

AN OVERVIEW OF THE MAIN ACADEMIC WRITING TYPES

Seminar papers, annotated bibliographies, theses...At the end of the day, the focus of academic writing is on reading about a particular topic, analyzing the subject matter, and ending with a well-thought-out conclusion. But, there are a number of ways in which this can be achieved. Here's just an overview of the main types you may come across during your time at university.

■ Seminar/research paper

In a seminar or research paper, you're expected to research and understand a particular topic, then demonstrate your comprehension of the subject through analysis and original thought, using academic sources to support your arguments. You're required to structure and organize your evidence and ideas in a comprehensive manner, allowing your reader to follow the main thread of your thoughts. Your professor or supervisor will provide you with the main concept, page or word limit, and deadline. For guidance on how to write such a paper, have a look at "**How to write an academic paper**" in this series.

■ Scientific paper

In a scientific paper, you're required to write-up the procedure(s) you carried out for a scientific experiment, followed by a discussion of the results and conclusions you found. Unlike a seminar paper, generally you'll need to include a "materials and methods" and a "results" section. When writing such a paper, you should bear in mind the question: reading this report, could someone else now repeat the experiment I conducted? For guidance on how to write such a paper, check out "**Scientific writing: how to write a laboratory report**" in this series.

■ Literature review

For a literature review, you're expected to provide an overview of the literature that's been published on a particular subject. However, it's not simply a matter of supplying a brief description of all the books and journal articles you find on a specific topic: you need to objectively analyze these sources. Literature reviews are more often than not part of a thesis, and here they play an important role in placing your research question(s) and/or hypothesis(es) within the wider context, and in demonstrating the knowledge gap that your research aims to fill. For guidance on how to write such a paper, have a look at "**How to write a literature review**" in this series.

■ Annotated bibliography

As with a literature review, the main focus of an annotated bibliography is literature. However, instead of attempting to bring your sources together, you look at each separately, providing a short explanation – or annotation – of around 150 words for each one. This allows you, or someone else interested in the topic, to know the overall contents of the book, journal article or report quickly and succinctly. However, you don't just focus on what the literature is saying: you also need to consider the accuracy and relevance of the text. It can be useful to keep an annotated bibliography when you're preparing to write or are writing your thesis. It's a way of managing notes on the literature you've read, allowing you to promptly ascertain if a source is useful or not for the part you're currently writing.

■ Reflective writing

This is more common if you study social sciences. You might be asked to write a reflective essay or keep a journal in which you examine your own personal experiences in light of what you've learnt or read during a module, for example, regarding different theories or literature.

■ Research proposal

You might be required to write a research proposal for your Master thesis, but they're usually required for people who want to undertake a PhD. Its overall purpose is to demonstrate the need for conducting your proposed research: you need to provide the aim(s) of your study, its significance within the wider context, and how you intend to investigate the problem. Different institutes and universities have different guidelines in regard to what they expect from your proposal, as well as specific deadlines, so make sure you look into these first.