**HOW TO WRITE A RESEARCH PAPER**

**What is a research paper?** A research paper is a piece of academic writing based on its author’s original research on a particular topic, and the analysis and interpretation of the research findings. It can either be a term paper, a master’s thesis or a doctoral dissertation. Here is an outline about the logical steps to writing a good research paper. To achieve supreme excellence or perfection in anything you do, you need more than just the knowledge. Like the Olympic athlete aiming for the gold medal, you must have a positive attitude and the belief that you have the ability to achieve it. That is the real start to writing an A+ research paper.

**CHOOSE A TOPIC**

Choose a topic which interests and challenges you. Your attitude towards the topic may well determine the amount of effort and enthusiasm you put into your research. Focus on a limited aspect, e.g. narrow it down from “Religion” to “World Religion” to “Buddhism”. Obtain teacher approval for your topic before embarking on a full-scale research. If you are uncertain as to what is expected of you in completing the assignment or project, re-read your assignment sheet carefully or ASK your teacher. Select a subject you can manage. Avoid subjects that are too technical, learned, or specialized. Avoid topics that have only a very narrow range of source materials.

**FIND INFORMATION**

For general or background information, check out useful URLs, general information online, almanacs or encyclopedias online such as Britannica. Use search engines and other search tools as a starting point.

Pay attention to domain name extensions, e.g., .edu (educational institution), .gov (government), or .org (non-profit organization). These sites represent institutions and tend to be more reliable, but be watchful of possible political bias in some government sites. Be selective of .com (commercial) sites. Many .com sites are excellent; however, a large number of them contain advertisements for products and nothing else. Network Solutions provides a link where you can find out what some of the other extensions stand for. Be wary of the millions of personal home pages on the Net. The quality of these personal homepages vary greatly. Learning how to evaluate websites critically and to search effectively on the Internet can help you eliminate irrelevant sites and waste less of your time.

To find books in the Library use the OPAC (Online Public Access Catalog).

Check out other print materials available in the Library:

* Almanacs, Atlases, AV Catalogs
* Encyclopedias and Dictionaries
* Government Publications, Guides, Reports
* Magazines, Newspapers
* Vertical Files
* Yellow Pages, Zip or Postal Code and Telephone Directories

Check out online resources, Web based information services, or special resource materials on CDs:

* Online reference materials (including databases, e.g. SIRS, ProQuest, eLibrary, etc.)
* Google Scholar
* Wall Street Executive Library
* Index to Periodicals and Newspapers (e.g. MagPortal.com, OnlineNewspapers.com, etc.)
* Answers.com – an online dictionary and encyclopedia all-in-one resource that you can install on your computer free of charge and find one-click answers quickly.
* Encyclopedias (e.g.Britannica, Canadian Encyclopedia, etc.)
* Magazines and Journals
* Newspapers
* International Public Library
* Subject Specific software (e.g. discovering authors, exploring Shakespeare, etc.)

Check out public and university libraries, businesses, government agencies, as well as contact knowledgeable people in your community. Read and evaluate. Bookmark your favorite Internet sites. Printout, photocopy, and take notes of relevant information. As you gather your resources, jot down full bibliographical information (author, title, place of publication, publisher, date of publication, page numbers, URLs, creation or modification dates on Web pages, and your date of access) on your work sheet, printout, or enter the information on your laptop or desktop computer for later retrieval. If printing from the Internet, it is wise to set up the browser to print the URL and date of access for every page. Remember that an article without bibliographical information is useless since you cannot cite its source.

**MAKE YOUR THESIS STATEMENT:**

Most research papers normally require a thesis statement. If you are not sure, ask your teacher whether your paper requires it. A thesis statement is a main idea, a central point of your research paper. The arguments you provide in your paper should be based on this central idea, that is why it is so important. Do some critical thinking and write your thesis statement down in one sentence. Your research paper thesis statement is like a declaration of your belief. The main portion of your essay will consist of arguments to support and defend this belief.

A thesis statement should be provided early in your paper – in the introduction part, or in the second paragraph, if your paper is longer. It is impossible to create a thesis statement immediately when you have just started fulfilling your assignment. Before you write a thesis statement, you should collect, organize and analyze materials and your ideas. You cannot make a finally formulated statement before you have completed your reseach paper. It will naturally change while you develop your ideas.

A thesis statement should do the following:

* Explain the readers how you interpret the subject of the research
* Tell the readers what to expect from your paper
* Answer the question you were asked
* Present your claim which other people may want to dispute

**MAKE RESEARCH PAPER OUTLINE:**

A research paper basically has the following structure:

1. Title Page (including the title, the author’s name, the name of a University or colledge, and the publication date)
2. Abstract (brief summary of the paper – 250 words or less)
3. Introduction (background information on the topic or a brief comment leading into the subject matter – up to 2 pages)
4. Manuscript Body, which can be broken down in further sections, depending on the nature of research:

* Materials and Methods
* Results (what are the results obtained)
* Discussion and Conclusion etc.

1. Reference
2. Tables, figures, and appendix (optional)

An outline might be formal or informal. An informal outline (working outline) is a tool helping an author put down and organize their ideas. It is subject to revision, addition and canceling, without paying much attention to form. It helps an author to make their key points clear for him/her and arrange them.

In a formal outline, numbers and letters are used to arrange topics and subtopics. The letters and numbers of the same kind should be placed directly under one another. The topics denoted by their headings and subheadings should be grouped in a logical order.

**ORGANIZE YOUR NOTES:**

Organize all the information you have gathered according to your outline. Critically analyze your research data. Using the best available sources, check for accuracy and verify that the information is factual, up-to-date, and correct. Opposing views should also be noted if they help to support your thesis. This is the most important stage in writing a research paper. Here you will analyze, synthesize, sort, and digest the information you have gathered and hopefully learn something about your topic which is the real purpose of doing a research paper in the first place. You must also be able to effectively communicate your thoughts, ideas, insights, and research findings to others through written words as in a report, an essay, a research or term paper, or through spoken words as in an oral or multimedia presentation with audio-visual aids.

Do not include any information that is not relevant to your topic, and do not include information that you do not understand. Make sure the information that you have noted is carefully recorded and in your own words, if possible. Plagiarism is definitely out of the question. Document all ideas borrowed or quotes used very accurately. As you organize your notes, jot down detailed bibliographical information for each cited paragraph and have it ready to transfer to your Works Cited page.

**WRITE YOUR FIRST DRAFT:**

Start with the first topic in your outline. Read all the relevant notes you have gathered that have been marked, e.g. with the capital Roman numeral I.

Summarize, paraphrase or quote directly for each idea you plan to use in your essay. Use a technique that suits you, e.g. write summaries, paraphrases or quotations on note cards, or separate sheets of lined paper. Mark each card or sheet of paper clearly with your outline code or reference, e.g., IB2a or IIC, etc.

Put all your note cards or paper in the order of your outline, e.g. IA, IB, IC. If using a word processor, create meaningful filenames that match your outline codes for easy cut and paste as you type up your final paper, e.g. cut first Introduction paragraph and paste it to IA. Before you know it, you have a well organized term paper completed exactly as outlined.

If it is helpful to you, use a symbol such as “#” to mark the spot where you would like to check back later to edit a paragraph. The unusual symbol will make it easy for you to find the exact location again. Delete the symbol once editing is completed.

**REVISE YOUR OUTLINE AND DRAFT**

Read your paper for any content errors. Double check the facts and figures. Arrange and rearrange ideas to follow your outline. Reorganize your outline if necessary, but always keep the purpose of your paper and your readers in mind. Use a free grammar and proof reading checker such as Grammarly.

**CHECKLIST ONE:**

1. Is my thesis statement concise and clear?

2. Did I follow my outline? Did I miss anything?

3. Are my arguments presented in a logical sequence?

4. Are all sources properly cited to ensure that I am not plagiarizing?

5. Have I proved my thesis with strong supporting arguments?

6. Have I made my intentions and points clear in the essay?

Re-read your paper for grammatical errors. Use a dictionary or a thesaurus as needed. Do a spell check. Correct all errors that you can spot and improve the overall quality of the paper to the best of your ability. Get someone else to read it over. Sometimes a second pair of eyes can see mistakes that you missed.

**CHECKLIST TWO:**

1. Did I begin each paragraph with a proper topic sentence?

2. Have I supported my arguments with documented proof or examples?

3. Any run-on or unfinished sentences?

4. Any unnecessary or repetitious words?

5. Varying lengths of sentences?

6. Does one paragraph or idea flow smoothly into the next?

7. Any spelling or grammatical errors?

8. Quotes accurate in source, spelling, and punctuation?

9. Are all my citations accurate and in correct format?

10. Did I avoid using contractions? Use “cannot” instead of “can’t”, “do not” instead of “don’t”?

11. Did I use third person as much as possible? Avoid using phrases such as “I think”, “I guess”, “I suppose”

12. Have I made my points clear and interesting but remained objective?

13. Did I leave a sense of completion for my reader(s) at the end of the paper?