

RESEARCH WRITING: STARTER PHRASES

Sometimes we find it difficult to find the right phrase to start sentences. At such times, a useful strategy is to borrow the phrases of others, known as 'syntactic borrowing' (Kamler & Thomson, 2006; Swales & Feak, 2004).

To do this, look at some sentences in various sections of a research journal in your discipline and remove all the content, leaving a sentence skeleton. This should give you some ideas for phrases that are often used. Perhaps you could set up your own writing group or wiki site and share phrases with colleagues in your discipline.

To help you along with the process, here are some lists of common phrases you might want to use in particular sections of your thesis or exegesis. Please note, however, that these are general academic phrases - there may be phrases in the lists that are not used in your discipline.

Introduction

... is an important component of ...

Central to the discipline of ... is ...

... is an increasingly important issue in ...

Recent developments in ... have shown the need for ...

Recent developments in the field of ... have led to a renewed interest in ...

This study builds on ... and contributes to ...

Over the past century, there has been a (major) decline in ...

Recently there has been renewed interest in ...

To date, there has been little agreement on ...

A theoretical issue that has dominated the field for many years is ...

The controversy over ... has raged for many years.

The issue of ... has recently grown in importance.

Most studies of ... have only been carried out on ...

Until now, little importance has been given to ...

Until now, this method has only been applied to ...

Literature review

A considerable amount of literature has been published on ...

However, there has been relatively little literature published on ...

Numerous studies have argued that ...

Several studies have revealed ...

The research to date has tended to focus on ...

Data from several studies have identified the ...

It has been suggested that ...

It has been conclusively shown that ...

It has been demonstrated that ...

It is thought that ...
Other studies have considered the relationship between ...
The first systematic study of ... was reported by ...
The study of ... was first carried out by ...
Detailed examination of ... by ... showed that ...
In a randomised controlled study of ...
A comparative study by ... found that ...
This view is supported by ..., who argues that ...
A key problem with this argument is ...
However, there is inconsistency with this argument, given ...
X's interpretation overlooks much of ...
One question that needs to be asked, however, is ...
One problem with this approach is ...
The main limitation to X's study is ...
However, this method of analysis has a number of limitations.
However, the research does not take into account ...
The author offers no explanation for ...
The main weakness of this study is ...
Previous studies have only focussed on ...
The existing research fails to ...
Much of the recent literature has not ...

Methods

The design of the questionnaire was informed by ...
A semi-structured approach was chosen because ...
This methodology has a number of advantages, such as ...
Limitations to the study design include ...
Data were gathered from ...
...was prepared according to the procedure outlined by ...
The initial sample consisted of...
The criteria for selecting the subjects were as follows: ...
Eligibility criteria required individuals to have completed ...
To increase the reliability of measures, ...

Results

It is apparent from Table 1 that ...
The data in Figure 2 indicates that ...
Strong evidence of ... was found when ...
A positive correlation was found between ... and ...
The results, as seen in Table2, indicate that ...
No significant reduction in ... was found.
The majority of respondents felt that ...
A small number of those interviewed indicated that ...
A comparison of the two results reveals that ...

Discussion

Contrary to expectations, this research did not find a significant difference between ...

This finding was unexpected and suggests that ...

Findings in the present study are consistent with the findings of ...

There are similarities in...between the present study and those described by ...

It is possible to hypothesise that ...

These findings suggest ...

In contrast to earlier findings, however, no evidence of ... was detected.

There are several possible explanations for this result. For example, ...

This inconsistency may be due to ...

These data must be interpreted with caution because ...

It may be the case that ...

This finding, while preliminary, suggests that ...

This finding has implications for ...

An important issue emerging from these findings is ...

Conclusion

This research has investigated ...

The study set out to ...

The purpose of the present research was to ...

The study has shown that ...

An important finding to emerge in this study is ...

The results are significant in three respects ...

In general, therefore, the results show ...

The findings add to our understanding of ...

This study adds to the body of knowledge around ...

This research confirms previous findings and contributes to our understanding of ...

Although the study did not show ..., it did substantiate ...

However, a number of limitations need to be considered. For instance, ...

The research was limited in several ways.

However, the findings are subject to at least four limitations. The most significant was ...

Several limitations need to be acknowledged.

Further research should be done to investigate the ...

Future research should concentrate on ...

More research is needed to better understand ...

An implication of these findings is that ...

The findings of this study have a number of important implications for ...

References:

Kamler, B., & Thomson, P. (2006). *Helping doctoral students write: Pedagogies for supervision*. London, UK: Routledge.

Swales, J., & Feak, C. (2004). *Academic writing for graduate students: Essential tasks and skills. A course for non-native speakers of English*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.