formatting their references, as well as help ensure accuracy and consistency in citation style throughout their work.

Another way that AI technology can aid academic writing is through the use of anti-plagiarism software. These programs utilize machine learning algorithms to analyze written work and detect instances of plagiarism by comparing the submitted work to a large database of published works and other student submissions (Liu & Li, 2021). This can not only help prevent academic misconduct but also provide writers with insights into their own writing style and potential areas for improvement. By identifying potential instances of plagiarism or unintentional similarities to existing works, writers can ensure the originality and authenticity of their work and avoid unintentional plagiarism.

Overall, the use of AI in academic writing tools has the potential to greatly benefit writers and researchers by enhancing the quality and efficiency of their work. As AI technology continues to evolve, it is likely that these tools will become even more sophisticated and effective in supporting academic writing. For example, the present paper was augmented with the assistance of the GPT Chat Bot, as disclosed in the initial footnote. The said tool facilitated the identification of pertinent references and the formulation of sentences that conform to academic writing standards. The use of this technology has raised several underlying questions that could be further investigated in future research endeavors.

To conclude, as researchers in the 21st century, we have access to a rich legacy of scholarship, but we also have the advantage of leveraging the transformative power of digital technology. As we stand on the shoulders of AI, we have the responsibility to use this powerful tool with integrity and transparency. Academic integrity requires that we not only acknowledge the contributions of previous researchers, but also the contributions of technology. We must ensure that our use of AI aligns with ethical principles and that we are transparent about the way and extent that it has been used in our research. Additionally, we must continue to develop our critical thinking skills to ensure that we can distinguish between genuine human-generated work and AI-generated work. Ultimately, the future of academic research will be shaped by our ability to maintain the highest standards of academic integrity while also harnessing the potential of AI to advance our understanding of the world.

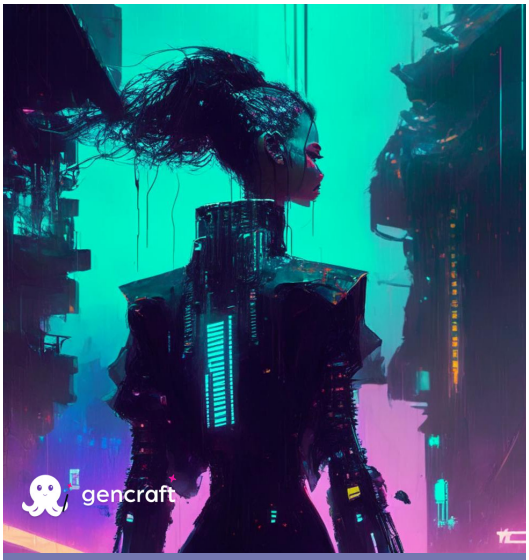


*Image 2:* Generated by AI text-to-image software Gencraft with keywords "a woman standing on the shoulders of the Artificial Intelligence"

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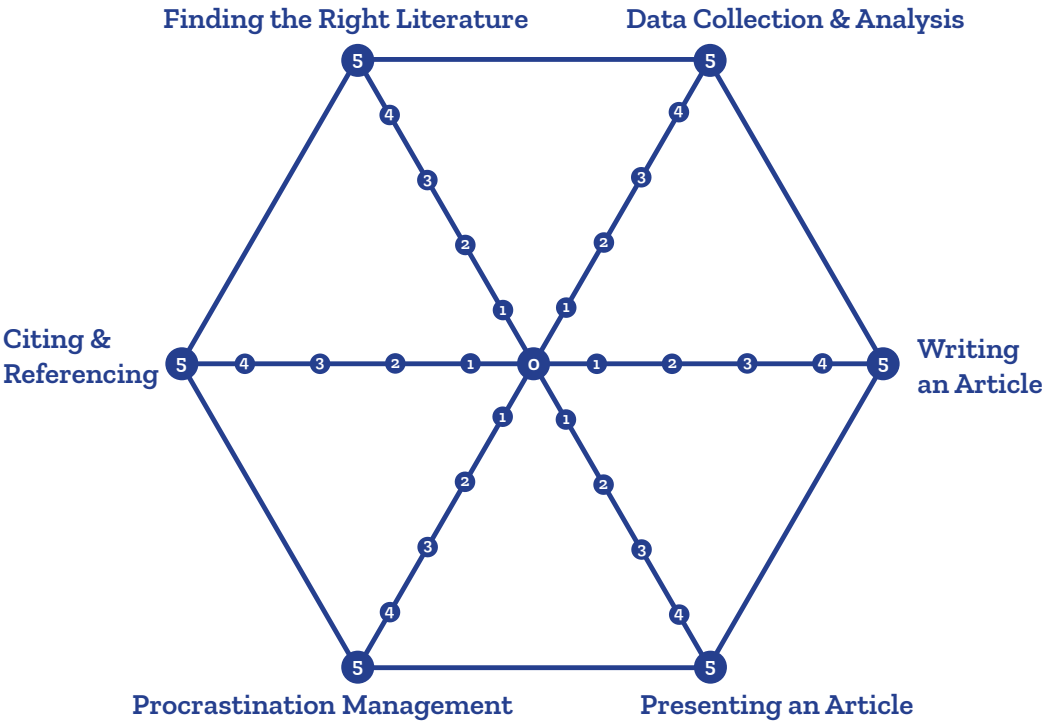
# Before You Go




We hope you see the light at the end of your academic tunnel at this point. Let's go back to the hexagon exercise and re-evaluate your skills once more.

Repeat the steps as at the beginning of the handbook. Take a look at your hexagon again. Do you feel more confident about any of the topics now that you have read the handbook? What steps can you take to improve your skills even more (those you graded with 1 or 5)? How can our team support you along the way? Please find our contact information at the end of the handbook. Should you need assistance or support with any of the individual topics, feel free to contact the "expert" person from the handbook.

# Meet the Team

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