



Writing a Research Paper

Research assignments are large projects with multiple steps that require many different skills. You will need to determine credibility, the ability to summarize and respond to texts, ability to formulate your thesis and support it with credible texts, revision, and final editing. Below, you will find tips to help you get started and finish!

Getting Started

Choosing a Topic

Below are some questions and prompts to help you find a topic that truly interests you.

- Look back at what you have read in class. Were there any people, moments, particular topics that you were drawn to? When were you the most interested and invested in class topics and readings?
- Try writing your way to the topic. Free writing is helpful to explore general topics. Begin by setting a timer (low stakes is always best, so a minute or two). And just write. Write down everything that comes to mind about the topic and be sure to include any questions. Do not worry about grammar and coherence—this type of writing is meant to get ideas from your mind onto the page.
- Pose your topics as a question or a problem to be solved. What do you know about the topic now? What would you like to learn more about?

Developing a Thesis Statement

The thesis statement is an integral part of the essay. While you do not need a clear and specific thesis to begin, it is helpful to have an idea of where the project will go. Below are some questions meant to help you refine your general topic into a more focused research project.

- What is your topic?
- What is your personal stance on this topic?
- Why do you take this stance? What do you know about the topic?
- What do you want to know more about?
- What patterns have you noticed thus far?
- Why and how would someone disagree with your position?
- What sources have you gathered and what stance are they taking on this topic?

Finding, Selecting, Reading Sources

Research projects require you to present evidence in support of your thesis. Sources can be found

on the internet, through the library's website, or in the stacks in the form of books. Sources come in two kinds: primary and secondary. Primary sources are written/recorded by the witness and can come in the form of letters, diaries, etc. Secondary sources are analyses of events, such as news stories, scholarly articles, etc. Be sure to keep track of all your sources because you will need to create a bibliography and reference them throughout the paper.

Writing an Outline

Below is a sample rough outline.

- I. Introduction and thesis
 - II. Body paragraph 1: supporting point
 - a. Source material
 - III. Body paragraph 2: supporting point
 - a. Source material
 - b. Example and/or quotes
 - IV. Body paragraph 3: supporting point
 - a. Source material
 - b. Brief analysis
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Writing a Research Paper

Introduction

- Define any terms or concepts
- Grab the reader's attention
- Present relevant background and context
- Explain the focus of the paper and the topic to be covered
- Reveal the organization
- Close with the thesis

Body

- Build your essay around the points you want to make. Reference your outline
- Include your sources as support with proper citations and utilize summary, paraphrase or direct quote accordingly
- Integrate analysis and discussion into the paragraphs to explain how the source supports your thesis and why it is important for your reader to know that information

Conclusion

- Summarize your argument
- Avoid new concepts or ideas – those go in the body of the essay
- Present the significance of your findings
- Suggest further research

