

# Struggles of writing a research paper as an UNDERGRAD STUDENT

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Have you ever started a research paper with a head full of ideas only to hit a wall mid-way? This is a common experience for many undergrads writing their first research paper. What begins as an exciting dive into a topic can quickly devolve into a frustrating maze of tedious work. Even though the end result is rewarding, the process is filled with roadblocks that might feel insurmountable unless tackled with patience and tact.

#### Struggling with team coordination

One of the most challenging aspects of writing a research paper is finding the right team. Initially, teaming up may feel like a brilliant idea — tasks can be easily divided and deadlines seem within reach! But soon you realise it's not that simple. Clashing schedules, different work ethics, and last-minute panics quickly turn what was supposed to be a group effort into a source of stress. To avoid these pitfalls, set clear goals from the beginning, maintain a shared calendar to keep everyone on track, and arrange regular meetings to keep everyone accountable and organised.

#### Difficulty in finding study participants

Research relies on valid data, responses from survey findings, or interviews. While reaching out to people for these surveys and interviews, however, oftentimes emails sit unnoticed, messages get ignored, and forms remain incomplete. The clock keeps ticking but you keep not being able to find enough research participants to meet your data requirements. At some point, you start wondering: "Will I have enough responses to complete this research on time?" To increase participation and gather sufficient data, diversify your network and cast a wide net through social media, offer incentives to participants, and send follow-up reminders to ensure a timely submission of responses.

#### Facing writer's block

Your participants are ready, your research topic is on track, and the deadline is set. But then the dreaded writer's block creeps in. Ideas buzz in your mind, yet the words refuse to take shape and you end up staring at a blank page for hours on end. Every researcher knows this struggle — it's as if a battle is being waged in your mind between thoughts and words while time keeps slipping away. To get the words flowing, outline your thoughts in bullet points before expanding them into paragraphs. Discussing your ideas with a peer may also be the catalyst you need to spark creativity.



ILLUSTRATION: ADRITA ZAIMA ISLAM

#### The challenge of understanding unfamiliar topics

Writing a paper becomes more challenging when tackling a topic you know little about. Starting a paper on an unfamiliar topic can be overwhelming in and of itself; limited online resources for primary research can further complicate this process. Although this obstacle is manageable over time and with effort, the initial lack of knowledge often feels like a significant hurdle, making it difficult to know where to begin. To understand your topic clearly, reach out to professors or experts and form study groups with classmates who have a stronger grasp of the topic and can share valuable insights and resources.

#### Formatting and citation

Citations are far more than a formality in academic writing. They are necessary for maintaining academic integrity and safeguarding against plagiarism. The problem with this final part of the paper begins with understanding the different styles of citation — APA, MLA, Chicago, and more. From punctuation placement to italicisation, the slightest mistake can undermine the credibility of an otherwise well-organised paper. Moreover, the fear of plagiarism looms large — forgetting to cite a source can have serious academic consequences. To keep track of your sources and ensure correct formatting, use citation management tools online or

consult with a librarian to ensure accuracy.

#### The pressure of balancing research with coursework

A good paper needs constant effort to make progress. However, just when you think you are making progress, a string of assignments, project work, and quizzes pile up at your university. The constant switch between tasks makes it difficult to focus and research often gets sidelined. Finding a balanced routine to prioritise academics without neglecting your research becomes hard. To reduce the pressure, employ time management techniques like the Pomodoro method, which breaks work down into 25-minute intervals with short breaks, to enhance focus. If needed, discuss workload management with academic advisors to find a balanced approach.

The entire research process can lead to burnout with you constantly doubting your every effort. However, it is important to see these obstacles as part of the learning process. Each struggle is a chance to build critical thinking abilities and time management skills. And, in the end, it all feels worthwhile when you finally see your work getting published and gaining recognition from your peers.

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