

# Formats for Research Reports and Papers

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**Course:** BUS 550  
**Title:** *The Contemporary Firm* (3 units)

“The hallmark of problem-solving at McKinsey is that every analysis is decomposed such that the issues are ‘mutually exclusive’ (each idea is distinct) and ‘collectively exhaustive’ (all possibilities have been covered).”

---Ethan Raisel (1998), *“The McKinsey Way”*, McGraw-Hill.

## **Purpose:**

The purpose of this document is to guide the research writer as to the appropriate format for a research paper. The first format is the ideal general format, but other formats (or a hybrid format) may be appropriate too, depending on the context and content. Among other things, the context and content may vary by the nature of the course.

## **I. Research Paper:**

This is the generic format for most research papers in my courses.

1. Overview
  - a. Summary of the Issues
2. Significance of Topic
  - a. Why is this subject matter (strategy/innovation/technology) important?
3. Literature Review
  - a. Scope
  - b. Magnitude
4. Research Questions
  - a. Keep your questions specific, measurable, and testable
5. Methods (you may or may not have these)
  - a. Data Collection
  - b. Sampling Plan
  - c. Missing Data
6. Results (you may or may not have these)
  - a. Descriptive Statistics
  - b. Inferential Statistics
7. Interpretation, Discussion, and Conclusions
  - a. Key Findings
  - b. Limitations
  - c. Recommendations for Management
  - d. Future Work

## **II. Business Plan:**

A typical business plan would contain the following elements:

1. Executive Summary
2. Industry Analysis
3. Company Description
4. Products and Services Description
5. Market Description
6. Marketing Strategy
7. Operations Description
8. Staffing Description
9. Financial Projection
10. Capital Needs

**III. Hewlett-Packard's "Ten Step" Process ("HP"):**

This is the format that was used to pursue innovations at Hewlett-Packard (HP) for a couple of decades. HP is a very successful, innovative firm. Over time, a "Step 0" was added—i.e., to review the rationale for planning to improve the likelihood of success

1. Statement of Purpose
2. Five-Year Objectives
3. Customers and Channels
4. Competition
5. Ideal Solution and Strategy
6. Implementation
7. Financial Analysis
8. External Assumptions
9. Internal Interdependencies
10. First-Year Plan and Continuous Planning Discipline

**IV. Legally-oriented Research Paper ("FIRAC"):**

This is a format that is often used in the first-semester Law School programs to write "briefs" of cases.

1. Facts
2. Issues
3. Regulations (or Rules)
4. Alternatives
5. Conclusions

**V. Software-oriented Capability-Maturity Model ("CMM"):**

This is really a "model" rather than a "format", *per se*. However, if an organization is aware of the model, is focused on improving organizational maturity (especially for "software" or "soft" processes), then this model is entirely applicable.

1. Initial
2. Repeatable
3. Defined
4. Managed
5. Optimizing