

How do I...

HIGHLIGHT MY RESEARCH CONTRIBUTION

An essential component of the Introduction and Conclusion of a thesis or research article is the author's claim regarding the **contribution to knowledge** that the research makes. Contributions are used by examiners to assess your thesis and by journal editors to decide whether or not to publish your paper. It is therefore important to devote a good amount of attention to writing contributions effectively.

Here are some tried and tested strategies for tackling the Contributions component. Remember to keep in mind that research communication conventions vary from discipline to discipline, so adapt the strategies to the accepted practice in your research paradigm.

A thesis or paper's contribution can be one of three types: **theoretical**, **practical**, or **methodological**. But take care: no matter how valuable you think your paper is, try to avoid stating contributions at *all* three levels; rather, choose one or at most two levels as the take-away message of your research.

THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Theoretical contributions are indispensable for research in many disciplines, especially in the Social Sciences. They refer to original knowledge your paper generates on the subject in question. You can explicate how your results advance the relevant literature and extend existing knowledge, whether the results confirm or oppose previous results. If the latter, you'd be expected to suggest why and clarify how your differing findings problematize the literature and allow for alternative perspectives on the subject. If a debate exists in the research community, what is your stance supported by the results. Alternatively, your results may enrich or modify existing models or theories, resulting in a refreshed understanding. You can then suggest that future research is conducted to verify your results.

PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

While researchers invest space in explaining theoretical contributions, you may want to highlight the implications of your findings on specific real-world problems. You may find writing **Practical Implications** a little more

straightforward than claiming a theoretical contribution, because you do not have to link back to literature so much. However, practical implications are not always relevant; a lot of research aims primarily to improve our conceptual understanding rather than to solve a problem.

METHODOLOGICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Methodological contributions are innovative research methodologies, such as adopting an unusual epistemological perspective unpinning a research design, accessing new data sources or adapting research instruments, or implementing new analytical techniques. Just as your research might have responded to another researcher's call to address methodological problems in the field, you can call on others to apply your novel approach to different contexts.

OTHER TIPS

Take notice of how other researchers express their work's contribution to the field. Contribution statements are often found at the beginning and/or the end of a paper.

When conducting your own research, don't feel that you need to wait until you get results before thinking about your contribution. Rather, consider what they might be at the beginning of your project. Discuss your ideas with your supervisor; if they are happy, your research is halfway there! So, work on your research contribution as early as possible and practise pitching it whenever you write or speak about your project!

Dr Frank Song
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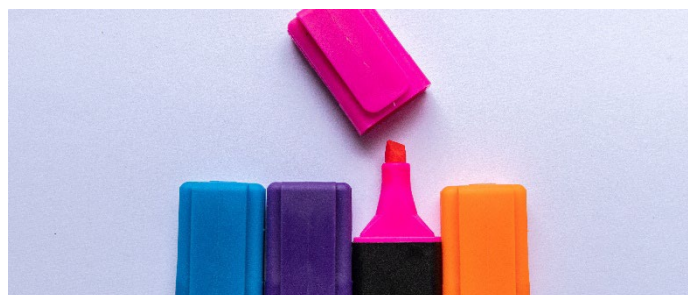


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