

The Application Paper

An Overview of the Application Paper

Your purpose in writing an application paper is to apply established research findings and theories to contemporary problems and issues in psychology. The paper itself may take many forms. For example, it could be an application for a research grant, a proposal for a service learning project, or a recommendation to a client/agency. Regardless of the exact audience and purpose of the specific document, every application paper clearly reviews and describes a body of research or theory, then describes how that previous scholarship informs a specific issue. For example, you may spend time observing a child daycare center in order to observe aspects of child development, then write an essay connecting previous research/theory to your observations.

An application paper can be a first step to a longer research paper because it enables you to think through research and theory as it connects to social phenomenon you would like to better understand.

Audience

Your primary audience includes your professor and classmates—an academic audience with an interest in psychology. Depending on the assignment, additional audiences could include a grant funding agency, a nonprofit organization or other such client, or another person/group interested in your findings.

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Variations on the Assignment

Depending on what your class is studying, your professor may ask you to:

- Start with given theory and look for a phenomenon to apply it to.
Example: You might study attribution theory and seek evidence of the theory at work.
- Start with a phenomenon and explain it with theories.
Example: You may be assigned to imagine something like this: “Your college tennis teammates tend to glorify their athletic ability when they dominate a match, but sometimes reference ‘good or bad luck’ as the cause of a game’s outcome.” This phenomenon may remind you of theories that you can look into further—including attribution theory.
- Start with a particular theory and a specific phenomenon, and ask the student to make a connection between the two.

Example: Your professor may ask you to consider theories of attribution (internal, external, stable/unstable, etc.) and to apply attribution to athletes' behavior. This could lead you to write about group teams versus individual teams (such as basketball vs. singles tennis) and the differences in attribution phenomena, or about what situations in sports tend to yield which types of attribution, etc.

- Take what you are learning in class and apply it to a real-world situation, such as modifying your own behavior or someone else's behavior.

Example: You may experiment with behavioral results of positive reinforcement by letting yourself watch an hour of TV for every two hours you exercise, and write about the experience and its effectiveness.

- Write a **thank you letter** and **reflection essay**, particularly in cases where you've observed children interacting. In the thank you letter, reflect on your experience at the site where you observed the children, describe some connections between theories studied in class and observations of child behavior at the site, and of course thank the organization for granting the opportunity to observe. An essay would further discuss and analyze theories you studied in class and their application to the the observations you made at the observation site.
- Write a **proposal for a grant** based on a particular organization's needs (such as a daycare center) or aspects of the organization's work that you believe could be improved, based on psychology knowledge). You may have to provide necessary documents and research information for the center to follow through with pursuing the grant.

Take Notice of Voice/Tone

As your document is intended to be read by an academic or professional audience, you should write in a formal, professional manner. This does not mean that you should pack the writing with jargon or complicated sentences; rather, you should be clear and detailed about the research and theories you discuss, remain objective, and format and edit the document carefully.

Prompts for Writing Consultations

- Has the writer read enough on this topic? Does he or she feel informed enough to describe the research/theory under discussion?
- Writers may have copied and pasted information from their annotated bibliographies into the text; that is fine, but be sure information flows smoothly.
- Are sources grouped together in a logical manner, organized by topic rather than by chronology of the writer's research process? (For example, the literature review should not read as a tour of the writer's research process, but rather as an essay that cites research according to the issues on which each source focuses).
- Is the theory/research clearly described?
- When applying theory/research to a particular phenomenon, is the phenomenon itself clearly articulated?
- Does the application of the theory/research seem plausible, appropriate, and clear?
- Are the claims made in the paper well supported by the research presented? As a reader, are you led to the same conclusions the

Format Accurately

The definitive guide to APA style is the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*; refer to that guide for help formatting your manuscript correctly and citing sources appropriately. Another useful resource for help with APA citations is the following site: <http://www.dianahacker.com/resdoc>.

Check your professor's assignment sheet. It will likely give you specific information about how your document should be organized, as the structure will depend on your audience's needs. For example, grant agencies often have specific formats for writers to follow. If you are writing a grant application, you will need to follow that appropriate format.

Generally, though, applications of research/theory to real-life problems are organized chronologically and include the following sections (labeled with headers):

- A description of what previous studies have shown. What theories have been supported, and which have been discounted, and why? (Example: what existing research is there about attribution theories in individual versus group sports?)
- An integration of those findings into the specific problem/phenomenon you are studying. (Example: How do previous findings regarding aspects of attribution theories relate to what you yourself observe in a particular area, such as tennis players versus basketball players?)

writer has reached? If not, where do you have trouble following the logic of the argument?

- Where applicable, are counter-arguments addressed?
- Has the writer maintained objectivity throughout the paper?
- Are sources cited correctly in APA style?
- Is the document formatted correctly, given the assignment's directives and APA style?