

Regina Garson's How to Write a Research Paper Handout

What is a research paper and what is expected?

A research paper is a written discussion. It is generally based on a thesis, which is supported by a collection of ideas and information. This information is gathered from materials that others have written. In the paper, you will present the information you have found from many different sources. Your personal creativity will be shown by the significance of the thesis you develop, the organization of your materials, and your presentation of the paper. You are expected to strive toward the highest professional standards in the field. You are expected to know where every piece of information originated. You are expected to use professionally competent English, grammar, and writing skills. Presenting the words, ideas, or opinions of someone else as one's own is plagiarism. When quoting directly from a source, repeat the source exactly, including punctuation. Be sure to give credit to the source by citing it in the text of your paper. A research paper is usually composed of approximately 10% quotations, 70% paraphrasing, and 10% your own words.

Select a topic:

Unless your instructor assigns your topic, select several possible options and determine the amount of information available on each. You may be limited in your topic choice by the resources available that support a single idea. The best research paper is one that is based on many sources. After considering several topics, determining the material available, and deciding on the length of your paper, narrow your choice to a specific subject of your broad topic.

Form a thesis statement:

After selecting your topic, form a thesis statement, which is the controlling idea or compass pointing the direction for your paper.

Do your research and take notes:

If you take notes carefully as you read various materials on your topic, you can easily organize your materials later. Your notes, which are written in your own words (except for quotations), should contain a brief summary of the information and an identification of the source.

Hints for taking notes:

1. Get the details first:
 - Get the title: Article, book, magazine article, and web page titles.
 - The author.
 - Date of publication.
 - Page number or URL of the information you will be using.
 - Publishing company.
 - Address.
2. Some people like to take notes on index cards
3. Put only one source and one subject on a card or page.
4. Write out your information on the topic (if you have quotes, check them for accuracy).

5. Quotations should be copied precisely and enclosed in quotation marks. Note the exact page number or URL where you found the quote.
6. Be accurate, be complete, and be brief. But be sure to get what you need.
7. If you must continue your notes on another page, list the source at the top in an abbreviated form so you can keep your information sorted as to what you got where.

Write the research paper:

When you have finished taking notes, you are ready to begin writing. This process begins with an outline and ends with your final paper. Here are the steps to follow:

1. Sort your note cards into groups according to subject.
2. Make an outline using the subjects on the note cards. This will serve as a guide for writing your paper.
3. Arrange your notes in the same order as your outline.
4. Using your note cards, write the first draft of your paper, putting the information into your own words.
5. Once you have written your draft, you will need to reread it, make corrections, and read it again. If possible get a trusted friend or instructor to give you their input.

Cite references:

1. Give credit where credit is due.
2. When in doubt cite the reference. It is better to over cite than to inadvertently plagiarize.
3. There are a number of different citation style guidelines. Use the style required by your instructor, or your boss.
4. Paraphrasing is rephrasing someone else's words. Ideas taken from other sources and put in your own words must also be cited.
5. Quoting is rewriting, word-for-word, someone else's words. You must pay close attention to the original wording, spelling, and punctuation, and follow them exactly.
 - A. Short quotations, consisting of only one or two sentences, should be included in the text of your paper, set off by quotation marks.
 - B. Use block quotations for quotations with four or more printed lines. The entire quote should be indented ten spaces from left margin. The period is placed immediately after the quote for blocked quotes.
 - C. When indenting an entire paragraph that begins with an indention itself, indent an extra three spaces in the first line.
 - D. Citations within the text may read:
 - a. According to
 - b.explained....

Bibliography:

The Bibliography or Works Cited page is located at the end of the research paper. It contains a correct listing of all sources from which you quoted or paraphrased. Only sources actually used in a paper need to be cited. Each entry on this page must contain all of the information needed for identification and library research. For detailed instructions on how to construct your Bibliography, refer to the style instructions specified by your instructor. It may be a style guide, such as MLA or APA, or it may be an in-house style designated by your boss or instructor. Do not be daunted by either. Many companies have their own style guides as well.

Matters of style:

Your completed paper should be typed and double-spaced; top, bottom, left, and right margins should be one to 1.25 inch. There should be one space between sentences. Times New Roman is a good professional font style. Font sizes may generally range between 11-12 points.

Beyond the basics:

Your instructor, boss, or even career field may require very specific style formatting. These are just a few. Most of these are available online or in book format. If you are in a work situation, do a quick search to get examples, but depending on your work, you may want a full book reference to keep at your desk.

- *APA Style Guide*
- *Chicago Manual of Style*
- *MLA Style* (Modern Language Association)
- *The Associated Press Style and Libel Manual* (The AP Style Book)
- *Turabian*
- IEEE Style Guide
- US Government Standards
- In House Style Sheets

Putting it all together:

The paper should be compiled in the following order:

1. **Title Page:** The title page, if required by your instructor, should follow your instructor's guidelines. A title page is not numbered.
2. **Table of Contents or Final Outline:** If required by your instructor and containing more than one page, a final outline or table of contents should be placed between the title page (if one is required) and the research paper.
3. **Page One: If there is no title page,** include your name, instructor's name, course title, and date at the upper-left corner of the paper. Next, center the title of the paper just above the first line of the research paper. The first page of the paper is not numbered; but it counts as page number one. (Note: Some research guidebooks specify that all pages be numbered, including the first one. Consult your instructor concerning the style you are to follow.)
4. **The Remaining Pages:** Place both your last name and page number on the header of each page of the paper, beginning on page two with your introduction, followed by the subtopics of the body and ending with the Bibliography.
5. **Bibliography:** Your Works Cited page is the last page of your paper.

*Some of this information was adapted from GPC/Dunwoody ISS Writing Lab

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