

1. Fundamentals of a Research Paper

In an academic paper, you address a **research question**, formulate a **hypothesis**, and **argue** why it is true. These components are not always stated explicitly, but they guide the academic work.

Argumentation means that you make statements that support your idea. Good academic papers make the connections between these statements as clear as possible.

An academic paper does not reflect your personal opinion. Ethics and philosophy are often dismissed as opinions, yet ethical work is about making scientifically defensible claims. You do this through arguments.

An argument sets out premises and derives a conclusion from them. A famous example is:

Premise 1: All humans are mortal.

Premise 2: Socrates is a human.

Conclusion: Socrates is mortal.

If Premise 1 and 2 are true, then the conclusion must necessarily be true.

Arguments do not have to be formatted as above but can be integrated into the running text. For example:

All humans are mortal and Socrates is a human. Therefore, it is clear that Socrates is also mortal.

In ethical questions, you not only have to derive the conclusion from the premises but also show that your premises are true. Consider the following argument:

War causes great suffering. Causing great suffering is morally wrong. Therefore, war is morally wrong.

Here you have two premises. First: war causes great suffering. That is an empirical question. To demonstrate the truth of this premise, you can refer to empirical literature showing how civilians or soldiers suffer during war.

The second premise is: Causing great suffering is morally wrong. That is a normative question. Here, you are not making a claim about the actual functioning of the world but you declare an action to be morally wrong.

To support this premise, you can refer to ethical literature that argues why it is morally wrong to cause great suffering. When you do so, you should show that the arguments used are logically consistent.

Academic papers therefore make claims that you substantiate. You also defend certain values, but you must support them through arguments. Supporting your claims with evaluative language is not sufficient.

Avoid expressions such as “Unfortunately” and “Fortunately.” These reveal your personal feelings but do not strengthen your arguments.

2. Use of Academic Literature in the Text

To support their claims, scholars mainly rely on academic literature in scholarly journals or books. Occasionally, you may also draw on blogs or newspapers.

When you use literature, you must cite it. Otherwise, you are presenting the content as your own idea – that is plagiarism.

A citation can be either verbatim or paraphrased. Verbatim quotations should not be used too frequently, as it might seem that you are “hiding” behind them. An academic paper should not only demonstrate that you have read the literature but also that you can express it in your own words.

A verbatim quotation is enclosed in quotation marks. It looks like this:

“Part of our present difficulty is that we must constantly adjust our lives, our thoughts and our emotions, in order to live simultaneously within different kinds of orders according to different rules. If we were to apply the unmodified, uncurbed, rules of the micro-cosmos (i.e., of the small band or troop, or of, say, our families) to the macro-cosmos (our wider civilisation), as our instincts and sentimental yearnings often make us wish to do, we would destroy it. Yet if we were always to apply the rules of the extended order to our more intimate groupings, we would crush them. So we must learn to live in two sorts of world at once.” (Hayek 1990, 18).

The text within the parentheses indicates the author, year of publication, and page number. The period is inside the quotation marks, the parentheses outside.

You should mainly use paraphrases in your paper. A paraphrase keeps texts more readable and demonstrates that you have understood the content. In a paraphrase, you express an author's idea in your own words. The quotation marks used in verbatim quotations are omitted.

A paraphrase must clearly be in your own words. If you present a verbatim quote as a paraphrase, for instance by omitting quotation marks, that counts as plagiarism.

A paraphrase could look like this:

If we applied the rules of the microcosm to the macrocosm, we would destroy it. But if we applied the rules of the macrocosm to the microcosm, the same would happen. Therefore, we must constantly adapt to live simultaneously in both worlds (Hayek 1990, 18).

Note that the structure and wording have been changed.

At the end of a paraphrase, there is no period. It comes only after the parentheses containing the citation. You can also place the citation at the beginning of the paraphrase. In that case, the period is placed at the end of the sentence:

Hayek (1990, 18) wrote that we live in two different worlds. If we applied the rules of the microcosm to the macrocosm, we would destroy it. But if we applied the rules of the macrocosm to the microcosm, the same would happen. Therefore, according to Hayek, we must constantly adapt to live simultaneously in both.

You must make it clearly recognizable which ideas are your own and which you have taken from the literature.

When quoting verbatim, you may omit parts of the text. In that case, you must indicate omissions with [...]:

“Part of our present difficulty is that we must constantly adjust our lives, our thoughts and our emotions, in order to live simultaneously within different kinds of orders according to different rules. If we were to apply the [...] rules of the micro-cosmos [...] to the macro-cosmos (our wider civilisation), as our instincts and sentimental yearnings often make us wish to do, we would destroy it. Yet if we were

always to apply the rules of the extended order to our more intimate groupings, we would crush them. So we must learn to live in two sorts of world at once.” (Hayek 1990, 18).

Longer quotations like the one above form their own paragraph. Short quotations, on the other hand, are integrated directly into the text:

Friedrich von Hayek wrote: “Part of our present difficulty is that we must constantly adjust our lives, our thoughts and our emotions, in order to live simultaneously within different kinds of orders according to different rules.” (Hayek 1990, 18).

Quotations longer than three lines should form their own paragraph.

In the example above, it is also possible to place the citation before the quoted text. In that case, you do not need to repeat it afterward:

Friedrich von Hayek (1990, 18) wrote: “Part of our present difficulty is that we must constantly adjust our lives, our thoughts and our emotions, in order to live simultaneously within different kinds of orders according to different rules.”

Longer quotations can also be integrated into the text and mixed with your own wording:

Friedrich von Hayek realized that we cannot avoid adapting “our lives, our thoughts and our emotions, in order to live simultaneously within different kinds of orders according to different rules.” The rules of the micro-cosmos are simply not applicable for the macro-cosmos. However, he also noted that “if we were always to apply the rules of the extended order to our more intimate groupings, we would crush them.” Thus, “we must learn to live in two sorts of world at once.” (Hayek 1990, 18).

The parts outside the quotation marks are paraphrases of the text. Here too, make sure that the text is clearly recognizable as your own wording.

Here too, you can include the citation either at the beginning or the end:

Friedrich von Hayek (1990, 18) realized that we cannot avoid adapting “our lives, our thoughts and our emotions, in order to live simultaneously within different kinds of orders according to different rules.” The rules of the micro-cosmos are simply not applicable for the macro-cosmos. However, he also noted that “if we were always to apply the rules of the extended order to our more intimate groupings, we would crush them.” Thus, “we must learn to live in two sorts of world at once.”

3. Citation Styles in the Text

There are several ways to indicate literature. These vary depending on the journal or book. The most important thing is that they are consistent.

For your university papers, you can use the Harvard system. In this system, as in the examples above, you insert the citations directly in the text:

(Author, Year, Page Number).

You do not have to indicate page numbers when you paraphrase papers. However, you must include them when you cite verbatim.

4. The Reference List

All literature you use in your paper must be listed in the reference list. There are rules for this as well. In our department, we use the APA system.

The citation format varies depending on the medium. You would cite a book like this:

Hayek, F. A. (1990). *The Fatal Conceit: The Errors of Socialism*. Routledge.

You first list the author's last name followed by the initials of the first name. Book titles are italicized. At the end, you include the publisher.

You cite an article in an academic journal as follows:

Hayek, F. A. (1975). The Pretence of Knowledge. *The Swedish Journal of Economics*, 77(4), 433–442.

Again: last name plus initials of the first name, followed by the year. Then the title of the article, which is not italicized. However, the name of the journal and the volume number are italicized. Then follows the issue number in parentheses. At the end, you specify the page range of the article.

Sometimes an article is not part of a journal but a book. You cite a book chapter in an edited volume as follows:

Russell, B. (1949). Individual and Social Ethics. In *The Basic Writings of Bertrand Russell* (pp. 334–343).

The first and last names refer to the author of the article, not the book. Then follows the article title. The italicized text is the book title. The page numbers indicate where in the book the article appears.

You must also list the book itself:

Egner, R. E., & Denonn, L. E. (Eds.). (1961). *The Basic Writings of Bertrand Russell*. Routledge Classics.

The citation of an edited volume does not differ from that of a monograph. However, you add “(Eds.)” after the authors’ names to indicate that they edited rather than wrote the book.

Books and scholarly articles are your most important sources in an academic paper.

You may also draw on newspaper articles. You cite them as follows:

Pilkington, E. (2019, October 14). Digital dystopia: How algorithms punish the poor. *The Guardian*.
<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2019/oct/14/automating-poverty-algorithms-punish-poor>

For such articles, you indicate not only the year but also the month and day of publication. For online articles, include the link to the article as well.

Blog posts are cited in the same way.

You arrange the reference list alphabetically:

Egner, R. E., & Denonn, L. E. (Eds.). (1961). *The Basic Writings of Bertrand Russell*. Routledge Classics.
Hayek, F. A. (1975). The Pretence of Knowledge. *The Swedish Journal of Economics*, 77(4), 433–442.
Hayek, F. A. (1990). *The Fatal Conceit: The Errors of Socialism*. Routledge.
Pilkington, E. (2019, October 14). Digital dystopia: How algorithms punish the poor. *The Guardian*.
<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2019/oct/14/automating-poverty-algorithms-punish-poor>
Russell, B. (1949). Individual and Social Ethics. In *The Basic Writings of Bertrand Russell* (pp. 334–343).

The reference list is also chronological. If you cite several works by the same author, as with Hayek above, the earlier publication is listed first.

If you have several works by the same author from the same year, they are again sorted alphabetically by the article title and labeled as follows:

Russell, B. (1943a). An Outline of Intellectual Rubbish. In *The Basic Writings of Bertrand Russell* (pp. 45–71).

Russell, B. (1943b). The Future of Pacifism. *The American Scholar*, 13(1), 7–13.

In the running text, these articles are cited as (Russell 1943a) and (Russell 1943b).

5. How to Write a Paper: Useful Tips

Write clearly. You should rephrase or divide complicated sentences into several shorter ones:

Friedrich von Hayek had already examined the different spheres of the micro- and macrocosm, noting that the rules of one sphere, namely the microcosm—which defines the rules within intimate spheres such as the family—cannot be applied to the macrocosm, which defines the rules of the larger society in which we interact with people who remain anonymous to us, and that this insight also applies in reverse.

Better: Friedrich von Hayek had already examined the different spheres of the micro- and macrocosm. He found that the rules of the microcosm cannot be applied to the macrocosm. The microcosm defines the rules that apply within intimate spheres, such as the family. In contrast, the macrocosm defines the rules of the larger society. In it, we mainly interact with people who remain anonymous to us. Conversely, the rules of the macrocosm are not applicable to the microcosm.

Avoid double negatives:

It is not plausible that artificial intelligence will have no risks.

Better: Artificial intelligence will have risks.

Write in the active voice when possible, not the passive:

The law was passed.

Better: Parliament passed the law.

Avoid nominalizing verbs:

The American economy shows growth.

Better: The American economy is growing.