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### The Research Paper

Will Emerson

The purpose of this article is to provide a guideline for writing a thorough and well-written through effective research, strategic organization, and compositional clarity.

#### Embracing the Unavoidable

There are several things you can count on during your time in college: late nights, ramen noodles, and research papers. You can handle the late nights and the noodles on your own, but a research paper can be a tricky task. The research paper is a genre of academic writing that thoroughly analyzes, evaluates, or interprets a single topic based on empirical evidence. It is a genre distinct from other essays, such as narrative writing, due to its heavy reliance upon the ideas of others. Another key distinction is that a research paper is often informative or argumentative. A successful research paper will effectively present new information or argue a position in light of existing information. A strong research paper will include effective research, be organized logically, be written with clarity and brevity, and be formatted properly based on the assigned style guide.

#### Breaking it Down into Simple Tasks

Once you choose your topic, the first step in creating a strong research paper is doing the research. This will require extensive use of the library, including Internet databases. It is a good practice to begin researching sooner rather than later to dispel misconceptions about your topic and discover the best ways to find further material. Researching early will also allow you adequate time to formulate the stance you will take in your thesis. As you research, you will doubtless come across both primary and secondary sources: **primary sources** include original material from the time that an event occurs or directly thereafter, while **secondary sources** are created by someone who did not experience the event but who seeks to engage with the primary sources. Use these sources intentionally to craft your ideas, using a proper mixture of both. Rather than reading the entirety of every source, it is helpful to skim sources and set aside the ones you plan on using for further in-depth review. As you research, be sure to jot down notes using index cards, Microsoft Word, or a digital research assistant such as Zotero.

Once you have thoroughly researched, you are ready to create an outline. Creating an outline gives structure to a paper, allowing you to better understand what will be written from beginning to end. The average research paper consists of an introduction with an introductory statement and a thesis; body paragraphs, each with a topic sentence, claims, supporting evidence, and analysis; and a conclusion that restates the thesis, highlights the main points, and discusses the implications. This is followed by a page of your cited sources.

As in every kind of paper, a research paper should be written with clarity and conciseness, making sure your rhetoric flows in a way that works for the reader. It will be necessary to write several drafts, acknowledging that the first one may not be your essay's finalized form. Be willing to go back and

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proofread your work, making changes and adjustments as needed by rechecking your sources and revising your analysis.

Lastly, remember to use whichever style guide is assigned for your discipline. Whether it is MLA, APA, Chicago, or AMA, each style guide has its own rules for formatting, in-text citations, and full citations. For more information on these style guides, consult our collection of Writing Center articles.

Ultimately, writing a research paper might seem like a daunting task, as it requires careful research and a structured outline. When writing a research paper, you are participating in a larger conversation with scholars in your field while generating new ideas. Through this lens, the importance of your task becomes even more apparent.

### Tips

1. Understand the assignment by reviewing the prompt frequently.
2. Document all the sources that you use. Keeping track of them will make researching and writing much easier.
3. After researching, write out a working thesis statement to guide your discussion. If you are having trouble, phrase your topic as a question and then answer it.
4. Complete small chunks of your paper at a time, scheduling out your process and sticking to deadlines.

### Works Consulted

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