



Writing Research Papers: A Step-by-Step Procedure

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For more information about writing research papers, see our overview page on this subject at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/index.html>. For extensive documentation covering all aspects of the research process in detail, see our new handbook-style workshop on research papers at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/workshops/hypertext/ResearchW/index.html>.

The Preliminaries

- ___ 1. Choose a topic
- ___ 2. Begin preliminary reading
- ___ 3. Restrict the subject
- ___ 4. Develop a preliminary thesis statement

Gathering Data

- ___ 1. Compile the working bibliography
- ___ 2. Prepare the bibliography on cards in correct form (3" x 5" cards)
- ___ 3. Begin extensive work in the library reference room; be sure to check:
 - ___ a. general bibliographies
 - ___ b. trade bibliographies
 - ___ c. indexes (books and collections, literature in periodicals, newspaper indexes, pamphlet indexes)
 - ___ d. library electronic catalogue

Taking Notes

- ___ 1. Develop a preliminary outline
- ___ 2. Evaluate your source material; which is primary material and which is secondary material?
- ___ 3. Begin note-taking on cards (4" x 6" cards)
- ___ 4. Avoid plagiarism

Writing the Paper

- ___ 1. Develop the final outline; test your outline
- ___ 2. Prepare to write:
 - ___ a. put your note cards in the order that your outline is in
 - ___ b. consider your (real and imagined) readers and how their expectations may affect your tone and style
- ___ 3. Write the rough draft
- ___ 4. Check your documentation carefully
- ___ 5. Revise and rewrite
- ___ 6. Check the format of the text, citations, notes, and bibliography (most instructors recommend MLA at http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r_mla.html or APA format at http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r_apo.html)
- ___ 7. Proofread

Most of this format is based on the process described by James D. Lester in *Writing Research Papers: A Complete Guide*, 2nd ed.

(1971; rpt. Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman, 1976).

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