Lab Reports Made Easy

By Cora Thiele

“In this class you will be writing a lab report which will account for half your lab grade...” The dreaded words fell like a brick in the silent lab. The rubric stated we were to use APA format, a foreign language to most of us. As it turns out, there’s a simple formula for an APA lab report making this daunting task far simpler than I could have imagined. A generic APA paper consists of eight basic sections:

1. **The Abstract**: Although it goes at the beginning of your paper, it's easiest to write this section after you’ve written everything else. The abstract states, in the shortest possible way, the purpose of your study, its results, and the conclusions that can be drawn from these results.

2. **Introduction**: Here lies your thesis statement—the guiding sentence for your report. In a research paper or lab report, your thesis should include the main problem (e.g. good pancake recipes are hard to find), your question (e.g. is the recipe on page 215 in the *Joy of Cooking* a good pancake recipe?), and your hypothesis (people like to eat these pancakes, hence it is a good recipe).

3. **Literature Review**: This is the place where you cite everything that anyone worth quoting has ever said about your subject of research. The Literature Review provides all the background a person needs to know to understand your research.

4. **Materials and Methods**: If you ever want to replicate your experiment, this is where you’d look for the recipe. This section should include your sample size, what you did, how you did it, and an account of any instruments or materials you used to accomplish your procedure. If you were testing a pancake recipe this way, you would want to clearly document every step so that your great-grandchildren could make the same buckwheat-chocolate-chip-apple-raisin pancakes, again.

5. **Results**: The only thing you can include in this section is the data resulting from your experiment. You may not comment upon it; you may not say what you think it suggests; you may not even say that it was lousy data; all you may report are the numerical values and accuracy measures associated with your data. For example, “Out of the 498 pancakes I made, 98% of the pancakes were consumed. The margin of error for these percentages was <0.5 pancakes.” Unfortunately, you cannot state here that the odd (Lab Reports Pg. 2)
The Blank Page

By Elizabeth Butler

Many of us know the sensation—we’ve been assigned to write an essay, but all we can do is stare at the blank page. We can’t seem to bring ourselves to put pencil to paper or fingers to keyboard. Everything we think of sounds stupid and silly, or we can’t think of anything at all. We go do something else and come back later, but the page remains blank.

This is known as “Blank Page Syndrome” (BPS) or fear of the blank page. BPS can show up in many different forms, but the outcome is the same: the writer cannot start writing and ends up procrastinating until there isn’t any time for even one revision. This can further the idea that writing must be perfect the first time and is therefore difficult to accomplish.

The common denominator for BPS sufferers is that the writer has no idea how to begin writing. One technique to overcome this is to free write—write down whatever comes into your head without editing. Other techniques include:

- starting in the middle or starting with the conclusion and working your way backwards
- writing the paper as a letter so that you are writing to someone
- writing the paper in parts and worrying about the transitions later
- hand-writing the paper with a pen—it has been shown that the physical act of writing stimulates the brain more than typing
- writing the paper in short sessions instead of all at once
- calming yourself down with whatever works for you, so long as it does not distract you (like taking deep breaths or listening to music)
- outlining the paper first

The key is to write anything. Once you’ve written something, the page is no longer blank. Obviously this will not banish the fear completely, but it can alleviate it. Writing is just like any other activity; it requires practice. If you haven’t played the violin in a long time, you can’t expect to just dash off a Beethoven sonata without any preparation. So just have fun with it.
Creating a Strong, Effective Argument

By Lee McClelland

It is one of the most common college composition assignments, yet it is a form of the English essay both challenging and artful: the argument.

Many students visit the Writing Center with questions about argumentative essays, and in this article, I will try and provide a basic structure to follow in order to put together a basic idea while focusing on the crucial steps in formulating an argument.

**Step 1:** Consider your topic. What are you arguing for or against and why? Try and avoid the cliché topics which have been done to death such as abortion, gay marriage, and capital punishment. Not that these are bad topics, but unless you’ve created a new, groundbreaking argument, try and branch out into new territory.

**Step 2:** Once you’ve found a topic that interests you, it is time to do research. Head to the library—browse through old periodicals or search for a book that piques your interest. An argument revolves around your ability to organize facts and expert opinion, so finding the right supporting details is crucial to a fruitful, worthwhile discussion.

**Step 3:** Who is your audience? To whom do you want to address and what do you want to tell them? If you’re writing about gun control, what do you want your readers to take away from your paper? If you’re writing about women’s reproductive rights, will you be trying to appeal to men or women? These are important things to think about.

**Step 4:** It is time to write your paper. Like any basic composition structure, you start with an introductory paragraph where you’ll introduce the reader to your argument, which will be summed up in your thesis statement—one or two sentences that spell out your topic in a clear, concise manner.

In order to support your thesis, or strengthen the thesis, you’ll need to have supporting paragraphs. Some suggest having three paragraphs—two arguing for and one arguing against your stance on the chosen topic—but more than that is okay. Each paragraph will have a topic sentence, which is just a sentence that does not restate your thesis but contributes to the idea in your paper.

At least one paragraph should address the other side of the argument, or the side that you are arguing against. This helps to persuade the reader that your position is correct because you bring up an opposing point and then discredit that point (e.g. Bigfoot doesn’t exist, though some claim his existence through shoddy video footage. These claims have never been verified nor are they scientifically recognized).

Now you’ve reached the conclusion. Whatever you do, do not just end the paper. Restate your thesis in a new, creative way and give a quick summary of your argument. The last two or three sentences should provide the reader with a “take-away moment” where you present an epiphany to your audience. It’s the dying breath of your paper; the last words of your argument. Do not let your hard work die in vain.

We’d love to hear from you!
Send your comments or suggestions to our email:

[writing@nmu.edu](mailto:writing@nmu.edu)
Beware the Citation Machine!

By Erin Comer and Stephanie Minor

Although it’s tempting to use a citation generator and skip the monotonous task of formatting citations, one should be aware that even generators make mistakes when formatting a citation. It’s okay to use citation generators to ease some of the pain caused by the process of citing sources, but you should be aware that you run the risk of using faulty citations. To avoid this, compare the results of the citation generator with a resource such as the citation guides on Purdue Owl. Doing so will help you identify any mistakes made by the citation generator and will help you become more familiar with citation formats. Better yet, start with Purdue Owl and you shouldn’t have to double check the generator’s citation. By using a citation generator, you’re making more work for yourself by making a one-step process into two steps!

http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/2/

The Centaur’s Challenge

Fix this sentence:

Julia, the mayor’s daughter, was at the party, she danced all night long.

_________________________________________________

Bring your answer into the Writing Center in LRC 111g for a chance to win a $10 gift card to the NMU Bookstore! Only those who answer correctly will be able to put their name into the drawing. The drawing will take place March 25. Good luck!