

How to Write a Research Paper

Student Success Workshops
Sauk Valley Community College



Choose Your Topic

When choosing a topic:

- Find a topic in which you are interested
- Find a topic that has enough information
- Find a topic that has a subject that you can manage

Create a thesis statement

A thesis statement is a short statement, usually one sentence, that summarizes the main point or your belief that you will be writing about in an essay, research paper, etc.

Create a thesis statement

- ***Brainstorm the topic*** - You start out with an idea of what you want to write about or what you want to uncover in your paper.
- ***Narrow the topic*** –Research the topic. Use the information to narrow the focus of your paper.
- ***Take a position on the topic*** – Take a side and clearly identify your position in your thesis statement.
- ***Use specific language*** – You want your reader to know exactly what you mean.
- ***Make a statement based on clearly stated support*** – Finally, revise your thesis statement to incorporate all of these points.

Examples of Thesis Statements

- *While both sides fought the Civil War over the issue of slavery, the North fought for moral reasons while the South fought to preserve its own institutions.*
- *In Huckleberry Finn, Mark Twain develops a contrast between life on the river and life on the shore.*

Above examples taken from <http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/thesis.html>

Locate Information

- Use information from a variety of reference sources. These sources include searching the internet, encyclopedias, almanacs, scholarly journals, books, magazines, and newspapers.
- When conducting an internet search, it is important to pay attention to domain name extensions.
 - .edu = an educational institution
 - .gov = a government institution
 - .org = a non-profit organization

.edu and .gov sites represent institutions and tend to be more reliable, but be sure to watch out for political bias in some government sites.

Other possible internet searches:

SVCC Library Database

<http://www.svcc.edu/InfoMenu/departments/lrc/databmenu.html>

In the library, you can also consult guides to periodicals, such as:

- Education Index
- Readers Guide
- International Index to Periodicals
- Psychological Abstracts

ERIC <http://www.eric.ed.gov/>

- The Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), sponsored by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) of the U.S. Department of Education, produces the world's premier database of journal and non-journal education literature. The ERIC online system provides the public with a centralized ERIC Web site for searching the ERIC bibliographic database of more than 1.1 million citations going back to 1966. **More than 107,000 full-text non-journal documents (issued 1993-2004), previously available through fee-based services only, are now available for free.**

Prepare an Outline

INTRODUCTION

- What is the main reason you are writing the paper?
- Explain briefly the major points you plan to cover in your paper and why readers should be interested in your topic.
- End with your your thesis statement.

BODY

- Present your arguments to support your thesis statement.
- Remember the Rule of 3, find 3 supporting arguments for each position you take.
- Begin with a strong argument, then use a stronger one, and end with the strongest argument for your final point.

CONCLUSION

- Restate or reword your thesis.
- Summarize your arguments.
- Explain why you have come to this particular conclusion

Prepare Notes

- You should write down anything and everything that will answer your thesis statement or research question.
- Be to the point in whatever you write.
- For major issues, having more than one person who agrees with you strengthens your point.
- It's also okay to include opposing views.
- Using a variety of sources will lend weight to your argument, broaden your horizons on the topic when you need varying viewpoints anyway and demonstrate to your professor the thoroughness of your research.
- Skim through your sources, locating the useful material, then make good notes of it, including quotes and information for footnotes.
- Be accurate and honest.
- You can organize your notes on paper or 3x5 index cards for easy shuffling. Number your note cards or pages to keep track of them.
- Devise your own method to organize your notes. One method may be to mark with a different color ink or use a hi-liter to identify sections in your outline.

Write A Rough Draft

1. In the introduction, tell the reader what you are going to say (statement of purpose)
2. Say it (main body of the paper)
3. In the conclusion, tell the reader what you've said (statement of summary and conclusion)

Avoid Plagiarism

To avoid plagiarism, write in your own words what you understand to be the basic meaning of a sentence or a block of text (paraphrase the text). Highlighting key passages or photocopying key pages can be a good first step towards extracting important information. Before you start your draft, translate and rewrite your notable research findings *now*. Don't count on doing it later when the temptation of keeping beautifully-crafted sentences in the body of your paper (without acknowledgment) is even greater.

Revise Your Rough Draft

You are now ready to polish up the first draft.

- Try to read your paper as if it were unfamiliar to you.
- Reading the paper aloud is a good way to be sure that the language is not awkward, and that it "flows" properly.
- Check for proper spelling, phrasing and sentence construction.
- Check for proper form on footnotes, quotes and punctuation.
- Check to see that quotations serve one of the following purposes:
 - Show evidence of what an author has said.
 - Avoid misrepresentation through restatement.
 - Save unnecessary writing when ideas have been well expressed by the original author.
- Check for proper form on tables and graphs.

Prepare Your Bibliography

At the end of your paper, provide a list of all the sources you used to gather information for the paper.

For more information on how to create a Works Cited (MLA) or References (ALA) page, please visit:

MLA format information –

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>

APA format information -

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/2/10/>

Prepare a Title Page and Table of Contents

- The title page is the first page of the paper. It should include the title of your paper, your name, and the date on which the paper is due. Check with your instructor if this page is required or if any other information is needed for the title page.
- The table of contents is the second page (if required). It should list the main topics, important subtopics, and the page on which each is introduced in your paper.

Final Checklist

Before handing in your paper, be sure you can answer “Yes” to each of the following questions.

- Did I include a title page? (if required)
- Did I include a table of contents? (if required)
- Did I number all pages correctly? (if required)
- Did I provide footnotes for quotations and major sources of information?
- Did I include a bibliography?
- Did I keep a second copy for my files?

Finding the time to schedule your project

Ideally, you will have at least four weeks from the date it's assigned to complete a research paper of 7 or 8 pages (2,000 to 2,500 words).

Shorter papers requiring fairly simple research (4 or 5 pages - 1,500 words) may not require four weeks' "lead time," while a 15 page or longer paper might be a semester-long project.

Finding the time to schedule your project

Step by Step Research & Writing Schedule	Date I will finish this step
Start Date: March 18th	
STEP 1 - Getting started: planning the process	March 22
STEP 2 – Researching and choosing a topic	March 26
STEP 3 – Create your outline	April 1
STEP 4 - Gathering information: detail research	April 5
STEP 5 - Preparing to write	April 12
STEP 6 - Writing and revising	April 19
STEP 7 – Submit paper	April 29th

**For more information on MLA or APA formats
visit the Purdue OWL website:**

<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>

Information retrieved from:

<http://www.ucc.vt.edu/stdysk/termpapr.html>

www.mangrum-strichart.com

[http://owl.english.purdue.edu/workshops/hypertext/Research
W/notes.html#LOOK](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/workshops/hypertext/ResearchW/notes.html#LOOK)

<http://www.ipl.org/div/teen/aplus/step1.htm#1.1>

<http://www.aresearchguide.com/1steps.html>

<http://www.aresearchguide.com/1steps.html#step4>