

Types *of* Academic Papers

This guide outlines several types of papers that you will write during your academic career, and will also assist you as you learn to read through writing assignments—breaking them down into the component parts.



Academic papers vary in difficulty, length, and the amount of research required. In the lower-division courses, papers tend to be a bit shorter, whereas upper-division course papers are longer and more complex. At whatever level you find yourself right now, it is important to know the difference between the different types of papers, and understand what each paper entails and demands. This is not an exhaustive list of every type of writing, but covers most of the major types of papers.

Genres & Types of Assignments

Each type of paper falls into one of four specific genres, or categories:



Narrative

Tells a story, or summarizes concepts usually in first person or in great detail.



Expository

Investigates, explains, and examines various issues, events, and people.



Persuasive

Presents information with the purpose of persuading the reader to take a position.



Argumentative

Examines both sides of an issue, persuading the reader as to which side has the better argument.

While on your academic journey, you are likely to encounter eight types of papers:

Writing Genre	Type of Assignment	Description
Argumentative	Argument	An essay that describes both sides of an issue
Argumentative	Response	A personal or critical response to a particular information source
Expository	Compare & Contrast	An explanation of how two things are alike or different
Expository	Reflection	A contemplative analysis of a topic
Narrative	Book Review	A summary about a text, including the author's opinion of it
Narrative	Descriptive	An in-depth description of something
Narrative	Literature Review	A survey of scholarly research articles, books, and other sources relevant to a specific issue or theory
Narrative	Research	A thorough examination of a topic

Perspective

When you write an academic paper, the perspective, or **point of view** from which you write plays a significant role. Point of view describes in what voice the writing occurs: either first person or third person. First-person narration tends to have a more personal tone, while third-person narration is more formal and academic. The point of view will be determined by the assignment and formality of style. Occasionally, you might be asked to write a paper in the third person, with an opportunity to share a personal reflection at the end of the paper, resulting in a point of view hybrid—both third-person and first-person perspective.

Tone & Style

Furthermore, **tone and style** indicates the formality of the piece, and refers to the author's attitude and "voice", and whether the author should take a formal or informal stance. Again, this can vary based on the writing assignment. A personal narrative or reflection might have a more informal tone and style, while a research paper will have a decidedly formal tone and style. This tone and style will communicate directly to the audience, and choosing an incorrect tone might damage your credibility as an "expert" on your topic.

Research

Finally, **research** describes whether "outside" research will typically be required for this type of assignment. Most of the time, the instructor will indicate whether outside research needs to be completed, and to what extent. At whatever level, if you are referring to texts, videos, lectures or other sources, you must cite those sources in-text in APA format, and include a reference at the end of the paper. Most academic papers and especially research papers should maintain an objective tone and avoid an "editorial" or opinion-based approach.

"Prose is architecture, not interior decoration."—
Ernest Hemingway

Academic papers have specific requirements, which are used for specific purposes, that show depth and breadth of understanding—which demonstrate analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of a particular topic. Remember that in the end, the purpose of these essays are to demonstrate understanding of course concepts.

Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. -Colossians 3:23-24