Reading and Writing Research Reports

Reporting research results has a few basic components:

1) What has the author(s) read that prompted the research ?
2) What is the purpose of the research being reported ?
3) What is the specific research question or research hypothesis ?
4) How was the research conducted ?
  a) who were the participants ?
  b) what equipment and/or materials were used ?
  c) what treatment & data collection procedures were used ?
5) What are the results of the statistical analysis of the data as
….they relate to the research question or research hypothesis?
6) How do the current findings integrate with what the author(s)
  read that prompted the research?

All of our discussions about reading or writing research reports will revolve around these **6** things. (Learn 'em !!!)

Since there is a nearly universal set of 6 things used to describe one's research and its outcomes, it makes sense to "standardize" those reports -- making it easier to write them clearly and easier to read them.

Such "standardization" was the intent of a group of editors and business managers of anthropological and psychological journals in 1928. They wrote 7-page set of guidelines for authors. The most recent version of these guidelines, the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 4th Ed.*, is a bit larger (368 pages), but has the same basic intent.

APA format, as we will apply it, has three components:

1) the content of the report and how it is organized and labeled

2) the format of the report (e.g., margins, citations, tables, etc.)

3) the style of the report (e.g., non-sexist language)

One way to describe how the content of an APA paper is arranged is to consider the basic parts, and then to look at which parts contain the 6 components of a research report.

Title page -- the title should capture the intent/results of the study

Abstract -- 50-120 word summary of the key information of study

Introduction -- review of the literature that prompted the research

Method
  Participants -- who (what) and how they were selected
  Materials -- equipment and materials used to collect data
  Procedure -- treatment and data collection details

Results -- description of the data analysis and results

Discussion -- relating the findings to the previous literature

References -- citations of previous literature referred to in report

Tables, Figures, Etc. -- usually used to present data & analyses

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Where to look for the information to critique a research report ??

1) What has the author(s) read that prompted the research ?
  Introduction, Discussion, References

2) What is the purpose of the research being reported ?
  Abstract, Introduction, Discussion

3) What is the specific research question or research hypothesis ?
  Abstract, Introduction, Results, Discussion

4) How was the research conducted ?
  a) who were the participants ?
   Abstract, Method - Participants

  b) what equipment and/or materials were used ?
   Abstract, Method - Materials/Apparatus

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  c) what treatment & data collection procedures were used ?
   Abstract, Method - Procedures

5) What are the results of the statistical analysis of the data as
….they relate to the research question or research hypothesis?
  Abstract, Results, Discussion, Tables/Figures

6) How do the current findings integrate with what the author(s)
  read that prompted the research?
  Abstract, Discussion

It is a good idea to check each source for the different kinds of information. In particular, don't depend on the Abstract's very brief descriptions of the different component of the report.

If the Abstract were a sufficient portrayal of the research, we wouldn't have to write the other 10-30 pages !!

Elements of APA format & style you'll need for this first writing assignment …

Start with a few basic rules:

• Double-space everything

• Have uniform margins of at least 1 in. at the top, bottom, right, and left of every page

• Write "formally" -- without slang, contractions, etc.

• Use sentences and paragraphs -- do not "list" information

• Give credit to others for their ideas -- if you found a good idea in an article cite that article when you use the idea (even if you're convinced you did/would have had the idea yourself)