



10 BASIC STEPS TO WRITING A RESEARCH PAPER

What It Is

The research paper is a paper in which students present their views and research findings on a chosen topic. The paper is usually between five and ten pages long, with most instructors specifying the length and the numbers of sources to be used. It is expected that the student will choose an appropriate topic, gather information about it and report the findings in a paper.

Types of Research Papers

There are two main types of research papers. The first is the report paper which summarizes the student's findings on a particular subject. The student does not judge or evaluate the findings but presents them in a logical order and in his own words. The second type of research paper is the thesis paper, which takes a definite stand on an issue. The thesis is the point of view or argument that the student is making in the paper.

Most instructors assign a thesis paper because it requires the student to exercise judgment, evaluate evidence and construct a logical argument. Be sure you know which type of paper you have been assigned to write, and be certain that your instructor has approved your choice of subject or thesis.

10 Basic Steps to Writing a Research Paper

1. Choose a subject and limit it to a specific topic.
2. Do some general background reading on your subject in the library.
3. Organize your ideas in a logical sequence, form a rough outline and create your research question.
4. Make a list of all the places you want to check for material.
5. Using the library and the librarian, begin your research.
6. Read carefully and take good notes. As you go, list where you got your information.
7. Organize your notes, write your thesis statement and prepare the final outline.
8. Write the first draft and revise it carefully.
9. Prepare footnotes and bibliographical citations to document your report.
10. Type the final copy.

Choosing a Subject

Follow your instructor's suggestions. If the subject is not already assigned pick something that interests you. Before you commit to a topic, make sure the library has resources for you to use to write the paper. Also choose a topic which you can take a point of view.

Background Reading

The most useful beginning point for research is a reliable general encyclopedia. Use the index volume to the set and read all of the citations so that you get a broad overview of your topic.

Preliminary Outline

The outline is the backbone of a good written paper, and the framework for your research. List all the major points you want to develop, or all the questions you want to answer.

Sources of Material

List all the places you wish to look for material. Develop a card file of 3 x 5 cards or use the computer to record all of the sources you use.

Where to Find Information

Begin with the online catalog on the library website. This will allow you to search by author, title and subject for books in the library and ebooks. Ask the librarian to help you identify relevant subject headings for your topic. Look in specialized encyclopedias and use EBSCOHOST and other library databases to find periodical articles. The internet is also a source you can use for information.

Using the Sources of Information

Look at your sources with a critical eye. Are they current and authoritative? Do they list other places to look? This is especially important when using the internet. Take good notes in your own words. Do not use too many quotations.

Final Outline

Begin by writing your thesis in one clear, direct sentence. For help, see "Writing a Thesis Statement" on the LAMC/Library homepage. **Click on Research Paper Guides**. Arrange your notes into some logical order. There are many different ways to put your ideas together. Some subjects are best when put into chronological order. Others are suited to cause and effect or comparison and contrast. Use the library hand-out (at reference desk) called "How to Make an Outline," for the correct form.

Writing and Revising

With your outline, note cards or computer notes before you, begin the first draft. Let all of your ideas pour out. Triple space the pages, so you have room for corrections and notations. Check the draft for logical organization, mechanics of grammar, punctuation and spelling. Be sure that for each idea you have presented good examples that prove your point.

Documenting the Research Paper

On every page of your research paper where you have used the words, ideas, facts or statistics you have "borrowed," you must document the sources with parenthetical or in-text documentation. In addition, you must have a bibliography page which lists all of the books, periodical articles and internet sites that you actually used in preparing your report. The list should be alphabetically arranged by the author's last name. In cases where there is no author, arrange the item in its alphabetical place by the first main word in the title. The library has hand-outs to assist you in formatting your paper and creating your bibliography. (MLA-Works Cited, APA-Reference) Pick these up near the reference desk.

The Final Report

Use 8 1/2" x 11" paper with 1" margins and double-space the paper and the bibliography. Indent five spaces for new paragraphs. See the format handout for MLA and APA at the reference desk for more information about this.

The library has many books on writing the term paper in the LB 2369 section.