

Structuring your term paper, format, style and grading criteria

Your paper must have these 5 parts:

- 1 Abstract
- 2 Introduction
- 3 Body of the paper (do not use 'Body of the paper' as a heading; in the 'body' you should have a number of different headings to indicate the main points you are making).
- 4 Conclusions
- 5 References

Abstract: Usually written once you have finished writing the paper

Two hundred words. Look at published papers for examples. Here you must briefly summarize your work by saying what area of ecology you are dealing with (topic), what is the specific problem that your paper addresses (objectives and main question), why is that interesting (significance of your topic and question). Then you will present in a very condensed way (a sentence or two) a review of the very main ideas that you are exploring in detail further on. Finally, you finish the abstract with a statement of the most important conclusion(s) that you have reached (again, think 1 – 2 sentences). Write and cut, write and cut. Do not allow any superfluous words to creep into the abstract. This is about the bare bones of your paper. Make every word count and achieve maximum impact! This is not as easy as it sounds but writing in a succinct manner is a crucial skill to develop in academic writing. Just to give you an idea, the text that you see in this paragraph is exactly the maximum amount of text you should write for the abstract of your paper (200 words). The abstract is included in the 15-page limit of your paper.

Introduction:

Here is where the reader finds out about what your paper is about. Try to establish your main question and objective within the first paragraph of the introduction. Then set up your investigation in its context. Provide an outline in words of how you plan to deal with the question. Make it read like a well planned-out piece of writing. A strong paper will achieve several things here: provide just enough background for the reader to make them understand why you are interested in the topic; formulate a question which is intellectually exciting and is ecologically relevant; provide a road map as to how your paper will address the question you have formulated. Note, that the guidelines above should not be followed in any particular order – this is just a list of elements that I will look for in your introduction as a whole. It is up to you to integrate them cohesively.

Body of the paper:

This is the main part, your exposition. You will review any relevant material and research that you have read. The key is to only include material which is directly relevant to what your question is. You may use sub-headings here to make the structure of your paper easier to follow. This is the most important part of your paper where you have to demonstrate your analytical skills in presenting and evaluating the evidence you have gathered from various sources.

Things to avoid:

- Trying to cover too many different points, or studies, or examples. This may lead to confusion. Instead, summarize relevant material in your own word by carefully selecting what is crucial to your argument and leaving anything that is not out. Introducing any information that you thought it's cool and somewhat relevant to the topic is not OK. If it does not significantly contribute to your thesis, cut it.
- Using direct quotations. When writing academic text, always try to paraphrase as much as possible. Sometimes quotations are appropriate but this is rarely the case.
- Drifting away from your stated objective and the main question. Always stay on point!

Conclusion:

Summarize the main points of your paper clearly and succinctly. The best conclusions steer away from mere repetitions of statements already made, especially in the same wording. You may try presenting the key points of the paper at a slightly different angle that puts your findings into a broader perspective. The conclusion should also refer to the significance of the paper that you have written and how it contributes to ecological theory or practice.

Things to avoid:

- making a claim that is not substantiated by the evidence that you have reviewed in the paper;
- making over-the-top claims about how something will change the world we live in and people will live happily ever after (this is an academic piece of writing, not an editorial column in a newspaper; be objective and stick to the facts!)
- repeating word for word something you have already said;
- avoid the phrase 'further research should be carried out' unless you have a specific idea what this research should be addressing

Overall style, formatting, structure and cohesion:

Important here is the use of sources. Do not plagiarize. This is a serious issue and getting an F on this paper will be the least of your problems. Always attribute ideas that are not yours. Your paper must be spell-checked and proof read before submission. Messy grammar and sloppy phrasing do not bode well. Your overall writing abilities also matter when you write so clearly you will score extra points here if your writing achieves a logical unity of your paper in a way that allows it to be read from beginning to end without having to back-track one's steps in order to figure out where you're going with a particular point.

And finally....just a polite reminder to always aim to:

**BE CONCISE! USE SCIENTIFICALLY APPROPRIATE LANGUAGE
AND STYLE! WRITE SIMPLY!**

and feel free to get help if you need it –
the Writing Center is a great resource.

Good luck!

