

RESEARCH PAPERS

No. 2 in the Writing Center Handout Series

Pick a topic

What has interested you in the past or in class? What are controversial areas? What areas need to be considered further? Choose something that interests you and has potential for formulating a unique approach.

Find general sources

Go to the library or the library's website. Find books or articles based on your topic. Pick keywords from your topic based on general headings, and look them up. Gather these general sources, and keep a bibliographic record of them on note cards or in another format. Keeping an organized record will make citing easier when you begin to write and will help avoid accidental plagiarism. Read and take notes on what you are discovering.

Develop a working thesis and outline

Based on what you have discovered, where is your research heading? Look at themes and make connections. Form all of these notes into a working thesis (the more detailed and final the better). Form an outline of what you need to include to support your thesis. Incorporate the themes of your research into this outline. Be aware that in-depth research will alter your thesis and outline. Be flexible, but remember the important aspects of your outline so you don't lose focus.

Conduct in-depth research

Now that you have a thesis and an outline, look back at the sources you already have, and use them to find other, more detailed sources. Think deeply about the subject. Look for new sources at the library, in Galileo and other databases, and use the bibliographies from your general sources to prompt your search. Take detailed notes, and be careful to record which sources you used. Keep your working bibliography up to date.

Write

Revise your thesis and outline. Write a rough draft. Find the most efficient way to incorporate your research as you write. Don't count on adding research later; you might forget or run out of time. Cite as you write! This is the best way to avoid inadvertent plagiarism. Keep your bibliography up to date.

Fill in any gaps

When you have finished writing a rough draft, consider what areas you left out or did not sufficiently cover. Add research if you need to, or just add your own analysis.

Rewrite

A research paper is often longer than other papers but it needs just as much rewriting or even more. Compare your paper with your outline. Are your connections as clear in the paper as they were in your mind? Play with the format; move paragraphs; do whatever is necessary to make the paper more effective.

Revise

Now that you have a detailed paper, read it again. Check spelling, grammar, sentence variety — all of the things that will make the paper great.

For more information on writing research papers, see

http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r_resteps.html

<http://webster.comnet.edu/mla.htm>

The New St. Martin's Handbook. St. Martin's Press. 429-618.



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