

Final Paper Outline Example

Your Name Here

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Overview

Your final paper should be approximately **10–15 pages** (double-spaced, 12pt font, 1-inch margins), not counting tables, figures, or references. It should read as a coherent research report — not a problem set — with clear prose connecting each section.

The outline below follows the example research question from the proposal assignment: *Does parental education influence children’s educational attainment, and does this relationship differ by gender?* Your paper should follow this same structure, adapted to your own question, data, and findings.

1. Introduction (1–2 pages)

Open by motivating your topic for a general reader. By the end of this section, the reader should know:

- **What** you are studying and why it matters sociologically
- **The gap or puzzle** your paper addresses (what do we not yet know, or what is

contested?)

- **Your research question** stated clearly and directly
- A brief preview of your data, method, and main findings

Example: This paper examines whether parental education shapes children's educational attainment, and whether this relationship differs by the gender of parent and child. Using data from the General Social Survey, I find that...

2. Background and Theory (2–3 pages)

Situate your question in the existing literature. You should draw on your annotated bibliography here. This section should:

- Summarize what prior research has found on your topic
- Identify the theoretical framework(s) you are using to make sense of your question
- Derive your hypotheses from theory — explain *why* you expect what you expect

Example: Status attainment research consistently shows that parental education is one of the strongest predictors of children's schooling (Blau and Duncan 1967; Sewell et al. 1969). Two competing theoretical models make different predictions about gender-differentiated effects...

End this section with your hypotheses stated explicitly, as you did in the proposal.

3. Data and Methods (2–3 pages)

Describe exactly how you will answer your research question. A reader should be able to replicate your analysis from this section alone. Cover:

- **Data source:** What dataset are you using? Who collected it, when, and how? What is the unit of analysis?
- **Sample:** Any restrictions you impose (e.g., age range, year, non-missing on key variables) and your final analytic sample size
- **Variables:** For each variable, state its name, what it measures, and how it is coded. Organize by role: dependent variable, key independent variable(s), moderating variable(s) if any, control variables
- **Analytical strategy:** What statistical method(s) are you using (OLS regression, logistic regression, etc.)? Why is this method appropriate for your outcome variable and research question?

Example: I use the “attain” subset of the GSS, which includes $N = X$ respondents with complete data on all key variables. My dependent variable is respondent’s years of completed education (**educ**). My key independent variables are father’s education (**paeduc**) and mother’s education (**maeduc**), both measured in years...

4. Results (3–4 pages)

Present your findings in order from simple to complex. Include at least one table and one figure.

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

A table showing means (or proportions) and standard deviations for all key variables. Briefly narrate what the numbers show about your sample.

4.2 Main Analysis

Present your regression results in a formatted table (use `modelsummary()` in R). Walk the reader through the key coefficients: sign, magnitude, and statistical significance. Relate each finding back to your hypotheses — do the results support or contradict them?

4.3 Additional Analyses (if applicable)

If you examine interactions, subgroups, or run robustness checks, present them here. A visualization (e.g., a predicted probability plot or a coefficient plot) is encouraged.

Example: Table 2 presents OLS regression coefficients for three models. In Model 1, each additional year of father’s education is associated with 0.32 more years of the respondent’s education ($p < .001$). Adding mother’s education in Model 2 reduces this coefficient slightly...

5. Discussion (2–3 pages)

Interpret your results — this is where you do the sociological work of making sense of what you found. Address:

- **Do your findings support your hypotheses?** For each hypothesis, explain why or why not.
 - **What do the results mean substantively?** Don't just report the numbers again; explain what they tell us about the social world.
 - **Limitations:** What are the weaknesses of your data or method? What alternative explanations can you not rule out?
 - **Future directions:** What would a follow-up study need to do to address these limitations?
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6. Conclusion (0.5–1 page)

Briefly restate your research question, main findings, and takeaway. What should the reader remember? Connect back to the broader sociological significance you outlined in the introduction.

References

List all sources you cited, formatted consistently (ASA or APA style is fine — just be consistent). Every source in the text should appear here, and every entry here should be cited in the text.

A Note on Tables and Figures

- All tables and figures should be numbered and have a descriptive title
- Every table and figure should be referenced in the text (e.g., “As shown in Table 1...”)
- Tables should be formatted cleanly — use `modelsummary()` or `knitr::kable()`, not raw R output
- Figures should have labeled axes and a clear legend if needed