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## INTRODUCTION

If you are an undergraduate psychology student reading this introduction, this book is specifically for *you*. Over the course of your undergraduate career, you will be asked to write papers for a number of different psychology classes. Sometimes you will be asked to write a term paper or lab report; other times you may be asked to write a research paper, either summarizing the available research on a topic in a literature review or writing an experimental paper about your own original research. This book is designed to help you write scientifically. One of the features I like most about this book—and I hope you will too—is that it includes actual examples of the different steps involved in scientific writing. For example, when I present the notecard method and software programs for extracting information from sources, you will see depictions of actual notecards. When reviewing how to write the Introduction section of a research paper, you will see an actual student's rough draft, an edited version (as it would be marked by an instructor), and a final draft. In reviewing American Psychological Association (APA) format, you'll see examples of different types of citations you might need to use in your scientific writing.

Although I wrote this book in a linear fashion, you don't have to read it that way. In Chapter 1, I start by establishing the underlying theme of the entire book, that is, that the best communicators in science must be able to tell a good story. As human beings, we enjoy good stories, and we are likely to remember good stories. Chapter 1 provides an overview of the book and briefly reviews the types of assignments for which this book can be most helpful, namely, literature reviews and research papers. The importance of identifying your audience and writing for that audience is presented in Chapter 1 and stressed throughout the book.

Before you can jump in and do any type of scientific writing, careful planning needs to occur, and this is the central topic of Chapter 2. The development of a clear topic and research question (or thesis statement) is essential to laying the foundation on which your scientific writing will be built. I review library search strategies and available resources, and I emphasize the importance of understanding the assignment so you don't waste time or effort writing a great paper that doesn't satisfy the requirements of the assignment.

In Chapter 3, I continue with the next steps of the research process, focusing primarily on identifying key resources and discussing methods for extracting information from those sources. I describe in detail how you can track information from multiple sources that will facilitate the actual writing process and the synthesis of information from your multiple sources.

In Chapter 4, I present some general tips that will apply to most scientific writing in psychology. Key components of this chapter include detailed instructions on creating your first draft, editing, revising, and proofreading. In my discussion of plagiarism, I provide actual examples of text and point out the differences between plagiarized work and sloppy citation methods. This chapter ends with a section on APA Style and format and provides useful information on how to avoid the most common writing errors and tips for improving all kinds of writing, not just scientific writing.

The literature review is a key component of many types of scientific writing. You may be asked to write a stand-alone literature review, or a literature review might be part of a term paper or research paper. Chapter 5 provides guiding principles for writing literature reviews and an actual sample from a former student of mine, including the first draft, an edited version, and the final draft. Seeing actual examples of the process will give you insight into how to improve your own writing.

If you will be writing a complete research paper, then Chapter 6 is essential for you. In this chapter, I review each of the main sections of a research paper (Introduction, Method, Results, and Discussion), again including an actual student sample of each section's rough draft, edited version, and final version. In this way, you can see how an instructor would identify writing problems, and you can also see a student's solutions. By modeling this entire process, I show how psychologists write and think, and, I hope, you will start to internalize and gain those abilities yourself.

Chapter 7 outlines the remaining details of the research paper, including the title page, abstract, references, and tables. In my usual format, I provide examples of each so you can see actual student work.

Although the type of writing you would do for an undergraduate course in psychology is the major focus of this book, scientists also write for other reasons, and Chapter 8 presents examples of other types of scientific writing. An essential component of being a good scientist is the ability to communicate to the larger scientific community, and we often work toward that goal by attending regional or national conferences. As a student, you too might have the opportunity to attend or present at one of these conferences, and thus Chapter 8

opens with examples of writing for an oral presentation at a conference and also provides an example of writing for a poster presentation. However, scientific information is also communicated in other ways, such as writing for blogs and social media. Finally, I close by discussing writing for both pleasure and insight, as there can be beneficial effects of writing for certain medical conditions (as demonstrated in published studies).

You can read the chapters in any order, but if you are actually conducting research for a psychology paper, I suggest you read Chapters 2 and 3 before you start writing your research paper. If you are writing a term paper that is mostly your opinion, I would suggest Chapters 1 and 4. If you are in a course such as research methods or experimental design, then I would recommend that you read all the chapters in sequence so you can see the process from start to finish. You will note that in many places I have used information from the internet to provide cogent examples. In Chapter 3, I present a section titled “Evaluating Sources,” and I have followed the advice I present there in my selection of materials from the internet. As I have been, always be careful about referencing information from the internet, and ensure that the information and its source are credible and reliable.

It is my sincere hope that the ideas I present will help you with your scientific writing. If you can think of anything that I can do to improve this book, please email me ([elandru@boisestate.edu](mailto:elandru@boisestate.edu)). Your suggestions are both welcome and valuable, and in future editions of this book I will be able to add resources to improve my advice to undergraduate psychology students.