



NO. 2 IN THE WRITING CENTER HANDOUT SERIES

Research Papers

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 will allow you to cover new ground.

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 help avoid accidental plagiarism. Read and take notes on what you discover.

Develop a working thesis and outline.

Based on what you have discovered, where is your research going? Look at themes and make connections. Form all of these notes into a working thesis (the more detailed the better). Form an outline of what you need to include in order 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 what you're trying to prove or demonstrate about your 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.

Look over your outline, revise your thesis, check your points, and 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 practice 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. Are there other points that use, help elaborate, or better support your thesis? Add research if you need to, or just add your own analysis.

Critique.

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_ressteps.html

<http://webster.commmnet.edu/mla/index.shtml>

The St. Martin's Handbook (5th ed): 318-57