

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
PROBLEMS IN CIVILIZATION**

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Abstract:

The present work intends to demonstrate the problems of methodology the students bump into when writing a research work. Fourth year students of English working on a civilization work have been taken as a sample to show how difficult, and in some cases impossible to accomplish a research work in this field. This is mainly due to the students' lack of knowledge in methodology in addition to many other problems that will be dealt with

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To know how to write a research paper in the English language is far from being an easy task. The writer bumps into

many problems and difficulties that prevent him from advancing in his work.

In the present work, we are not going to refer to professionals (professional here refers to writers who have already had the experience of writing a research paper). The purpose is rather restricted to the experience of university graduate students, English students more particularly and the problems they come across when writing their “memoirs” in civilisation and history.

The English students’ first experience with “research” in our English department starts in the fourth year when the students are asked to write a project commonly called a “memoir”, a work which needs to be submitted by the end of the year for the accomplishment of the B.A Licence in the English language.

It would be misleading to call the work performed by the students at the graduate level, in about forty or fifty pages as a research work. Nonetheless, because the students follow the same methodology of a research paper of any type, they are initiating themselves, for the first time, in a research task,

later exploited during the preparation of their M.A or a doctorate thesis.

Throughout their cursus, the students of English are taught different civilization modules at different levels. British and American civilizations in the second the third years and African civilization in the fourth year. It is worth noting that their acquisition of American, British, and African civilizations is far from being complete. Only one aspect of civilization i.e. history is taught to the students at the different levels. The other aspects of civilization such as culture, society, and economics are utterly neglected. For this purpose, the students hoping to prepare a work on civilization always opt for the historical aspect. In other words, past events already dealt with in class. Civilization, in its broadest meaning, would be a very interesting field, the students would analyse. If we take the example of the African civilization for instance, we would notice the great variety of items one could deal with. The African way of life, their social organization, their cultural heritage, their political institution...and their religions would not be without significance.

Different approaches may be used for the accomplishment of a research work in civilization or history : The thematic approach, the chronological approach, or the geographical approach. By thematic, we mean that the writer needs to organize his work according to the themes he wants to tackle; chronological concerns the chronology of events as they occur in history; and finally geographical: that is the analysis of events according to their geographical location (one geographical area after the other).

The choice of the title must be restricted. It must be accompanied by the time axes. Dates or periods that limit the period of work.

Many students do not know how to proceed when it comes at the level developing their research work. Because of lack of knowledge in methodology, some students copy down, directly from a given document, ideas needed for their topic. Methodologically speaking, this is completely rejected and is referred to as “plagiarism”. The student has, therefore, to start with data collection. In other words, collecting the documents needed for his topic, then he should organize his ideas according to the importance of each one. Finally, he needs to

paraphrase i.e. using his own style to express those ideas according to an order of importance related to the topic itself.

Quotations, long and short, are used in a research work to illustrate and reinforce the arguments. These quotations are cited and quoted as they occur in the original sources with no change. However, they are presented in a certain way. For long quotations a space is left within the text to write down the original author's ideas as they occur in the original source. The use of quotation marks in this case is useless. Nevertheless, the writer needs to mention the source in the footnotes (notes at the bottom of each page). Short quotations, on the other hand, are presented differently. They are inserted in the text with quotation marks indicating the beginning and the end of the quoted text. To cite the original source of the cited text in the footnotes is obviously compulsory to demonstrate that what has been quoted in the text, has been taken (as it is), directly from the original source with no change.

The footnotes, as some students believe, are not only used for the presentation of the sources. Notes at the bottom of each page are also used to explain a complicated concept, word... or an information that can not be inserted in the text.

Equally important, the footnote is also useful to give details (short biography) about important persons in the work : his / her date of birth, his / her accomplishments related to the work... and his / her date of death. Nonetheless, the biography must be very short (should not exceed two lines) and has to include very important details about him / her.

The presentation of the bibliography : list of documents used for the accomplishment of a given work is not given at random. The student needs to follow a certain strategy. He needs first of all to present the list of books following an alphabetical order of authors' names. The name of each author is then followed by his first name, the title of his book underlined, the place of publication, publishers, and the date of publication. The list of books is followed by the list of articles and reviews. Again following an alphabetical order of the authors' names, then the first names, the title of the article between quotation marks, the review's name underlined, the date of publication of the article and its number, and finally the pages' numbers. Extra documents may also be used in the bibliography, the most important of which are theses, dictionaries and encyclopaedias and even web sites nowadays (only when the references are complete).

Writing a research work by our fourth year English students is, indeed, very hard. This is mainly due to the students' little interest in research methodology. The problem is, in fact, related to the lack of teaching such modules throughout the different levels to initiate the students and to prepare them for the accomplishment of an acceptable work by the end of the fourth year.