

Overview: Research Paper Procedure

The Research Process

The words *research paper* strike fear into the hearts of many students at all levels of education. It is true that at first glance, the assignment as a whole looks daunting and possibly overwhelming, but in truth, writing a research paper, like any creative process, merely consists of a series of steps that are taken to achieve an end. When these steps are taken one at a time, the process is manageable, the information is easily consumed, and the tasks are painlessly accomplished.

Below is a 10-step breakdown of the whole research process—a map of the journey. These steps take the research paper writer from departure to arrival, emphasizing the importance of scheduling all efforts required in executing an excellent research paper. The coursework that follows provides a detailed description of each step, along with suggestions for avoiding roadblocks.

Steps to Writing a Research Paper

1

Understand the Available Resources

Become familiar with primary and secondary sources, as well as the variety of print, non-print, and electronic resources that are available. Understand how to locate these resources, and how to use them responsibly and without plagiarizing.

2

Select a Topic

Locate a subject of personal interest, and then find a specific angle or approach to that topic that can reasonably be handled within the prescribed page limit.

3

Conduct Preliminary Research and Begin Writing Source Cards

Search for sources of information and record publication information about available resources on source cards, following MLA or APA format.

4

Formulate a Thesis Statement

After collecting some preliminary information, formulate a judgment, evaluation, or criticism that will serve as the main point, or the thesis, of the paper.

5

Make a Preliminary Outline

Continue doing research until three to five major topics have been acquired to support the thesis. Then start finding specific supporting evidence for each major supporting topic.

Compose a tentative topic outline showing what information is collected and what information still needs to be gathered.

6

Take Notes

Locate more sources and begin taking notes on note cards, selecting only relevant information, and entering it only under the appropriate topic headings on your note cards.

7

Prepare to Write

Once you have sufficient information, organize note cards under the major supporting topics and return to the outline. Fill in the facts, examples, statistics, and expert opinions that support each major supporting topic. Review the guidelines for incorporating borrowed material into the paper, with particular focus on paraphrasing, summarizing, direct quotation, and parenthetical citations

8

Write the Rough Draft

With the completed outline and the information on note cards in hand, start writing the rough draft, putting in documentation for all borrowed material. Provide discussion of borrowed material by incorporating insight and analysis. Compose the introductory and concluding paragraphs.

9

Edit and Revise

Self-edit the paper, and then have others edit it. Study the feedback received, and then revise. Good writing almost always requires several drafts and several revisions. Use a checklist to guide the revisions.

10

Create the Source Page


Prepare your source page (works cited or reference) using the sources used in the paper. Double-check the citation forms and punctuation conventions.


Submit papers on time and with pride. Make sure every paper is an example of honest effort and hard work.

Note...

About Research Documentation

There are two forms for the documentation of research papers: the first (and generally accepted) is the form the

Modern Language Association (MLA)  recommends ; the second is the form the American Psychological

Association (APA)  recommends.

The MLA is an organization of teachers and scholars, founded in 1883 to strengthen teaching in languages and literature. It developed the *MLA Handbook* to simplify the task of preparing both student papers and scholarly works. The majority of scholarly publications in languages and literature follow MLA guidelines, as do many schools and colleges.

The APA, also an organization of teachers and scholars, promotes research and scholarship in psychology. Its *Publication Manual* is a widely-recognized authority for publications in the social sciences. To accommodate the science and social studies departments in many schools, this manual provides APA rules and models as well.

There are other authorities on these matters, and in college *The Chicago Manual of Style* or a manual prepared by the college or university itself may be the preferred guide.

Regardless of the method they advocate, the goal of all style manuals is the same: to make it easier to convey information with consistency, clarity, accuracy, and honesty.