How to Research a Term Paper

How do I find a topic?

- Try to find a topic that interests you
- Find ideas in:
  - Books / Textbooks
  - Library of Congress subject heading list
  - Encyclopedias
  - Library catalog
  - Periodicals / Research databases
  - Internet
- Be aware of topics that are too:
  - recent
  - regional
  - emotional
  - complex
  - broad
  - narrow
- Ask yourself:
  - Do I understand the topic?
  - How much information do I need?
  - Does enough information exist to fill this paper?

How do I formulate a thesis?

- A thesis is a statement that states the main idea of your paper. It defines the scope and focus of your essay so that your readers know what to expect from the essay.
- Ask yourself what the focus or purpose of your paper is and then set out to prove it in the body of your paper.

How do I prepare an outline?

- List the major points and ideas of your thesis.
- Put similar points together so your paper will follow a logical order.

Where do I find information?

- Definition or Overview – Encyclopedias, subject encyclopedias, dictionaries, etc.
- Extensive Information – Books, eBooks
- Specific Topic – Journal articles (Research databases), periodicals, magazines, etc.
- Current Events – Newspapers, News web sites on the Internet; NewsBank (database)

All these can be found both online and in paper. When using Internet resources, make sure your sources are reliable, such as a from a government web page.
How do I evaluate my resources?

- Is the information from a reliable source?
- Is the information sufficient to cover my topic?
- Is it relevant to my thesis statement?
- Is the information current?
- Does the information reflect just one side of the argument or is it biased?

How do I take notes and write the text of the paper?

- Note where you find all your information, including page and author, for your citations.
- Note how you would use each piece of information based on your outline. Consider using index cards, separate pieces of paper or create notes on the computer so you can easily organize all your notes.
- Organize your notes so that they flow logically.
- Pay attention to correct writing elements such as grammar, spelling, effective phrasing of ideas and good paragraph development.
- Have someone else read through your paper to double check it.

How do I document the sources?

- Acknowledge any sources you used with proper citation format, e.g., APA, MLA.
- Remember to use citations both within the document (following quoted, paraphrased, or summarized material) and the References or Works Cited page.

Keep in mind:

- Remember that spelling and grammar does count.
- Plagiarism is a serious offense. Document all sources you used.
- Librarians are here to help. Don’t hesitate to ask.


Other useful resources:

Books

- Razakis, Laurie. Schaum’s quick guide to writing great research papers (eBook)
- Strunk, William. The elements of style PE1408 .S772 1979
- Gibaldi, Joseph. MLA handbook for writers of research papers LB2369 .G53 2009
- A P A. Publication manual of the American Psychological Association BF76.7 .P83 2010

Web sites

Research Paper Learning Module: Library Web site → Learn → Research Papers
Purdue Online Writing Lab (writing guide, MLA & APA citations) http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/
Research and Documentation Online (citation styles) http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/resdoc5e/index.htm

To contact us:

Main Campus Library Reference……..530-879-4024
Chico Center Library Reference……..530-879-4398