# The College Research Paper

#### What is a research paper?

A research paper integrates a thesis statement, or research question, and information that directly relates to the topic being discussed. This related information can come from a variety of sources, including scholarly journals, biographies, Internet databases, and textbooks, to name a few.

### **Thesis + Information = Research Paper!**

#### What are the steps to writing a research paper?

The <u>Norton Field Guide to Writing</u> mentions the following important steps in writing a research paper:

Feel free to check the steps as you complete them!

Keep in mind that you may not need to follow every step in this list. When in doubt, ask your professor about the paper's requirements.

## Step 1: Formulate a Plan!

For some students, the most difficult part about writing a research paper is starting, especially when many professors give these types of assignments well before the due date. Though it may seem like the end of the semester is worlds away, the paper's deadline will come faster than you think. *Start right away* to allow time for outlining, drafting, and revising. If possible, set goals for each step of the writing process.

Use an agenda or calendar to mark the *due date*, as well as upcoming events that might limit your ability to write on certain days (holidays, work conflicts, etc.) Set specific goals, such as a day to visit the library or an afternoon when you will visit the Writing Center.

	Step 2: Analyze your rhetorical situation.
	In order to analyze a rhetorical situation, think about several factors regarding the assignment.
What i	is the <u>purpose</u> of the assignment? Is it to argue? To inform? To persuade? To analyze? To describe? The purpose will influence the way you think about your topic, the research you do, and the set-up of your paper.
Who is	s the <u>audience</u> ? In other words, who will be reading this paper? Will it be your classmates? Your professor? The readers of a journal? The general public? Sometimes your professor will tell you to write the assignment with a specific intended audience in mind—it may be an audience that would read this type of writing in the professional world related to your field.
	Step 3: Choose a possible topic.
	Research papers can be exciting because they allow a reader to delve deeply into a topic of interest. Sometimes a professor may assign a topic, but quite frequently you will be given the freedom to choose your own subject matter. Remember, the topic must relate to the assignment at hand. Also, if you have the freedom of choosing your topic, make sure that it is something you are interested in! Completing the assignment will be much more pleasant when you are able to work with something you are truly intrigued about. Please consult the Writing Center's handout on Getting Started for some help with this step of the process.
	Step 4: Do preliminary research.
	You may have a broad idea of a topic you would like to research. However, research papers require a more specific focus. For example, you may be interested in researching physical education in schools. This is a very interesting, but expansive, topic. It will help to hone in on a particular part of physical education, such as its benefits for children's health or the integration of physical education and curriculum.
	By completing preliminary research, a writer can move from a large topic to a specific idea. Scholarly databases, such as the ones included on the website for the Neil Hellman Library, provide a sampling of past and present research on many topics.  Other areas to complete preliminary research include:

Newspaper articles

Periodicals

Books

Textbooks

Step 5: Come up with a research question.
Now that you have analyzed your rhetorical situation, chosen a possible topic and completed preliminary research, you are ready to select a research question. This question will be the focus for your research paper – the point that you will work to answer throughout your paper. In coming up with this question, start by thinking about the possible conflicts, controversies, or confusing aspects of your topic that individuals (including you) may wonder about. You may want to list several questions that come to mind and then think about which one would be worth exploring for the assignment.
<ul> <li>Ask yourself:</li> <li>Will this research question address the assignment?</li> <li>Is my research question too narrow or too broad?</li> <li>Can I find ample research involving this topic? Note: If you find research too easily, it may be a sign that your question is too broad or that it has already been thoroughly addressed by others. These are signs that you may want to rework your topic or choose another question.</li> <li>Is this question important in terms of the way your topic is understood?</li> </ul>
Step 6: Conducting Research.
Research will serve as the foundation for the research question; the research question cannot stand without related information to support it. This research can be completed by analyzing journal articles and textbooks, conducting interviews, and by gathering data.
It is difficult to determine a specific amount of research a writer should complete. Your professor may require you to use a specific number of sources in your paper, and in that case, use that requirement as a guideline. If you are not given a requirement, aim for approximately 1-2 sources for every page of your paper.
Keep track of your sources! Document sources used and label all printed materials. This information will be necessary when citing sources in the body of the paper and when creating a page of references. For more information about citations, visit <b>The Writing Center</b> !
Step 7: Come up with a tentative thesis and outline.
An outline is an outstanding tool for writers of research papers. It provides a set template in which the writer can input his/her thesis statement, or research question, with related research.

Outlines provide a clear view of the information collected so far, which can help a writer

determine if more research is needed. Another benefit of using an outline is that it can assist in the organization of the research paper and in particular, the sequence of paragraphs. The outline can be as formal or informal as you desire. For assistance in creating an outline, ask for an outline handout from **The Writing Center at the College of Saint Rose!** 

# Step 8: Drafting, Proofreading and Conferencing

This step encompasses many important and often overlooked aspects of writing a research paper. Remember, a draft can be as polished or as rough as the writer chooses it to be. Here are some tips for revising your paper (have a pen or pencil handy!):

- 1. Read your paper out loud—this can help you to understand your paper in a much more complete way. Often, issues in wording or other mistakes become much clearer when the text is read out loud.
- 2. Read through your paper multiple times! You will see new issues to work on each time you read through it. You may want to make changes, print out a copy, and read it again. Repeat this process until you feel comfortable with what you have.
- 3. If you are having problems with organization, consider getting out a pair of scissors and actually cutting up your paper by paragraph or sentence. This will allow you to easily experiment with different ways of arranging your ideas.
- 4. As the final step in your revision process, read your paper backwards. Starting with the last sentence, read each sentence separately. This will allow you to catch such errors as sentence fragments, repeated words, missing words, wrong words, etc. much more easily. By reading your paper backwards, you force your brain to focus on just the sentence at hand, without the option of thinking about what's coming next (this can often cause us to gloss over errors).

When you have a draft, seek out another person (a parent, friend, roommate, etc.) who can read your draft and provide feedback. Or, better yet, make an appointment at **The Writing Center!** Remember, every writer needs a reader! ©

Go to <u>www.strose.edu/writingcenter</u> for the handouts mentioned here plus many others!

Information on this handout adapted from:

Bullock, Richard. The Norton Field Guide to Writing. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006.

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