Basic Structure of a Scholarly Research Paper

Begin with a nice introduction. It is less painful for your reader, and allows you to introduce your topic while enticing your reader to continue reading. Do this well enough and your reader will read each word written rather than skip ahead. Add more stuff. At some point, get to the point. The point should be very specific. The point of your paper is specified in a thesis sentence (or paragraph). Your thesis should have a minimum of three (3) points you wish to expound upon.

1 -- In the body of your paper, you will pursue a discussion of your three points. Here, we have point number one. Describe point number one a little more concisely. Mention (if possible) three specific items about point one:

a) Begin pulling out information about point one. Here, that first thing you mentioned, for instance. Now you bring out the research you have done. Here is the proof you discovered about point one from this author. (author here). You may continue discussion of author’s point of view as it relates to point one as you understand it.

b) Now we have the second thing about point one, and another author or view of point one. Be sure to always credit any quotations or theories about point one to the author. (author here)

c) And lastly, the third thing about point one you mentioned above. You don’t need to have a new author for each paragraph. You may elaborate on the work or works of a specific author if it corresponds to point one and you present it as proof of the point of view you are promoting to back up your point one statement.

2 -- Now we proceed to point two from your thesis sentence. You may include a few points of view on point two if you wish. It makes it easier to create a general outline of your paper and fill it in as you go if you have this basic structure firmly in mind. Remember that each point you discuss relates to the topic of your paper and your thesis statement. The body of your paper is where you back up your statement with “proofs” discovered in your literature research of the topic.

a) As always, remember that any thought, idea or quotation you use from a specific author (be it from a book, scholarly journal article, conference paper or any other source other than your own) MUST be credited to avoid plagiarism. You may paraphrase the work of an author, but the idea must still be credited to its source. Plagiarism is so very tempting to help you add length to your paper without having to be original, but under both federal and international law – not to mention university policy – plagiarism is theft of property (albeit intellectual property).
Plagiarism in published works is called copyright infringement. Plagiarism in classwork is considered grounds for expulsion. Don’t get lazy. Paraphrase and/or credit the work upon which you base your paper. We include the name of an author we refer back to in the body of our paper so the reader can easily see whose work we are referring to, allowing them to check said work should they wish to pursue an investigation into the topic.

b) As we round out point two from your thesis, remember to credit the work of others. Include a cite back to that work after pulling the work out and discussing it with your reader and to paraphrase. Remember also that this paper is not the work of others. You shouldn’t be filling it with quotations or paraphrasing the words of others, but generating your thoughts on the topic based on the proofs you have presented, which are the articles and books you have read on the subject. Your extensive reading on your paper topic makes you – for your reader – the authority on that topic for the moment. Give your reader the benefit of your knowledge and understanding of the topic.

3 -- Now we begin with the final point, point three, which we provided our reader way back in our thesis sentence at the beginning of our paper. As with the other points, try to include three paragraphs and points of view about point three. Remember that this is not the only way to write a paper, but is a very useful tool to keep in mind. As you progress, you will get into the habit of researching your topic and thinking in terms of points you wish to make and the structure and organization of your paper. It will become easier. Until it does, however, understanding the basic skeleton of a research paper is a terrific aid to help you organize your thoughts in a cohesive manner and place them on paper in a way which will allow your reader to absorb that information in a simple, logical progression. The alternative, to jump around randomly on a diverse collection of thoughts on your topic or to fail to back up your thesis with researched material will inevitably lead to disaster. Do that, and your reader will become confused – and you will without doubt receive a less than satisfactory grade for a class paper. Remember that your instructor is also your reader and appreciates picking up a paper that is organized, logical and “easy to read.”

a) As we go on to another view of point three in this paragraph, remember too that part of making a paper easy to read is to use correct spelling and good grammar. Fail in those two basic needs and your reader will find themselves constantly hitting a brick wall as they progress through your paper. Brick walls for a reader do not translate into good grades.

b) Nor should you depend upon the computer to do your thinking for you. SpellCheck is notorious for spelling the wrong words correctly. Did you mean too, to – or two? Read your paper for errors yourself. Ask a friend to read it. Read it backwards or out of order. Put it away for a couple of days and read it again. (It’s amazing how often that trick alone will allow you to catch problems before you submit your paper to an instructor or publisher.)
Finally, after you have itemized the three points in a thesis statement, included approximately three paragraphs elaborating on each point within the body of your paper, ensured that you have not used the thoughts or words of another without attributing credit and are content that you have used correct grammar and spelling, summarize the topic and points you have presented in the paper for your reader.

Remember that you spent a great deal of time researching your topic and thinking about each point you were going to make, but your reader has just buzzed through your paper in a few minutes. They may have forgotten some of your earlier points. A summary will bring each point back to their mind, fresh and clear. Now that you have made your points and reviewed each, provide your reader with a conclusion that ties together all three points of your topic and reinforces your original thesis statement.