

Writing Your Research Paper



ENG 112
Professor Katherine Delhagen

*adapted from Empire State College

Purpose of Research Paper

- Through the process of writing a research paper, you learn more about the topic and form a clear stance of your own. Your goal is to take the research and use it to inform your views so you can add to the pool of information out there and inspire readers to continue building upon your research.
- You will be taking a stand on an issue and providing support or evidence gained from your research to back up your position.
- Any type of writing where research and citations are required: Essays, case studies, etc.

Don't Get Overwhelmed!



10-15 pages may sound like a LOT of work - and it is! But it doesn't have to be an insurmountable task. Take a deep breath and break it down to a step-by-step process

Step 1 – Clarify Assignment

- What is your topic idea? Does it fit the assignment question?
- Length of paper required?
- What citation format is required?
 - MLA – Modern Language Association
 - Used in the Humanities
 - APA - American Psychological Association
 - Used in the Social Sciences, Education, and Behavioral Sciences
- Ask your professor/mentor any questions you may have at the beginning of the process!

Step 2 – Develop a Research Question

- Provides focus for research and paper
- **OWN YOUR TOPIC!**
 - What interests you the most about the topic?
 - Make a list of questions you would like to have answered about the topic
 - What would capture the interest of the reader?
- Pick an issue that can be researched
 - Make sure topic is not too broad or narrow in scope
- Resource:
 - See topic options in your Research Packet for this course



Step 3 – Begin Doing Research

- First, you need to make sure there is research out there on your topic. You may find some useful sources now, but will likely need to continue researching throughout the writing process.
- MCCC Online Library
 - http://mccc.edu/student_library.shtml - Click on Online Databases on the left. See the Research PPT for more information on using the databases and finding scholarly sources.
 - The library databases contain mostly scholarly, peer-reviewed articles. This is what you want! Google search may seem comfortable and easy, but will give you MANY results and it can be difficult to sift through the junk to find good stuff.
 - Avoid certain "sources" i.e., Wikipedia, unsubstantiated sources such as blogs, statements from non-experts.
 - Books, journals, newspapers, and magazines may also be helpful. You can find some online or in print at the school or local library.

Academic Integrity



- Cite **all** of your sources
 - Never represent the ideas or words of another as your own – *plagiarism can result in failure of the assignment and/or the course!*
- Use index cards to take notes when doing research
 - Direct Quote – put in quotation marks
 - Summary – condenses information and puts it in your own words
 - Paraphrase – roughly same length as original, but information is stated in your own words.
- All of the above need to be cited – put citation information on back of card for future reference.

Step 4 – Develop a Thesis Statement

- Purpose: focuses your ideas and information within the paper and provides guidance to the reader
- **TOPIC + YOUR POSITION ON THAT TOPIC = THESIS STATEMENT**
- Example:
 - Adult students returning to college make up a higher percentage of entering students than they did twenty years ago because of a number of statistical, economic, and social reasons.

Step 5 – Organize Your Ideas

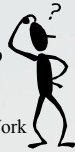
- Use mapping, outlining, or arranging of your research index cards to place your ideas in a logical sequence.
- Sequence of ideas is sometimes determined by thesis statement.



Step 6 - Create a First Draft

- Three major parts to good research paper:
 - **Introduction**
 - Opportunity to capture interest of reader
 - Allows you to present thesis statement
 - **Body**
 - Paragraphs that provide evidence supporting your thesis statement
 - **Conclusion**
 - Allows you to provide summary of main points and should make reader think about implications of topic discussed.
 - May conclude by making a prediction or offering specific advice.

But how do I fill 10-15 pages?



- Don't panic, and don't try to write it all at once. Work on the paper a little at a time and return to it often (obviously, if you get on a roll, don't stop yourself!)
- Organize your ideas into an outline before writing. Use your research to help guide your organizational plan.
- If you get stuck on one section of your paper, try working on another and coming back to it.
- Be flexible - your research and your writing process may lead to new ideas and conclusions you didn't expect. Allow this to happen and adjust your plan accordingly.

Introductions

Your introduction should:

- Clarify the purpose for researching/discussing this topic
- Give necessary background information
- Raise the research question and ultimately, the thesis

In technical writing/research, you should also introduce the sources you will be using to present your finding.

The introduction for a paper of this length should take more than a page! One and a half to two pages is a good target.

Body of Paper

- Divide your findings into sections. Begin by providing more information about the problem. Where does the problem come from? What approaches to the question already exist?
- Then, analyze. Form your own ideas about the issue based on your research. Discuss what the data might mean, how it can be interpreted, and possible solutions.

Body of Paper

- Some tips!
 - You can use subheadings throughout the paper to clearly separate sections.
 - Organize according to supporting ideas, not according to sources. Try to integrate your sources. By this I mean, don't talk all about source number 1, then all about source number 2, then 3. Use quotes and evidence from your sources throughout the paper as appropriate. Your points will be most convincing if you can use more than one source for each point.
 - Address the counter-argument. Don't be afraid to use sources that contradict what you are trying to prove. It shows you have considered the other position and are confident enough in your thesis to argue against it.
 - If you are having trouble getting enough length from the body of your paper, first make sure every quote/idea is well explained in your own words. You should be constantly making connections to the thesis. If you are still struggling, try looking for more sources.

Conclusion

Your conclusion should NOT simply repeat what you have said in the paper!

- Begin by reiterating your thesis, but not word-for-word. Briefly summarize your major supporting ideas.
- Based on your research, what are your conclusions about the initial question? Try to make the problem relevant for your reader. You can issue a call to action and/or present a clear solution. Leave your reader with something to think about.

Step 7 – Begin Revisions & Proofreading



- Revision
 - Have you said what you wanted to say in a clear and effective way?
 - Have you provided enough evidence to support your thesis?
 - Is information presented in most effective order?
 - Does it flow?
 - Do you leave any questions in the mind of the reader?

- Proofreading
 - Checking your paper for grammar and spelling errors
 - Are you using consistent verb tense?
 - Are you using variation in your use of words?
 - Is there any way you can tighten your sentences?
 - Did you use spell-check or a dictionary?
 - Have you used proper punctuation?

Step 8 – Document Your Sources and Create Works Cited Page

- Find a good handbook (such as the Bedford Handbook by Diane Hacker) or a website (such as <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/> or www.bedfordstmartin.com/online) that will demonstrate proper citation formats.
- Check that you have included in-text citations for your research findings.

References or Work Cited Page

- References (APA) or Works Cited page (MLA) should follow at end of paper
- Example of entry for a book:
 - DePree, M. (1989) *Leadership is an art*. New York: Doubleday. Print. (APA format)
 - DePree, M. *Leadership is an Art*. New York: Doubleday, 1989. Print. (MLA format)
- All entries listed in alphabetical order

Step 9 – Do Final Reading & Make Last Minute Revisions

- Always take time to do final reading
- Read paper slowly out-loud to listen for errors
- Ask someone else to read through paper to make sure you have expressed yourself clearly
- No corrections are trivial – take the time to present yourself in best possible light.

Step 10 – Submit Paper!

- Make sure you have adhered to all of the formatting requirements and submit your paper.
- Always keep a copy of your paper on file and in hard copy.



Additional Tips

- Never Use Personal Pronouns in Research Papers. "I think, You will agree," etc. If you're citing the works of a group of researchers, don't state "they found." State instead, "The group concluded," or "It was determined." Remain totally objective - your credibility is at stake.
- If you cite research that supports your thesis, then you should also cite works that support the opposition.

End
