

Writing Research Papers

from the Augsburg College Academic Skills Center

WRITING RESEARCH PAPERS

Writing a research paper can sometimes be a terrifying or a completely boring experience for students. Knowing and learning the skills involved in creating a research paper can help a student to face the task as a challenge, one he or she is fully capable of meeting. Learning these skills will prove invaluable throughout the student's professional life: exploring any given topic in detail; seeking out and finding raw data; reflecting upon the implications of the data; following insights; establishing logical categories; organizing the data logically; writing with clarity and precision; and revising appropriately. In today's technology, of course, the computer offers additional opportunities to develop these skills. The words you type on your computer screen are not as fixed as they used to be when you used pen and paper. Computers allow you more freedom and ease in changing your words or ideas; consequently, you can take more risks with your ideas. Strive to make the writing of every paper an exercise in developing your thinking, writing, and computer skills. You will use these skills over a lifetime!

The 20 Steps in Writing the Research Paper:

1. Choosing your topic
2. Narrowing your topic
3. Formulating a genuine question which your research data will address
4. Finding references and select bibliography
5. Writing research notes
6. Writing bibliography cards for notes you plan to use
7. Categorizing your research notes
8. Converting your original question to a clear thesis sentence
9. Verifying that all of your research data DOES directly relate to your thesis sentence
10. Writing a detailed outline
11. Making a clear draft copy, making sure to SAVE the document on your computer
12. Leaving for a day!
13. Learning rules for using quotation marks correctly
14. Learning rules for using footnotes correctly
15. Learning how to write a bibliography
16. Checking for plagiarism: have you correctly given credit for the words and ideas of other writers and researchers you are using as sources?
17. Editing your first draft: repositioning sentences and paragraphs, adding and deleting material to advance your thesis; looking to insert transitional words and phrases; reading the paper aloud to someone

18. Selecting an attention-getting title for the research paper: eliminate the first two titles that come to mind and go with the third title!!
19. Making a final copy of the research paper
20. Turning the research paper in ON TIME

Choosing Your Topic

Always aim to choose a topic of interest to YOU! That is what a research paper is, an opportunity for you to explore issues of interest to you. Many times an instructor will provide you with a list of topics to select from. Otherwise, pick a topic from the ideas expressed in class lectures that you found interesting. You might also look in your textbook for chapter headings or subheadings that intrigue you, or look over the index of the textbook to see if certain topics leap out at you, topics you would really like to know more about. **You can also ask a librarian to help you find sources of information in the field that you are studying.** It is important to see what professionals in the field are writing about the topic of interest to you. If you still have difficulty finding an interesting topic, do not hesitate to ask your instructor to assist you.

Writing Essentials: A Norton Pocket Guide, by Dawn Rodrigues and Myron D. Tuman, offers a helpful checklist in exploring your assignment:

1. What does the assignment ask me to do?
2. What aspect of the topic most interests me? Why?
3. What should the finished product look like? Does the assignment call for a certain genre or format, such as a standard essay or formal research paper?
How long must it be?
4. Do I know enough about my topic?
5. What do I need to learn?
6. Where will I be able to gather information--books, magazines, on-line sources, talking to others? (5)

Narrowing Your Topic

The most common criticism of student research papers is that the “topic is too broad, too general.” How can you be sure that you have sufficiently narrowed your topic? A Cornell English professor once suggested this sure-fire strategy: put your original topic through three significant narrowing; that is, move from one category to a class within the category, and then do it two additional times. Here is an example of some narrowing for 10 to 12 page research papers:

1. Public opinion polls (TOPIC):

accuracy of polls (FIRST NARROWING)
accuracy of such polls in national
election (SECOND NARROWING)
factors that determine the accuracy of public
opinion polls in national elections (THIRD NARROWING)

2. Climate of opinion between World War I and World War II:
 - the moral climate of opinion between WWI and WWII
 - the particular arguments involved in the debate over Prohibition
 - the arguments for Prohibition used by “Drys” in support of the 18th
Amendment and their arguments in the late 1920’s and early
1930’s to prevent repeal

3. Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*:
 - Walt Whitman’s genius in *Leaves of Grass*
 - Walt Whitman’s imagery in *Leaves of Grass*
 - Walt Whitman’s water imagery in *Leaves of Grass*

4. Nuclear war:
 - Arguments against nuclear war
 - Types of nuclear weapons
 - Potential dangers from ICBMs

5. The American Civil War:
 - Crucial battles of the Civil War
 - The Battle of Fredricksburg
 - Napoleonic Strategy and the Battle of Fredricksburg

Provide a Focus for Gathering Material

In a research paper, you want to avoid at all cost the error of making your paper simply an accumulation of facts. Your instructor will expect that you have first come up with a genuine question, and then you will begin to accumulate the facts to answer the question. Of course, your question may change as you begin to accumulate more and more facts. Whether the question can be definitely answered or not is unimportant! Let your accumulation of facts lead you to the most logical answer to your question. For example, let us say that you decide to do research on Item #5 above (“The American Civil War”).

After narrowing your topic further, you decide to focus on Napoleonic Strategy and the Battle of Fredricksburg; therefore, your question may be “In what ways did Napoleonic Strategy affect the outcomes of the Battle of Fredricksburg?” Now you begin to accumulate your facts. A detailed outline at this stage is not practical since you are not yet sure of the material you will find or how it will answer the question! Nevertheless, a specific question will save you much time because it will give you the needed focus for gathering relevant material.

Your computer may be of additional use to you in this phase. Using your E-mail, you can discuss your ideas for topics with your professor and/or with other students in your class (you could use your classmates as your distribution list: remember, too, mail messages can be sent to regular text files that can be read and edited).

Select a Bibliography

As you already know, one of the most important components of a research paper is carefully and accurately documenting your collected data. Your instructor will probably expect you to use either the Modern language Association (MLA) system or the American Psychological Association (APA) system. The MLA system basically asks you to cite within your paper, which will lead your readers to a list of works cited at the end of the paper. The APA system also contains in-text citations, but they refer your readers to a list of references at the end of your paper. Be certain which format your professor expects.

College libraries contain valuable sources of reference material. If you are not familiar with how a library operates or where reference material is found, **please ask to see one of the Reference Librarians in the Augsburg College library**; he or she will be glad to help you get started on your research. In today’s world of technology, the student has access to a vast source of information: ask a librarian to introduce you to the CLIC system, the library’s CD ROM resources, the World Wide Web, and various readers’ guides to periodical literature (for example, the **Reader’s Guide** and **Poole’s Index to Periodical Literature**, as well as special indexes in certain academic fields, such as the **Psychological Abstracts** and the **Educational Index**).

Once you have found a book or article that MIGHT relate to answering your question, you are ready to create a system that keeps track of all the bibliographic information dealing with your topic. Here is an excellent way to record each book or article you may want to look at. First, buy a pack of 3x5 index cards. Using one side of the card, make a bibliography card for each book or title you might be looking at (this way, you will not have to run back to the library weeks later to find the book’s author, title, publisher, and publication date). When the time comes to write your paper based on the books and articles you have chosen, you will already have the bibliography handy. Here are examples of efficient bibliography cards, the first citing a book that you consulted, the second citing a source found on the net.

Library call- Brief note to remind you of number why the text may be useful

BF	Contains research on effects of stress
637	
C6	
C43	
Christiansen, Harley Duane <u>Self-Relaxation: Comfort in Times of Tension</u> Tucson, Arizona: Peter Juul Press, 1975	

The exact bibliographical information

http://www.NE14SUN.com
Bruckman, Amy. "Anyone for Sun?" < http://www.NE14SUN.media.mit.com > (4 Dec. 1994)

When you find information for your paper on **the net**, on your bibliographic card or computer file, write down the full http address of the source, the author's name (if known), the title of the article in quotation marks, the title of the complete work (if applicable), the date of the publication (if known and if it is different from the date accessed), and **in parenthesis** the date you actually accessed the site.

Your **computer** may also be used to keep track of your source materials. Software is available to assist you in preparing your bibliography. Some will format the bibliography for you by asking you to enter each piece of information as a field in a database. Other software programs "will provide an on-line guide to bibliographic format as you enter your data; this kind of program will automatically alphabetize entries and place them in the proper format as well as take care of all printing concerns" (Rodrigues and Tuman 63).

One frequently overlooked source of information is the personal interview; every campus and town has its share of experts and authorities. If possible, arrange for an interview and be prepared to take notes.

Collect your bibliography cards in one central location so that they may easily be found. Keep the cards for books or articles you think you might be rejecting; you may discover later that the source has important information, or your instructor may ask to see your cards.

Gathering Notes

After filling out your bibliography cards for each source, you are ready to read your books and articles and to write out note cards or type in computer entries for each source that you decide to use. It will save you time to examine several sources each time. It is an excellent idea to write **ALL** of your notes on paper of the **same size** because it would be less bulky, easier to keep together, and uniform. The 5x8 index cards work very well for your notes. Here are the basic guidelines for your note cards:

1. Use **only one side of the index card**, and then record at the top right-hand corner the **TOPIC** of the quotation or summary (for example, "Causes of stress").

2. Identify the **reference information** at the top left-hand corner of the card by writing the author's last name or the title of the book or article.

3. Write notes in your own words or use quotation marks and record **EXACTLY** what the author wrote or said. Get facts, not just opinions and compare the facts with the author's conclusion. You do not want to collect only those things that will support your thesis, ignoring other facts and opinion. Remember that you need to write your notes out in a form, which can be used in your paper. If you are summarizing what the writer wrote or said, keep in mind that you are required to indicate in your paper when an idea or words are not your own, but those of your source. Failure to do this might lead you into plagiarism, a serious offense that could cause you to either fail the assignment or to fail the entire course!

4. Your notes should be concise, yet detailed enough to provide the accurate meaning of what the writer said.

5. Write your notes neatly so as to avoid the frustration of later having to come back to the source because you could not read or understand what you wrote.

6. Always skim the chapter or article before writing your notes.

7. Use ink. Notes written in pencil can become blurred through handling and sorting of your note cards.

8. If you decide to use direct quotations, use only a few and only those that are outstanding in supporting your position in the paper. Most students tend to quote too much and too often.

9. Abbreviate only the common words; otherwise, much time could be lost in trying to "figure out" unfamiliar shorthand.

10. When ideas and insights occur to you, write them down on separate note cards; in the top left-hand corner write "my own."

Should you choose to create your bibliography and note cards **using your computer**, keep the following in mind:

1. Create a template file for each master card. Customize them as needed to accommodate your sources. Since the cards are designed for a word processor, the space will expand as needed.

2. After you design the cards, use the Block Copy function of your word processor to make multiple copies of the text in the file.
3. Each time you use the file, save a copy of it with a new name so that you can use your original bibliography card or note card file for another project.
4. Head each note card with a key word or words that represent(s) an important concept in the source. You can then search your file to find all the notes you have taken on a specific topic with the same key words. For example, if you are writing a paper about problems in the legal system and want to find all of the notes you have taken that include the key words “defense attorneys,” search for all instances of “defense.” By searching a file that contains all your notes, you will be able to find and reorganize your notes by copying all related items to a new file.
5. When you take notes, indicate the usefulness or value of each source in a section of your bibliography card; also indicate your personal reaction to the source on your note card.

Note Card on Your Word Processor

Key words:
Author or brief title:
Notes:
Personal response to this source:

Bibliography Card on Your Word Processor

Author(s) or Editor(s):
Title:
Volume:
City/publisher/Web Site
Date of publication:
Date of access (if source is on the Internet):
Value of this source

Should you choose to use the vast information structure of the **Internet**, you must learn how to use the various search engines, Infoseek and WebCrawler being two of the most popular. Here again, Writing Essentials offers some excellent suggestions:

1. Develop a list of descriptors or search terms, and revise the list you find items that yield better results.
2. Use *and* and *not* in your searches. Many programs allow you to use two words that are joined by *and* to limit your search to all the sources that contain both words (For example, searching for *interactive* and *television* would produce a list of all the sources that contain both words).
3. To exclude certain kinds of sources, use *not* between your search items (For example, searching for *written and composition not music* would produce sources that are about written composition, not musical composition).
4. Scan the list of sources, and jot down new search terms that are like the “See also” references that often appear in abstracts and summaries.
5. Search in various databases, using the same terms as well as any new terms that appear. You will know that you have exhausted your search when the sources that you have already seen continue to appear as the results of your search.
6. Learn how to use search tools such as Netscape or WebCrawler on the World Wide Web.
7. Learn how to create a bookmark, a program feature of many Internet browsers that allows you to mark material to which you may wish to return. First, as you search on the Internet, locate a set of sources for your project. Then indicate to the computer that you want to save the location under “Bookmark” in Netscape.
8. Mail information that you locate through the World Wide Web to your e-mail address, and incorporate it into your notes. Check the World Wide Web or Internet program for directions on mailing files to yourself. (35)

Categorizing Your Notes

Because you recorded only ONE topic in the top right-hand corner on each of your note cards, you can now arrange your note cards into separate topic stacks. And because you wrote on only one side of the note card, you can see your full notes without having to turn cards over, back and forth! This will compensate for the fact that you might have felt you were wasting paper by writing on only one side! You will notice that by writing topics in the upper right-hand corner of your note cards, you will actually be organizing your paper as you take notes. If you find some material that might add interest to your introduction, then you can write “Introduction” as your topic. Some students find that by this method, they do not have to write a formal outline at all. As an example, after completing all of your note cards, adding topics to each card, you might be able to sort the cards into six piles easily. Let’s say you are

writing a paper on the radio program Voice of America. When you are finished taking notes, you might be able to divide them according to the following headings:

1. History of VA
2. Purpose of VA
3. Organization of VA
4. Cost
5. Effects of VA
6. Future of VA

Now your paper is beginning to take on a more coherent, organized look. If it does not, try going back and sorting the cards again, looking for main divisions, to see if another general pattern might become evident.

Here are several key ideas to follow:

1. Once you have put your note cards in separate piles according to topic, arrange the piles in the order in which they will appear in your paper, each pile representing its own section of your paper.
2. Now arrange the **CARDS in each pile in the order in which the information will appear in the paragraph(s)** of your paper.
3. Look over your note card piles and analyze the information in order to find a clear thesis sentence that the entire paper will serve to support or prove.

Deciding on an Approach

This is an important stage of the process, for now you must look over all of your notes in an attempt to find some main point or answer to the question you originally proposed. If you present your faculty member with a paper that simply strings together a long series of quotations, no matter how logically arranged, he or she might say, "So what?" And that is to the point: you ought to have clearly in mind before you begin writing the paper what this material adds up to. What will be your **thesis sentence**, the idea that the entire paper develops, supports and proves? If you have not as yet thought of a thesis sentence, now is the time to do so!

Drawing up a Detailed Outline

A detailed outline helps many student writers to order and control their data so that it can be used to support your thesis statement. In writing the outline, you will be forced to think through your material. Once you do this, then you will be able to draw from your reservoir of facts rather than stringing together

“snippets” of facts. The detailed outline will save you time as well during the revision stage, since your thesis and facts will be in the correct and logical order from the beginning. At the top of your outline, write a clear thesis sentence; the rest of the outline, beginning with Roman number I, should do nothing but support your thesis!

Make a Clear Copy

Write your paper around the outline (or around your stacks of note cards if you have chosen not to write a formal outline). Indicate in the first part of your paper what its purpose is (some writer, when dealing with a very controversial thesis, will present the data first, then the conclusion; they do this so as not to “turn off” the reader in the very first section of the paper). The sections of your paper will look somewhat like this:

1. In your introduction, attempt to interest the reader in your topic before you state your thesis sentence. Avoid an introduction that just mechanically states your thesis. You interest your reader by sharing an anecdote relating to your topic, or presenting interesting factual data, or emphasizing the importance of your topic to your readers. Then tell the reader what you are going to support or prove (statement of purpose, or thesis sentence).

2. Support why you believe your thesis to be true in the main body of your paper. Work hard to keep each paragraph of the body coherent: in other words, start the paragraph with a clear topic sentence and make sure the remaining sentences of the paragraph work to **support that topic sentence**.

3. After you have developed all of your information, conclude by telling the reader what you have just said (statement of summary and conclusion). Keep in mind that **NO NEW INFORMATION** should be introduced in your conclusion.

When you finish writing your sections, you have a first rough draft; it can be full of crossed-out ideas, additions, directions, etc. that are understandable **ONLY** to the writer. Read the entire paper aloud and listen to how it sounds before you begin adding your documentation. Your paper should flow smoothly. You may need to add transitions if your sentences and paragraphs are not connected logically.

Now it is time to document throughout your paper wherever you borrowed actual words, phrases, and sentences from another writer or speaker or wherever you borrowed an idea or conclusion from some other source. All statements of fact and opinion, whether directly quoted or paraphrased, should be documented by a parenthetical reference or by a footnote, showing exactly where you found the information.

The MLA style of using parenthetical references is much simpler than using footnotes or endnotes. You should clarify with your instructor if he or she will accept the most common type of documentation, the MLA style. Here are important steps to keep in mind, as summarized in [10 Steps in Writing the Research Paper](#):

1. Take out your bibliography cards and note cards.

2. Place the reference as close as possible to the material it documents, but only where a pause would naturally occur, such as at the end of a sentence. The parenthetical acknowledgment precedes the punctuation mark that concludes the sentence, clause, or phrase containing the material you have borrowed. If the quotation comes at the end of the phrase containing the material you have borrowed. If the quotation comes at the end of the sentence, the parenthetical reference should be enclosed after the closing quotation mark and before the concluding punctuation mark.

3. Within the parentheses there is no punctuation between the author's name and the page number if the volume number or other information is given. The abbreviation for the page is never used, and there is never any end punctuation within the parentheses.

4. Copy the page number on which the material was found exactly as you had it on your note card; if the source is a multi-volume work, the volume number appears after the author's name followed by a colon and the page number. If a pamphlet or booklet has no page number, supply a page number in brackets or write the words *no page*.

5. Check your bibliography cards to make sure that you have copied the author's name exactly. Draw a check mark on the card to remind yourself that you have used that source and that it must be included in your final bibliography.

FORMS FOR PARENTHETICAL REFERENCES:

1. If the work to be cited was written by a single author and is alphabetized in your bibliography under the author's last name, your parenthetical reference will give the author's last name followed by a page number: (Campbell 37). The reader only needs to check your bibliography or "Works Cited" page and look under "Campbell" to find the complete publishing information.

2. If you have already given the author's name in your text, then you should give only the page number: (37). In the case of multiple authors of a single work or a corporate author with a long name, it is preferable to mention the name or names in the text, leaving just the page number for the parenthetical reference, rather than having a long, unwisely parenthetical reference that would interrupt the flow of your writing.

3. If there is no author, use the title or the first word under which it is alphabetized if it is too long: (Language 26).

4. If there are two authors, use both last names: (Markham and Jones 123). If there are three authors, use all three last names: (Smith, Booth, and Jones 19). If there are more than three, use the first author's last name followed by "and others": (Smith and others 87).

5. If there is no author, but the bibliographical entry begins with the name of an editor or translator, use the last name of that person followed by the page number: (Jones 86).

6. If the author is a corporation, or the document is a government document, use the name of the originating entity of the first word under which it is alphabetized: (Institute 24). Of course, if you have more than one institute in your bibliography, you will need to add more to identify the correct source: (Institute Corporate Giving 23).

7. If your reference is to one volume in a multi-volume set, give the author's last name followed by the volume number, a colon, and the page number: (Biddle 2:23). In the case of non-print media (film, music on CD or vinyl, television, radio, etc.) there will, of course, be no page number: (Legends).

8. If your bibliography contains only one work by the author cited, you should give only the author's last name to identify the work, unless, of course, there were two authors in your bibliography with the same last names, in which case you would have to give the first name too.

9. If there is more than one book by the author in your bibliography, give the title or an abbreviated form of it after the author's name: (Smith, *Analysis* 24).

10. If you include the author's name in your sentence, you should omit it from the parenthetical reference that follows; you need to give only the page number. (82-83).

Also, keep in mind that **quotations that will exceed four lines** in your paper should be indented and no quotation marks should be used. Do not overuse long quotations. Observe the following rules for long quotations:

1. Properly lead into the long quotation, and use a colon to link the quotation to its introduction.
2. Double-space the quotation and separate the quotation from the rest of the paper by also double-spacing.
3. Indent **the entire long quotation including the first sentence**, ten spaces from your left-hand margin, but the right-hand margin needs no special indentation.
4. Place the citation after the last word of the quotation and, if possible, on the same line; otherwise, drop down and place the citation flush right one double-space below the last line of the quotation.

When you have completed your documentation, look over your paper again and ask yourself the following questions:

1. What is my main idea for this paper?
2. Did I stick to supporting this idea and not wander off the subject?
3. Does my paper flow smoothly and logically from one section to another?
4. Does each paragraph following the Introduction have a clear focus so that everything in that paragraph serves to support the main idea of the paragraph?
5. Does each paragraph lead logically into the next?
6. Does the entire paper make sense?
7. Did I follow the format my instructor requires?
8. Did I check spelling, grammar, and punctuation? Did I use the spell-check capacity of my computer? Do I need to take the rough draft to the Writing Lab to have someone else look over the structure and writing quality?
9. Did I document every important fact or opinion borrowed from another writer or speaker?

Now you are ready to write your clear copy. Do not permit time to go by before writing your clear copy! If you leave your draft even for a day, much time might be lost in trying to recall exactly how

you meant to blend in some of the ideas. Furthermore, if you retype or rewrite while the copy is still fresh in your mind, some spontaneous revision may take place. The result of this is a clear copy, which will be ready for revision after a “cooling-off” period of a day or so.

Leave for a Day!

This “cooling-off” period is important. During the writing stage, your mind is so full of associations with the words which you have written that you are liable to impose clarity and step-by-step sequences where these do not, in fact, need to be done! After your mind has dropped some of these associations, then you can come back to your paper and actually have to **READ** each sentence to determine the meaning. You can now better spot the glaring errors because you now can be critically objective.

Edit Your Paper

This is the stage in which you learn one of the most important skills -- to view your own production with enough courage to anticipate and be concerned about the potential reader’s reaction. This is the stage where you polish, boil down ideas, and struggle to say things more clearly, perhaps even deciding to start over or to write two more drafts!! It can help to have a friend read you the paper as you listen to it, looking for those areas weak in clarity or logic. Or you might read your paper into a tape recorder and play it back, listening for parts that do not clearly make their point.

Your Final Copy

In preparing your finished copy of your research paper, use only one side of a high-grade white bond paper. Be sure to double space, and leave generous margins at the top and bottom. Leave margins of about one and a half inches on both the left and right sides of the paper; this will allow enough room for you instructor’s comments. Make every attempt to hand in your research paper **ON TIME**; some instructors will deduct points for late papers.

Analyzing Your Information Sources

Another important skill a writer must develop is the ability to evaluate the sources of your information. Here are major points to keep in mind:

1. **Author:** what are her credentials (educational background, past writings or experience in the area she is writing about)? Is the book or article on a topic in the author’s area of expertise? Reference books such as **Who’s Who in America** or **Biography Index** can be used to determine the

author's reputation. Has your instructor mentioned this author? Have you seen this author quoted by other respected authorities? Note those names that appear in many different resources.

2. **Year of Publication:** when was the source published? This date is often located on the fact of the title page below the name of the publisher. If it is not there, look for the copyright date on the reverse of the title page. Is the source current or out-of-date for your topic? Topic areas of rapid development, such as science and technology, demand more current information.

3. **Edition.** Is this the first edition? Further editions indicate that a source has been revised and updated to reflect changes in knowledge. Many printings of a book may indicate that the work has become a credible source in its field and is reliable.

4. **Publisher.** If a university press prints the source, it is likely to be scholarly research and analysis. Although the fact that the publisher is reputable does not necessarily guarantee quality, it does show that the publisher may have high regard for the source being published.

5. **Title of Journal.** If your source is from a journal, you may want to determine whether or not the journal is scholarly. This distinction is important because it indicates different levels of complexity in conveying ideas (a popular journal may simplify information for a mass audience). You may wish to check your journal title in **Katz's Magazines for Libraries**, where brief evaluative descriptions are given.

6. **Content Analysis.** If your source is a book, read the Preface to determine the author's viewpoint. Look over the bibliography for other possible sources. Scan the Table of Contents and the Index looking for your particular topic. As you begin to read, keep in mind the differences among fact, opinion, and propaganda. Facts can usually be verified; opinions grow out of the writer's interpretation of facts. Skilled writers can make you think their interpretations are facts! Does the information seem to be valid and well researched, or is it questionable and unsupported by evidence? Is the writer's viewpoint objective and impartial? Is the language free of emotion-rousing words and personal bias? Does the work update other sources, add new information, or contain a different point of view from other sources?

You should explore enough sources to obtain a variety of viewpoints on any given issue.

7. Is the material **primary** or **secondary** in nature? Primary sources are the raw material of the research process. Secondary sources are based on primary. For example, if you were researching Adenauer's role in rebuilding West Germany, Adenauer's own writing would be one of many **primary** sources available on this topic. Others might include relevant government documents and contemporary German newspaper articles. Scholars use this primary material to help generate historical interpretations--a secondary source. Books, encyclopedia articles, and scholarly journals contain articles about Adenauer's role and are considered **secondary** sources. Choose both primary and secondary sources when you have the opportunity.

8. Locate critical reviews of books in a reviewing source, such as **Book Review Index** or **Book Review Digest**. Is the review positive? Is the book under review considered a valuable contribution to the field? Does the reviewer mention other books that might be better (if so, locate these sources for more

information on your topic)? Do various reviewers agree on the value of the book or has the book generated controversy among the critics?

LEARNING HOW TO QUICKLY DETERMINE THE RELEVANCE AND AUTHORITY OF A GIVEN SOURCE OF INFORMATION FOR YOUR PAPER IS ONE OF THE CORE SKILLS OF THE RESEARCH PROCESS.

Proofreading Your Paper

Students often overlook the importance of proofreading, which is an acquired skill, not an innate ability. Here are hints for successful proofreading:

1. Cultivate a healthy sense of doubt. If there are types of errors you know you tend to make, double-check for these.

2. Read your paper very slowly. If possible, read out loud. Read one word at a time. The student who turned in a paper saying “Abraham Lincoln preferred girdle cakes” rather than “Abraham Lincoln preferred griddle cakes” thought he had written “griddle cakes,” and because that’s what he was sure he had written, that’s what he saw when he proofread. If he had slowed down and read word by word, out loud, he probably would have caught the error. You have to doubt EVERY word in order to catch every mistake. Another reason for deliberately slowing down is that when you read normally, you often see only the shells of words--the first and last few letters, perhaps. The average reader can only take in six letters accurately with one stop of the eye, or fixation. This means you have to fix your eyes on almost every word you have written and do it twice for longer words in order to proofread accurately. You have to look at the word, not slide over it.

3. Read what is actually on the page, not what you THINK is there! This is the most difficult sub-skill to acquire, especially if you wrote what you are reading. Unconscious mistakes are so easy to make. It helps to read out loud because you are forced to slow down and you hear what you are reading as well as seeing it, so you are using two senses. It is often possible to hear a mistake, such as an omitted word or repeated word that you have not seen.

4. Proofread more than once. If possible, take your paper to the College’s Writing Laboratory and have a writing tutor go over your copy. Professional editors proofread as many as ten times, and publishing houses will hire teams of readers to work in pairs, out loud.

REMEMBER, IT IS TWICE AS DIFFICULT TO DETECT MISTAKES IN YOUR OWN WORK AS IN SOMEONE ELSE’S!

The Works Cited Format

Once your paper is done, you must then create a *Works Cited* page, which provides your readers with a list of the books, articles, and persons you consulted in gathering your information. If you used the bibliography cards, as suggested earlier, this task will be a fairly simple one.

The format for your *Works Cited* page is also fairly simple. It should include ALL of the works used and mentioned in your paper. Arrange your sources alphabetically by author's last name. The first line of each entry should be flush with the left margin. Additional lines for the same entry should be indented five spaces. The lines of each entry should be double-spaced, and you should be indented five spaces. The lines of each entry should be double-spaced, and you should double space between entries. The words "Works Cited" should be centered on the page, one inch down from the top of the page (about 5 lines); double space between it and the first entry.

The form of the individual entries may vary depending upon the type of source used. The basic information for a book should include the author's name, last name first; the title of the book underlined or italicized, the city (and state if the city is not easily recognizable, such a Springfield, Illinois rather than just Springfield); the publishing company, exactly as it appears on the title page of the book or on the back of the title page; and the copyright date.

For periodicals or magazines, include the name of the author, again last name first; the title of the article; and the publication information (name of magazine, volume number, date of publication, and the page numbers where article appears). For public documents there is no standard form because they vary so much. In this case provide enough information so that the reader could easily find the document. In general, arrange the information as follows: Government Body, Subsidiary Body, Title of Document, and Identifying Number.

For a person interview, list the name of the person you interviewed, last name first; his or her job title; name of his or her company; state "Personal Interview"; state city and state where interview occurred; and the complete date of the interview.

Here are examples of *Works Cited* entries:

Books:

Barr, Jacob. A New Psychology. New York: Colliers Inc., 1965.

Hooper, Henry Robert and Peter Simmons, Jr.. Physics, computers, and the Physical Perspective. Boston: William Pelham Publishers, 1989.

More than One Work by the Same Author:

Jones, Benjamin. A Course of Action. New York: Random House, 1969.

The Flight for Justice. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1994.

Two Authors:

Fillmore, Rodger, and Henry R. Stone. **Symptoms of Change**. New York: Scott, Foresman, 1989.

Periodicals:

Shade, William Bennett. "Social-Psychological Traits of Achieving Black Children."
Educaiton Digest 34 (1989): 38-44.

Author of Article is Anonymous:

"The Concorde: Is It Safe?" Time 16 December 1996: 38.

Editor:

Barrister, Davis, ed. The Complete Works of Montaigne. 4th ed. Glenview: Scott,
Foresman, 1985.

Classical Works:

Homer. The Odyssey. Trans. Richard Lattimore. Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1968.

Encyclopedia:

Dickinson, Robert E. "Norman Conquest." The World Book Encyclopedia. 1976 ed.

Public Documents:

U.S. Congress. House. Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce. Federal Cigarette
Labeling and Advertising Act. 89th Congress. 1st Session. House Report 449 to accompany
H.R. 3014. Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1965.

Computer Data:

Scipax. Series 3 software. Cleveland: Hunt Information Services, 1997.

Sears, Robert O. Trends in Women's Sports: Factual Data on Participation and Revenue.
VAX-1419. Bowling Green: Kentucky State University, 1993.

On-line Databases:

Garrow, Davidson. "On the Ideals of Race." New York Times 7 July 1995: E1. New
York Times On-line. America On-line. 29 July 1995.

World Wide Web:

Brown, Haines. "Citations of Electronic Documents in an Electronic Document."
><http://neal.ctstateu.edu/history/cite.html><(29 March 1996).

Burka, Lauren p. "A Hypertext History of Multi-User Dimensions." MUD History.
1993. <<http://www.ccs.neu.edu/home/lpb/mud-history.html>>(5 Dec. 1996).

Carbone, Nick. <nicke@english.umass.edu> "NN 960126: Followup to Dons comments
about citing URLs." 26 Jan. 1997. <acw-1@unicorn.acs.ttu.edu>via
<<http://www.ttu.edu/lists/acw-1>> (29 Mar. 1997).

"Field Guide to Sources On, About and On the Internet: citation Formats." 18 Dec. 1995.
<<http://www.cc.emory.edu?WHSC/citation.formats.html>> (7 Feb. 1996).

Hoeman, George H. "Electronic Style--Elements of Citation." Lkd. Electronic Style
Page, at "Continue" and "Citation Elements." 3 Nov. 1995.
<<http://funnelweb.utcc.utk.edu/~hoemann/style.html>> (29 May 1996).

Film:

Fargo. United Artists, 1996.

Personal Interview:

Tarrantino, Quentin. Director and Partner, A Band Apart. Personal interview.
Minneapolis, MN. 12 March 1997.

For further assistance in composing your *Works Cited* page, consult any of these excellent texts:

1. James D. Lester, Writing Research Papers: A Complete Guide, 4th Edition
2. Roberta H. Markham, 10 Steps in Writing a Research Paper
3. Gibaldi and Achtert, MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers

General Tips on Writing Research Papers

1. For the title of your paper, brainstorm. Your title should accurately reflect the topic of your paper in some interesting, creative way. A famous writing teacher once advised her class to think of a title, then change it at least three times. She believed that your fourth choice would be the title to use!
2. Some writers write out their opening and closing paragraphs FIRST. This enables them to be clear as to what the middle needs to do!
3. Keep all of your materials (notes, drafts, note cards, etc.) for the paper in a large folder so that you will not misplace anything. Keep this folder until the instructor returns your paper. Sometimes a professor wants to look over your notes.
4. Make a long-term time schedule, allowing yourself at least 2 hours a week for library time; during your library time, you will research your sources, read them over and make note cards, and begin writing your paper. If you go to the library faithfully once a week, you will have your paper completed by the due date. Try to arrange your schedule so that you will complete your paper at least two days before it is due; this will give you time to proofread adequately. Many professors will lower your grade if the quality of the writing and typing is not excellent.
5. Work on your paper in manageable units of time so that you do not get overwhelmed and stressed. Break the job down into small units rather than to procrastinate and find yourself having to spend many hours at once in order to complete it; if you rush yourself, you are probably going to be less accurate in your analyses and will probably overlook important information to be gathered.
6. Ask your friends' opinions about your paper when you are done. Keep in mind that your instructor will assist you if asked. If you are uncertain about your topic, your sources, your analysis of the data, **see your instructor**, who is a valuable source of feedback on your paper. Never be reluctant to ask him or her for help with your assignments.

The excellent book 10 Steps in Writing the Research Paper offers a checklist for frequent errors in writing research papers:

1. Your sources are not integrated. You use all material from one source and then all from another; your reader could just pick up one book and read certain pages and then the next one. Real research involves the blending together of ideas from many different sources.
2. Using Latin (i.e., *ibid.*) in in-text or footnote reference.
3. Not blocking a long quotation properly
4. Using phrases that are too similar to the words of your source, and that would be considered plagiarized.
5. Moving from one idea to another without transitions that indicate to the reader what the relationship is between the two ideas. Use transitional phrases such as “as a result,” “consequently,” “another less important reason,” and “on the other hand.”
6. Using punctuation incorrectly, especially the use of quotation marks.
7. Using a quotation without analyzing it and leaving it up to the reader to decide how it fits into your argument and/or how you are interpreting it for that purpose.
8. Using the passive voice, such as “It was decided by Professor Jones that such and such is true” rather than “Professor Jones decided that...”
9. Numbering pages incorrectly. Any page with a title should have a number at the bottom and the rest should be numbered carefully on top.
10. Not showing source of information; all information from sources other than the writer of the paper *must* be documented.
11. Using incorrect format for parenthetical references and bibliographical format.
12. Using obsolete publications for a current topic, such as for information about computers, the treatment of disease, divorce laws, or other subjects that change radically and quickly.
13. Using sources that are not reliable and whose information is not documented.

(74-75)

Before You Write

Not all of the papers you write will be research oriented: they may be narrative, autobiographical, descriptive, or creative. The information you need for these papers will not be found in a library--it must come from you.

Pre-writing is the process by which you creatively write down ideas for your paper. This process will give you a basis to start from and help you to see where you want to go with the paper. In other words, pre-writing helps you pull out what you already know about a topic. Some suggested pre-writing methods are brainstorming, free-writing, mapping, and the Tree Method.

Pre-writing is not limited to the methods listed here. Anything you can think of that will help you get ideas out of your head is a pre-writing method and is valuable.

Brainstorming

On a piece of paper, write your general topic at the top of the page; then make a list of everything that comes into your head as fast as possible. Don't be critical when you do this--it is okay to be irrational or wildly imaginative. The goal is simply to discover what is in your head. Brainstorm until you cannot think of anything else, then look over what you wrote down. Look for things that may surprise you or things that are related. These connections and surprises may suggest a pattern which, in turn, may suggest directions of interest to you. Now you are becoming aware of possible other topics or details which could be further developed throughout your paper.

Here is an example of the brainstorming method:

TOPIC: Grandmother

- back scratcher on my desk
 - left hand
 - transparent skin
 - soft, unused hand
 - wispy white hair
- had been Auburn as a girl in Scotland
 - go in to see if she was alive
 - shawl, dark, green, and black
 - thin but heavy
 - black watch?
- named for my uncle; named for his uncle
 - washed out my mouth with soap
 - broke her arm
 - wood stove
 - kidney soup, thick
 - grape jelly
 - dumped hot jelly on me
- forcing mouth open to eat eggs
 - dining room rug
- underside of dining room table
 - didn't like my father

These thoughts might not make sense to anyone except the writer, but that is the purpose. These are the memories of the writer that are reminiscent of the topic “Grandmother.” Things of obvious importance are Grandmother’s appearance and her domestic abilities. These characteristics of Grandmother could help the writer by opening up new possibilities to develop.

Free writing

The goal of free-writing is to let the words flow. On a piece of paper simply start writing about your topic. Don’t worry about spelling or punctuation when you are writing- just let it flow. By free-writing you are trying to see if language will carry you to meaning. Write whatever your mind tells you to. The key is to keep your hand moving at all times. If you get stumped, try to keep your hand going by scribbling until you think of something else to write the ideas you can come up with. The following paragraph is an example of free-writing.

TOPIC: Grandmother

I’m a bit afraid to write about Grandmother. Interesting I don’t put in ‘my’. Just Grandmother. Grandma. She was a frightening woman. I felt bigger than my grandmother, but I was afraid of Grandma. She wore her hair up in a knot on the top of her head like the queen of England.....I’m interested in the fear. Yes, I guess it was physical. I said ‘darn’ once and ‘bugger’, and I was hauled down those wooden steps in the Vassel street house and she scrubbed my mouth out with Fels Naptha soap. When I came home with a tan from summer camp, she tried to rub it off with a big brush.....the kind you use on the floor when you’re on your hands and knees. When she fell in the dining room.....I was in the first grade.....she broke her arm and had a great big round welt....a big purple lump just rose right up. Grandmother didn’t let the pain bother her. What a strong woman she was....

* Remember, the idea is simply to keep your hand moving during the time you are free-writing. Try to let your thoughts flow into words without worrying about grammar or style--that’s what free-writing is about.

Mapping

Unlike brainstorming, mapping attempts to exercise the right side of the brain, which is your creative side. Take a piece of paper and write the subject of your paper in the center, then circle it. Now think of ideas or anything related to the subject. When the idea comes to mind, draw a line from your subject word and write this new word at the end of it. Now think of something related to this new word. Continue to do this until you are out of ideas. Repeat the whole process until you have all the ideas out of your head. Find any connection when you are finished.

The Tree Method

This method of pre-writing resembles the mapping method. Start by placing your topic at the bottom-center of the page. Working vertically, write whatever comes to your head about the topic. Draw a vertical line to your next idea and allow further ideas to branch off the old ones, forming a tree. When you are finished, find the connections and relationships between ideas and see what meanings they might.

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- Markman, Roberta H., Peter T. Markman, and Marie L. Waddell. 10 Steps in Writing the Research Paper. Fifth Edition. Hauppauge, New York: Barron's Educational Series, Inc., 1994.
- Rodrigues, Dawn, and Myron C. Tuman. Writing Essentials. New York City, New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1996.
- Todd, Alden, Finding Facts Fast. Second Addition. Berkeley, California: Ten Speed Press, 1979.