**Question-Claim Structure**

While “essayed” research is an excellent introduction to academic inquiry, most academic writing reports the products of the inquiry process in the form of argumentative papers. That may be the direction in which you want to take this draft after your initial research. Maybe you’ve developed strong feelings about your topic and you want to methodically build a case for a particular idea or assertion as a response to your research question.

The question-claim structure is useful if your motive in the draft is to prove something. It has some similarities to the delayed thesis structure of the essay—for one thing it arises from a question—but this method for organizing your draft puts your answer to that question up front and then proceeds, suing your research, to make the most convincing case. It’s a little like the automobile dealer who, after wandering the lot, decides to put the models he or she most wants to sell in the showroom window. You direct your readers’ gaze away from the process of discovery to the product of that process: the point you want to make.

The question-claim structure may be the form of the research paper with which you’re most familiar. Here’s one way to think about organizing your draft using that approach.
Question-Claim Structure (continued)

I. Introduce the problem or research question that is the focus of the paper.
   a. Provide factual background.
   b. Dramatize with an anecdote.
   c. Establish the significance of the problem by citing experts or other observers.
   d. Explain your purpose: to change audience attitudes? To call for some kind of action? To merely inform?

II. Review the literature. What have others already said about the question?
   a. Cite published studies, interviews, commentaries, experiments, and so on that are relevant to the question or problem.
   b. Which ideas or voices seem most important? Are there identifiable camps in the debate, or certain patterns of argument?
   c. Address popular assumptions. What do most people believe to be true?

III. What will by your argument or thesis in the paper?
   a. What does your understanding of the ongoing conversation about your research question lead you to believe is true?
   b. What is your position?
   c. What will you try to prove?

IV. What are your reasons for believing what you believe and, for each one, what specific evidence did you find that you thought was convincing?
   a. What kinds of evidence will your readers find most persuasive?
   b. Are there various kinds of evidence that can be brought to bear?
   c. How do your reasons square with those who might disagree with you?

V. What is the significance of your claim? What’s at stake for your audience?
   What might be other avenues for research?
   a. What should we do? What might happen if we don’t act?
   b. How does the thesis or claim that you propose resolve some part of the problem? What part remains unresolved?
   c. What questions remain?

While each method of organizing your research essay is distinct, they all share certain characteristics. For example, nearly any academic research paper includes the following items:

1. A point, a claim, a thesis, one main thing you are trying to say about the research question.
2. A review of what has already been said by others about it.
3. Specific information—evidence—that is the data from which your interpretations, conclusions, assertions, and speculations arise.
4. A method of reasoning through the question, some pattern of thought—narrative, argument, essaying—that writer and reader find a convincing way to try to get at the truth of things.

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