

Research Papers Made Easy

Enrichment Event

Ten Essential Steps for Research Papers

1. Choose a Topic
2. Do “Broad” Research
3. Write a Thesis Statement
4. Do “Medium” Research
5. Create a paper Outline
6. Do “Fine” Research
7. Write the paper
8. Read & Revise your paper
9. Enlist a tutor or friend to edit
10. Do Final Revisions



Students DREAD writing research papers because they try to CRAM all 10 steps into a few days!

What kind of paper are you writing?

- An **analytical** paper breaks down an issue or an idea into its component parts, evaluates the issue or idea, and presents this breakdown and evaluation to the audience.
- An **expository** (explanatory) paper explains something to the audience.
- An **argumentative** paper makes a claim about a topic and justifies this claim with specific evidence. The claim could be an opinion, a policy proposal, an evaluation, a cause-and-effect statement, or an interpretation. The goal of the argumentative paper is to convince the audience that the claim is true based on the evidence provided.

1. Choose a Topic

- If your instructor has not assigned a specific topic, you must choose a topic for your paper.
- Choose a topic that interests you but be cautious about choosing a topic for which you already have strong opinions.
 - Many students have a difficult time writing papers about personal topics because their strong biases prevent them from doing appropriate research and developing a strong argument.
 - If you feel compelled to choose a topic you have are passionate about – take the opposite side! This way your paper will be full of evidence, not personal anecdote.

The Three Stages of Research



Stage #1: “Broad” Research

Gather a few general sources to help you develop a strong thesis with a good foundation.



Stage #2: “Medium” Research

Gather the specific sources that support your thesis and “flesh out” your argument.



Stage #3: “Fine” Research

Gather sources to strengthen weak arguments.

2. Do “Broad” Research

- After you’ve chosen your paper topic it’s important to gather some general sources to act as a good foundation for your thesis.
- **NEVER** write your thesis statement prior to doing some initial research.



Copy & Annotate the Material

- Print out, photocopy or save the source (as a PDF) to your flash drive.
- Skim, skim, skim!
 - Make a check mark next to any information that would be useful to your argument
 - Have a notebook or computer handy to note a quick description, source name, and page number of that useful information
- Repeat this until all gathered source material has been skimmed and annotated
 - This step will help you determine the usefulness of a particular source

3. Write a Thesis Statement

- After gathering some general sources about your chosen topic, it's now time to write your thesis statement!
 - Your thesis statement should be specific—it should cover only what you will discuss in your paper and should be supported with specific evidence.
 - The thesis statement usually appears at the end of the first paragraph of a paper.
 - *Your topic may change as you write, so you may need to revise your thesis statement to reflect exactly what you have discussed in the paper.*

4. Do “Medium” Research

- Now that you’ve got a thesis statement and some general sources you can begin gathering the bulk of your research.
- These sources will form and support your arguments (or main points).
 - Use the Bibliography in your general sources to find new sources or authors
 - Use the Library of Congress classifications
 - Use web resources through the college library to search your topic (journal databases) or talk to the reference librarian
 - Google and Wikipedia (**not a source**, a resource)

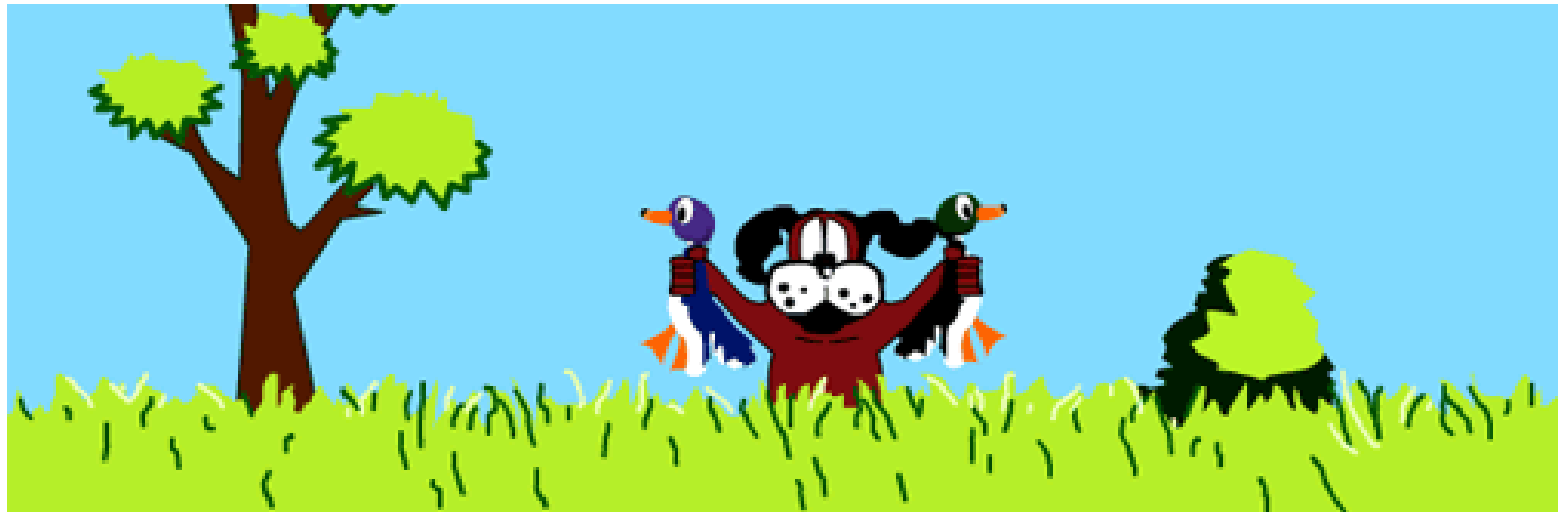


5. Create a Paper Outline

- Organizing your thoughts and your research is an essential step to making the paper-writing process easier.
 - Skipping this step leads to extra work, procrastination, and a poorly-argued paper.
- Start by creating a list of “main points” based on the sources you have.
 - What points are the most important or strongest?
- Next, create an outline that lays out these points and also notes what sources you will be using to back up each point.
 - Are each of your points sufficiently supported?

6. Do “Fine” Research

- After completing the outline of your paper you will likely find that some of your points need a little more support.
- This is the time to find specific sources to “bulk up” the weaker areas in your paper.
 - Rather than simply looking for any source related to your topic – you will be on the **hunt** for something specific.



7. Write your Paper

- Now that your outline is done and your research complete, you can begin writing your paper!
 - If you took the time to create a detailed outline with all your supporting quotations/paraphrased statements, the “writing” portion of writing your research paper should be easy.
- Let your outline guide your paper
- Build upon and tie together the source information already in the outline
- Always make sure your current point reads clearly before moving on the next point
- Read aloud as you type to test your writing for awkward phrasing and bad grammar
 - Leave the all-nighters to the average students, get your first-draft done quickly and effectively

8. Read & Revise your Paper

- **Fix**, don't fixate, on your errors.
- Your FIRST pass through your work should be conducted on your computer
 - Don't worry about small grammatical mistakes at this point
 - Take the paper one paragraph at a time
 - Correct awkward sentences
 - Repetitious points
 - Add more detail to arguments
 - Refine transitions
 - ...any MAJOR issues



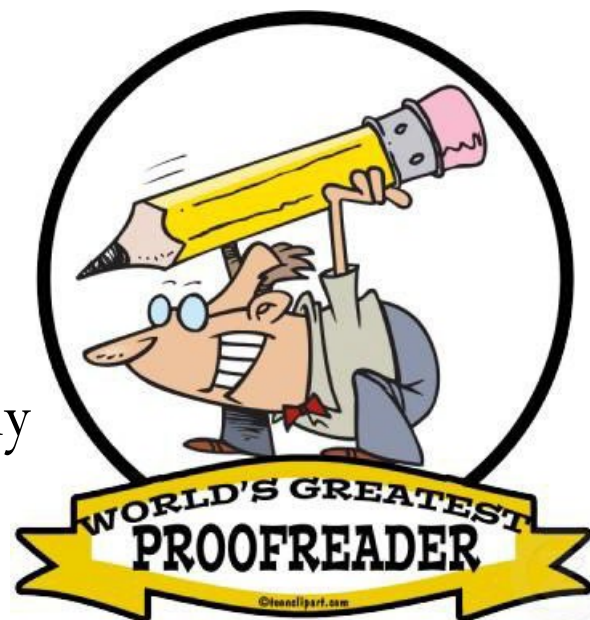
8. Read & Revise your Paper (cont.)

- Your SECOND pass through your work should be conducted on a printed copy of your paper
- With pencil in hand, **read your work aloud**
 - Read it as you would a speech
 - articulate every word
- Focus on the “flow” and any small errors



9. Enlist a Tutor or Friend to Edit

- Take your edited paper to...
 - A tutor, or
 - An A+ classmate, or
 - An A+ friend
- Have them read your paper and note any confusing areas, grammatical mistakes, etc.
- While your arguments may make sense to YOU, they may not to your tutor/friend



10. Do Final Revisions

- After making the corrections given to you by the tutor or A+ friend, you need to take one more pass through your paper.
- You will again, want to print out a draft of your work and read it aloud – ensuring you didn't miss small mistakes.



REVIEW

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