

Steps to Writing a Research Paper

Research, according to Webster, is a 1) careful or diligent search, and 2) studious inquiry or examination—especially investigation or experimentation aimed at the discovery and interpretation of facts. The purpose of writing a research report is to clearly communicate what you have learned through your research.

Set Work Schedule/Timetable

Since you will have several weeks to complete a research paper, it is easy to ignore—and thus put off—requirements that are not due immediately. Use a checksheet, like the one on the reverse side, to keep you on schedule. First, write in your final due date and work backwards to today.

Identify General Topic and Begin Library Work

Brainstorm topics that interest you, subjects you want to know about. Select one topic you want to read about, don't already have a strong opinion about, and have some background to understand. Before you begin to research, take time to learn to use various library and Internet resources.

Clarify Required Documentation Style

You must credit the authors of all the facts and opinions you use in your paper; you must document your sources. Although there are several different documentation styles, your instructor will require/recommend one specific style—probably MLA or APA. Consistent, accurate documentation is critical to good research.

Read To Narrow Topic

Read several general pieces about your topic to help you decide which aspect of the subject will be your focus. Once you narrow your topic, run a preliminary database/indices search to be sure there is enough accessible material to support your research in that area. Decide if your primary purpose is to explain or persuade.

Draft Preliminary Thesis

Like any good thesis statement, your research paper thesis must state your controlling idea about your topic. Keep revising your thesis statement until you clearly communicate your controlling idea.

Begin Research and Notetaking

Without purposeful, critical reading and meaningful, accurate notetaking, you cannot produce a good research paper no matter how excellent a writer you are. Always note complete citation information.

Draft Tentative Working Outline

This informal outline will help you organize the main ideas and the major and minor details you want to use to develop and support your thesis. In addition, outlining helps you present ideas in a logical order.

Continue Research and Notetaking

Draft Final Outline

If an outline is required, it should use the conventions of formal outlining.

Refine Thesis and Write First Draft

From your reading you should be ready to rewrite your thesis statement into a clear, brief sentence that precisely focuses your paper. Your draft should be a well-crafted combination of direct quotes, idea summaries, paraphrased ideas—all properly credited—and your original writing.

Read to Fill-In Any Gaps In Research

Develop Works Cited Sheet

In addition to citing with parenthesis in the body of the paper, you must develop a list of Works Cited at the end of your paper—an alphabetical listing of all your sources in the style your instructor requires.

Write Draft Two, Three, Four...

Remember, the key to good writing is rewriting. Having someone, like a tutor, read your draft may be helpful.

Edit, Format, and Double-Check Citations

Complete Final Draft and Proofread

Put these strategies into practice with the checksheet on the next page.

Checksheet for Writing a Research Report

As soon as your research report is assigned, write in all task due dates including the final completion date. Be sure to add any additional tasks your instructor requires. Even if your instructor doesn't impose intermediate dates, to keep yourself on target you should set your own completion date for each step in the process.

Research Report Writing Tasks	Days I Can Work On Task	Must Turn In	DUE Date
Set Work Schedule/Timetable	_____	_____	_____
Identify General Topic, Begin Library Work	_____	_____	_____
Clarify Required Documentation Style	_____		
Read To Narrow Topic	_____		
Draft Preliminary Thesis	_____	_____	_____
Begin Research and Notetaking	_____		
Draft Tentative Working Outline	_____	_____	_____
Continue Research and Notetaking	_____		
Draft Final Outline	_____	_____	_____
Refine Thesis and Write First Draft	_____	_____	_____
Read To Fill-In Any Gaps	_____		
Develop Works Cited Sheet	_____	_____	_____
Read, Revise, and Write Additional Drafts	_____		
Edit, Format, and Double-Check Citations	_____		
Complete Final Draft and Proofread	_____		
Final Paper DUE			_____