HOW TO WRITE A RESEARCH PAPER

***First, obtain preliminary information about the paper to be written.

1) Length of paper.
2) Due date.
3) Purpose and content of the paper.
4) Documentation style (e.g., MLA, APA).

***Second, set up a time schedule for the completion of your paper as well as deadlines for the various steps.

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<th>PRIORITY</th>
<th>STEP</th>
<th>COMPLETION</th>
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<td>PROOF READ AND CORRECT FINAL DRAFT</td>
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<td>11</td>
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<td>TURN IN CORRECTED, FINAL COPY!!!</td>
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Although this step-by-step format is very important to manage and understand the components of the research project, remember that the research process is not linear. There may be times of straightforward progress, and there may be moments of apparent circular movement; there may be times of confusion and overwhelm followed by times of clarity and understanding. Even the most experience researchers find themselves struggling at different times throughout their project!
One Last Minute Tip”
Need help clarifying your topic? Need ideas about where to look next? Want to be sure you’re using a reference source effectively? ASK A LIBRARIAN!

NOW, JUST FOLLOW YOUR PLAN!!!

1. CHOOSE YOUR TOPIC. If topic is assigned, stick to the topic!

   (A) Select a topic that is relevant to your course and of interest to our audience.
   (B) Select a topic that interests you.
   (C) Assess breadth of topic to fit your time and word count limitations.
   (D) Assess breadth of topic to fit depth of research expected.
   (E) Avoid a topic charged with emotion or one that is too technical.
   (F) Determine your objective and develop a thesis statement with your objective in mind.
   (G) Seek your instructor’s assistance in determining the quality of your topic.

   Example Topic

2. GATHER GENERAL INFORMATION AND PRELIMINARY RESOURCES.
   Work from the general to specific.

   (A) From topic, develop questions to guide you in your search; state topic itself as a question. Example: “What is heart disease?”
   (B) Skim resources to determine their relevance and appropriateness to your topic
   (C) Attain broad overview of topic
   (D) Become familiar with sub-topics within your research topic
   (E) Make rough sketch of these major sub-topics to be used for preliminary outline

   Example subtopics: “Causes, contributors, risks, prevention, etc.”
HOW AND WHERE DO I GATHER RESOURCES?

***The Hamilton Library is a phenomenal resource!!! These are some services and resources available to you:

- **UHCARL System** (Books, Journals, Audiovisuals, Magazines, Newspapers, Journal Articles: ERIC, Expanded Academic Index, and UnCover)
- **CD-ROMs** (Newspapers, Business, Psychology, Sociology, Politics, Literature)
- **Online Periodical Indexes** (Remote Access to UHCARL and links to library resources: http://nic2.hawaii.edu/~emailref/welcome.html)
- **Library Floor Plans** with Call Number Locations
- **A Reference Librarian** can show you how to use all of the above resources…all you have to do is ask!

***Be sure to record what you find and where you found it; you may need it again later.

HOW DO I KEEP TRACK OF MY SOURCES?

Write out a complete citation for each source you find using the format required by your teacher (e.g., MLA, APA, Turabian). See examples in back.

Or, simply cut apart reference printouts from UHCARL, CD-ROMs, or Online Periodical Indexes (by sources) to form a working bibliography.

HINTS:

- Utilize most recent, reliable source.
- Pay attention to names of key people in the field and check their reliability.
- Use primary sources (original works {books and articles} of the author) whenever possible.

With a general overview in mind…

3. DEVELOP A PRIMILINARY OUTLINE

(A) Declare thesis statement and objective of our paper. May be posed as a question. For example: “What is hear disease?”

(B) Use a rough sketch [2.E] to develop a preliminary outline of major sub-topics and potential specific areas of interest (i.e.: major headings with detailed sub-headings). For example: “What are the major contributors to heart disease? Who is most at risk? What an we do to protect ourselves?” etc.

(C) Be prepared to alter outline as focus sharpens-chosen sub-topics may develop, expand, or be discarded completely, depending on specific information available related to thesis and outline.
4. **COLLECT SPECIFIC RESOURCES**
   Again, be sure to write out a complete citation for each source you find using the format required by your teacher (e.g., MLA, APA, Turabian), or cut apart reference printouts (by sources) to form a working bibliography.

**HOW DO I WORK WITH SOURCES?**

Options:

1) Print out full text from Expanded Academic Index, or
2) Make Xerox copies of relevant pages from source.
   *** Be sure to staple computer printout of source or handwritten citation to Xeroxed information for easy organization and reference.
3) Take notes directly from source.
   *** Write out a complete citation at top of notes page.

5. **GATHER RELEVANT INFORMATION (TAKING NOTES)**

   **A)** A popular note taking strategy has been the use of note cards.
   1) Use 4X6 or 5X8 note cards.
   2) Write in ink to prevent blurring.
   3) Each card should contain only one point related to your outline.
   4) Each card should be labeled with a brief title related to your outline.
   5) Cite the source of reference—author, page number, abbreviation of title from bibliography card.

   **B)** Many students today tend to use Xeroxed copies of their sources, with the computer print out citation stapled to it.
   1) You may highlight important passages from your Xerox.
   2) Be sure to code (be consistent! Segments of information in margins.
      *Coding examples:* “Very important!”; Subtopic: “Causes” or “Risks”, or “Prevention”; “Good for intro.”; “Evidence”; “Good Example”, etc.
***No matter what method you choose, taking notes on notebook paper is highly encouraged.

1) When using notebook paper for notetaking, be sure to code each piece of information as above.
2) Notetaking to **record**: Write as you go—it helps critical thinking! - don’t *just* highlight.
3) Notetaking to **understand**: Make outlines, diagrams, show how facts relate, create summaries, compare and contrast points
4) Keep these notes organized by topic and connected to sources as appropriate.

Whether using note cards, highlighting, using the margins of a Xerox, or notebook paper, there are many…

6) **TYPES OF INFORMATION THAT CAN BE INCLUDED**

*Statement of Facts
*Direct Quotations
*Paraphrasing
*Summaries
*Your Own Opinions and Ideas

**EXAMPLES:**

**STATEMENT OF FACT**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author and page</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Fact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meltsner, p. 20</td>
<td>History</td>
<td>Steady decline in number of executions e.g., 155 in 1930, down by 56 by 1960</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
DIRECT QUOTATION

**Author and page:** Meltsner, p. 312  
**Topic:** Arguments against

**Quote:**
“Legislators will raft mandatory death statutes to meet the Charles Mansons and Richard Specks of the future, but no set of rules will avoid catching men whose deeds are far less reprehensible, or whose character arouses sympathy.”

Excerpt from *Black Rage* by William H. Grier and Price M. Cobbs:

“The black mother shares a burden with her soul sisters of three centuries ago. She must produce and shape and mold a unique type of man. She must intuitively cut off and blunt his masculine assertiveness and aggression lest these put the body’s life in jeopardy.”

PARAPHRASE

**Author and page:** Grier and Cobbs, p. 62  
**Topic:** Matriarchal influence on the black male

**Paraphrase:**
Grier and Cobbs sense a commonly held and long-standing attitude among black matriarchs, who feel that they need to curb the natural tendencies of “masculine assertiveness and aggression”: lest these qualities jeopardize their sons’ lives and well being.

SUMMARY

**Author and page:** Meltsner, p. 258-265  
**Topic:** Supreme court decision

**Summary:**
Meltsner believe Nixon chose Justices Powell and Rehnquist in part because they could be counted on to support the death penalty.

YOUR OWN OPINIONS, IDEAS, AND CONCLUSIONS

Note to self: It seems that capital punishment’s decline in support gives evidence of changing moral climate.

You will know you have a good amount of information when you have a general sense of your research question, a possible answer, and evidence to back up that answer.
6. DEVELOP A FINAL OUTLINE
   (A) Final thesis sentence should be formulated and stated as the title.
   (B) Expand preliminary outline from headings and subheadings into a clear
       and logical outline for the rough draft.
   (C) Check to see if the material is organized-create an internal structure (e.g.,
       a chronology, compare and contrast, etc.).

7. PREPARE A ROUGH DRAFT
   You may prefer to hand-write your rough draft, or go directly to composing at
   the computer.

   (A) Type out topic sentences for each paragraph-each heading from outline
       should be transformed into a declarative statement and subheadings
       should elaborate or develop in detail the major headings. If composing by
       hand, use a separate page to write out each main point.
   (B) Leave room for corrections-extra-wide margins and at least double space.
   (C) Keep your thesis sentence and outline before you as a guide as you
       compose
   (D) If you used index cards to record information, group together cards which
       deal with the same sub-topics and sort them into an order corresponding
       to the outline.
   (E) Take useful information (not cards, highlighted Xerox copies, notebook
       paper notes) and type in or write in information under appropriate
       headings/topic sentence.
   (F) Write your rough draft in continuous prose including an introduction, body
       and conclusion. (see format)
   (G) Set your paper aside for a few days! This will help you attain better
       objectivity for later critical appraisal.
8. REVISE YOUR ROUGH DRAFT

(A) Read your paper critically. Read it aloud!!!
(B) Check for errors of mechanics - spelling, grammar, punctuation.
(C) Bring to English Writing Lab for feedback.
(D) Look for unity and organization - chain of evidence and reasoning should be easy to follow.
(E) Use technical vocabulary when appropriate.
(F) Check for proper documentation.
9. PREPARE YOUR FINAL DRAFT

(A) Format-use the format required by your teacher
(B) Documentation-Use the documentation style required by your teacher.
   **References (APA) or Works Cited (MLA)
   **Cite all source material actually used in writing
   **Credit every quotation, paraphrase, fact or idea used so the reader may investigate it further if desired.

10. PROOFREAD YOUR PAPER

(A) Carefully check for spelling and typing errors.
(B) Correct all errors and retype as appropriate.
(C) If there are many errors on a page, retype or reword process.

11. CONGRATULATIONS, YOU'RE FINISHED!!! HAND IN FINAL COPY!!!

Suggested Readings

   Chicago: University of Chicago.

   Modern Language Association of America.

References


