

WRITING THE RESEARCH PAPER

From the Writing Instructors at the Academic Support Center

Writing a research paper is not something to be dreaded; rather, it is an opportunity to discover new knowledge and to persuade others to agree with your well-supported ideas. Think of it as a “blind date with knowledge.”

The tips which follow should expedite the process for your future research papers.

- **Set aside ample time** for completing all the steps necessary:
 - 1) Choose a suitable topic
 - 2) Locate sources and consult with a Reference Librarian
 - 3) Read and take notes
 - 4) Draft a tentative thesis statement and outline
 - 5) Draft the paper
 - 6) Go to the Academic Support Center for editing help
 - 7) Revise paper
 - 8) Prepare bibliography
- **Choose credible sources:** Using the library’s databases, find scholarly or peer-edited sources; avoid Web sites with student papers or those that are anonymous.
- **Use both internet and print sources,** thinking critically during the research, the evaluation of sources, and the integration of the sources into the paper.
- **Know precisely** the type of source used: Is it a database, an entire Web site, a work in an anthology, a multivolume work, a pamphlet, an interview, a DVD, a journal article? Distinguish between a primary source and a secondary source.
- **Keep a record** of sources used **at the time you find the source.** For internet sources, use RefWorks or a similar cite that will automatically create your bibliography page. This will save you hours of work. For print sources, collect ALL the data you will need for BOTH components of documentation: **in-text citation** (condensed information) and the **bibliography** page (complete information).
- **Know precisely** the Documentation Style that is required for the paper. The three most commonly used for college papers are MLA, APA, and Chicago, but there are dozens of others for particular disciplines. Each style has its own rules for overall page formatting, in-text citation and bibliography.
- **Avoid Plagiarism.** It is the student’s responsibility to know what constitutes plagiarism and to avoid it at all costs. In the research paper, be certain **to give credit** to your sources, whether you are quoting, paraphrasing, or summarizing their **ideas and/or writings.** Citing the experts you use to support your thesis will immediately increase your credibility, will strengthen your argument, and will increase overall knowledge about your topic.
- **Ask a Reference Librarian** for help with any problem encountered in the writing of the research paper. They welcome your questions and they have the answers! Also, various Documentation Style books are available online and in the library.

WRITING AN ESSAY

From the Writing Instructors at the Academic Support Center

WRITING AN ESSAY IS A 3-STEP PROCESS:

STEP 1: PREWRITING: THINKING CLEARLY AND PLANNING THOROUGHLY

Writing is not a matter of recording already developed thoughts; it is a process of figuring out what you **THINK**. It is a process of **DISCOVERY**.

- a. Be sure you **UNDERSTAND THE SUBJECT AND LIMIT IT**
- b. Have a clear sense of **PURPOSE** (to inform? To explain? To persuade?) and **AUDIENCE** (who will read it?)
- c. Generate ideas: listing, mapping, clustering, or freewriting. Choose the method that works best for you. Include main ideas and **DETAILS**.
- d. Organize the ideas in a logical order, grouping them into categories. This will result in **COHERENCY**.
- e. Write a **TENTATIVE THESIS STATEMENT** that includes ALL the selected ideas. This will result in **UNITY**.

STEP 2: WRITING THE FIRST DRAFT OF THE ESSAY: THINKING AND WRITING

The essay has 3 parts: the **INTRODUCTION**, the **BODY**, and the **CONCLUSION**. The essay's main point or **THESIS** is supported by subpoints, which become the **TOPIC SENTENCES** of the body's paragraphs.

INTRODUCTION: The first paragraph is the introduction. It must engage the interest of the reader AND establish the point of the essay which will lead logically to the **THESIS STATEMENT**, the last sentence of the introduction.

Options for beginning your essay include: general background material, a relevant quotation or narrative story, rhetorical questions, or an explanation why the topic is worth writing about. Try to hook the reader.

BODY: Each paragraph in the body of the essay **EXPLAINS**, **SUPPORTS**, and **DEVELOPS** the thesis statement. Each paragraph in the essay has its own topic sentence which states the paragraph's main idea AND which makes a point mentioned in the thesis. Topic sentences must be supported by **DETAILS**, **EXAMPLES**, and **EXPLANATIONS** which often result from asking the five **JOURNALIST'S QUESTIONS**.

CONCLUSION: The concluding paragraph should remind the reader of the main point of the essay—its **THESIS STATEMENT**. Key points of the essay may be briefly summarized here, and a connection to the Introduction will reinforce the coherency and unity of the essay. Avoid introducing any ideas not in the thesis; however, since the essay evolves as you draft it, a new idea may have been discovered as you developed your main point. In this case, be sure to **REVISE** the thesis statement to include it. Strive to conclude the essay with thought-provoking impact.

STEP 3: REVISING: RETHINKING AND REWRITING

Revising the essay is all-important and involves the essay in its entirety-- global revision-- as well as reviewing each sentence.

GLOBAL REVISION:

- Check for **unity**. Be sure the thesis and topic sentences all lead to the same main point. Be sure each paragraph makes one clear sub-point. Be sure the conclusion unifies the essay. Be sure all text is relevant to the thesis. If needed, clarify and strengthen the thesis.
- Check to be sure there is adequate **support** for your main idea. If needed, add **DETAILS AND EXAMPLES**.
- Check the essay for **coherency**. Be sure the paragraphs arranged in the most effective and logical order. Add transitions, if needed.
- Be sure the essay is interesting enough to engage the readers and to motivate them to keep reading.

SENTENCE REVISION:

- Edit each sentence for clarity, effectiveness, and variety. Eliminate unnecessary words. Be sure the vocabulary is appropriate for the audience and purpose.
- Correct any grammar or punctuation errors.