

Tips for Writing Research Paper

Getting Started

1. The first thing you want to do is give yourself enough time to work. Organization will help you make the most of however much time you have. Write a quick schedule to help you keep track of time: list the days you have left and the time during the day, you will be able to work. You will need to allot yourself time to go to your school library, take notes, write an outline, write a first draft, and revise the paper. Try not to set yourself up for a lot of late nights, unless you are a night person. Generally, people do better work when they are alert.

2. It is very important to start out your research with a **solid Thesis Statement**. A couple of hints:

* Keep it simple; you do not need an enormous subject to work with.

* Make it specific. It is much easier to do research on a narrowly selected subject than a massive idea. Help yourself by sharpening it down.

* Make sure your idea will work. Check with your professor about the suitability of the thesis to the assignment. Do a little preliminary research in the library to make sure there is enough available material on your topic.

Taking Notes

1. Use small (4"x 6", 5"x 8") index cards. If your subject has two or three separate main ideas you can color-code the research.

2. Make sure you include authors' names, date and page number at the top of the card. Also, on a separate index card, write down all the bibliography information in the proper form for your reference list or bibliography. This will help you identify footnotes and citations and make typing the references easier.

3. Try to be as accurate as possible when you write down statistics and direct quotes. Be sure to check for errors when you are finished.

4. It is good to have a lot of pertinent quotes when you are finished, but keep in mind that no more than 10-15% of your finished paper should be quotations.

Outline

This is the critical step in the process. Your paper will only be as good as the outline you write

for it.

1. Write your introduction at the top. This, essentially, is your Thesis Statement expanded to a paragraph. Set up your statement carefully, and make sure it matches the material you have gathered.
2. Take your note cards and figure out which of them you will use to illustrate your points.

Introduction:

Expand your thesis here. It should be concise and definite. Do not put opinionated statements like "I think..." or, "In my opinion...". This reduces your credibility. For example, if you were to write a paper on the economic factors involved in World War II, you might start like this: Germany's involvement in WW II was predicated by the purposeful dismantling of the country's economic power by the Allied Nations. Systematically go over each resonant point in your argument. If you are dealing with a historical paper, you might begin with the background and history of your material. Each paragraph should have clear, well thought out points.

Your Conclusion should be a final synopsis of the paper; a summary of the Thesis Statement you started out with. When you edit your outline, make sure each point is clearly made and that the flow of the paper works to make a convincing case. By the end of the outline, you should have covered all the main points you posed in your thesis statement.

Rough Draft

Write your first draft as freely as possible, following your outline closely. Use all the notecard information you feel is relevant and important. Do not pad your paper with excessive quotes. When you have finished the rough draft, check for accuracy and completeness of facts. If you think certain sections are too long or too skimpy, rework them until you feel they are the strongest you can make them.

Final Draft Revise paragraphs for unity and coherence. Reword your sentences for effectiveness of structure, grammar and punctuation. Run a spell check. You might want to read the paper aloud to yourself to see how it flows and to correct any awkward sentences.

Footnotes and Bibliography

You should consult a style manual to find the correct forms to use.

Here are a few very good manuals you can try:

Campbell, W.C. & Ballou, S.V. (1990). Form and Style: Theses, Reports, Term Papers

Strunk, W. Jr. & White, E.B. The Elements of Style (1972).

Turabian, K.V. (1987) A Manual of Writers of Term Papers, Theses and Dissertations

Final Words

When you have finished the paper, take some time for yourself before you re-read it. Make sure your quotes and citations are accurate; keep your note cards. Take a minute and congratulate yourself, unless you are already late for class.