

On writing a strong academic article:

Authors write articles based on original academic research, meaning new information that no one has written about before or new interpretations of known facts. Authors want to inform others about what they have found in their research, but the point is not simply to present a lot of new facts. Academic articles seek to help a reader see how she or he might use those new facts to see a particular topic differently or address a problem or a question in a new way.

For this reason academic articles are not just organized around a theme, but around a clear line of argument or persuasion—a thesis. Authors may use different methods to show the reader how the new facts that they present can be helpfully understood. They might put the facts in relation to previous writing on the subject, or in relation to theories presented in that particular academic discipline, or in comparison with a similar situation in a different place or time. In each of these, the point of an academic argument is to not criticize or to prove others wrong, but to build up a conversation between previous writings, the author's new research and the reader, in order to create new knowledge and different ways of thinking.

Wayne Booth, in *The Craft of Research* suggests that authors think about their thesis in relation to a conceptual problem (a lack of understanding on some topic) and a conversation that convinces the reader of one new way of understanding that topic that will help him or her see the world better. He suggests that authors start thinking about their thesis in terms of both the problem or issue that the article will help the reader understand, but also the importance of that topic and the consequence of what the reader will lose if they do not understand what the author writes. It is equally important to use the evidence well to convince the reader. "In a research argument, we are expected to make claims not just because we believe they are

true but because we think they are new and important enough to change what readers think. Then we support those claims with sound reasons and good evidence, as if our readers were asking us, quite reasonable, *Why should I believe that?*¹ If the article is able to convince the reader, it helps others shape their knowledge and thinking, moving the larger conversation forward.

Authors also need to present their evidence fairly, in a way that others can verify through citations and a clear discussion of the method they used to conduct their research and the kinds of sources they used. Instead of simply presenting a fact, authors need to convince the reader why that fact is valid and relevant to the particular thesis. When they use quotations, they are responsible for citing the source of the quotation, but also providing some context for the quotation and interpreting its meaning. Researchers who conduct interviews with living people have a responsibility to protect the safety and the dignity of their informants. This may require excluding the names of the informants and discussing how the interviews will be used.

¹Wayne C. Booth et al., *The Craft of Research*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).