



# Paper Guidelines

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## **A. The Goals of Writing a Research Paper in English**

Writing a research paper provides students with a chance to practice writing in English, researching a specific topic, working with academic texts, and condensing information into manageable, coherent chunks.

Another goal is to learn about the cultural aspects of writing a research paper in English.

## **B. Choosing a Topic**



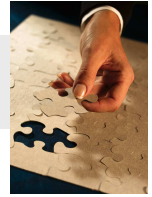
Choose a topic of interest to you!

Go to the library and search the Internet to see what books/materials are available. It is your responsibility to do the research. Your instructor may be contacted for consultation purposes but is not obligated to do your research for you.

Limit the scope of your paper. For example, if you are interested in civil rights, do not under any circumstances attempt to write a paper on the entire history of the civil rights movement in the United States. Choose one or two major events (e.g. the march on Washington, the Civil Rights Act of 1964), a person (JFK or Malcolm X), or small period of time (1968).

Choose a subject that is new to you. If you have already written a paper or taken an exam (e.g. for A Levels) on a subject, ask for permission before submitting work on the same subject.

## C. Parts of a Paper



### A. Introduction (engage reader's interest & expectations)

1. The “funnel” approach. Announce topic broadly, then declare your particular view!
2. Choose a tone (e.g. serious vs. light-hearted) and stick with it!
3. Background material. What information does your reader need to know to understand your topic? (summary of research on the topic, historical events, aspects of culture, etc.)
4. Define key terms! If you use a term that might be understood differently by different people or groups, you must define what you mean by it (e.g. sexual harassment, cults, etc.).
5. Personalize topic, make it relevant to the reader. Use a vivid and representative example of the problem! For example, if you write on homelessness in America, begin your essay with a story about an actual homeless person.
6. Begin with an anecdote!
7. Use a quotation which you either agree or disagree with. Explain how it fits your topic or how it is representative of the way some might think about your topic!
8. Ask a provocative question or evoke a vivid image!

### B. Thesis = blueprint for essay

1. The thesis is located in the introduction. Usually it can be found in the first paragraph. Each paragraph provides support for the thesis or refers back to it in some way. A thesis is specific. It must limit and focus a topic.
2. It often answers the question "How?" or "Why?"
3. It is interesting to your audience.
4. It avoids vague, abstract, or technical language.
5. It is not set in stone. Revise it if you end up writing your paper about something else!
6. If you are having difficulty writing a thesis, read the introductory paragraphs of several books in English and locate the thesis. After identifying several thesis statements, students usually have a better understanding of what a thesis is. I can also recommend the Writing Center of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's handout on the thesis: <http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/thesis.html>

### **C. Body**

1. The body consists of paragraphs (not a list of phrases or sentences). Each paragraph usually has a topic sentence. It often comes first but can appear at the end of the paragraph.
2. Stick to the point! Avoid digressions.
3. Develop a writing strategy, pattern of organization (examples, definition, illustrations, process, comparison and contrast, analogy, cause and effect, etc.)
4. Logical development: Linear development of arguments! Your introduction must have a logical sequence that your reader can follow easily.
5. If you make a claim, support it! (use scholarly literature or passage from the text).

### **D. Conclusion (redirection to 1st paragraph)**

1. Remember to devote enough time to your conclusion, because it is the last impression you will make on the reader! A good conclusion will pick up on key words of the introduction. Summarize what your contribution to the discussion is, especially if you are writing on an ongoing discussion!
2. New light on background information
3. Summarize the main points (if it makes sense)! This can be a dull way to end an essay.
4. End with an anecdote or quotation!
5. Acknowledge if any research still needs to be done, or if your essay led to new questions which need to be asked.
6. Call for action or provide a solution to the problem you have discussed in your paper.

### **D. Proof-Reading & Revision**



1. Revise extensively. Writing is often a process of discovery. Bear this in mind when you write. Be prepared to go back and make changes to what you have written and to the order in which you have presented your ideas and information.
2. Use transitions. The paper should flow, not jump from one topic to the next. Because the decimal system (1, 1.1, 1.2, 2 ...) is not used according to the MLA style sheet, transitional sentences and/or words within the paragraph help prepare the reader for what is coming next. If you don't know exactly what a transition is, consult the Writing Center of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's handout on transitions:  
<http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/transitions.html>

3. Read the introduction and conclusion. Did you do what you set out to do? If not revise your introduction.
4. Try not to rely too heavily on spell checkers. If you are not sure how to spell a word, consult a dictionary.
5. Read your paper out loud! Often you may not see a mistake or notice an awkward sentence, but you can hear it.
6. Get a friend to read your paper. It is difficult to find your own mistakes, so ask a friend to read your paper or try reading your paper aloud.

## E. Pitfalls



1. Avoid using inappropriate sources (school notes, general encyclopedias such as Encyclopedia Britannica or Brockhaus, essays from high school or college students in the Internet, Wikipedia, etc.).
2. Avoid the use of personal pronouns (I, we, me, our, etc.) and contractions (doesn't, won't, etc.).
3. Inconsistency. Avoid switching back and forth from American to British English or vice versa. Choose one.
4. Informality. Limit the use of the verbs (to be, to do, to make, to go, to have to) and the conjunctions (and, but).
5. Avoid making mistakes in spelling, punctuation, etc. which could have been avoided. Consult a reference works. See my page on improving writing skills through self-study: <http://www.uni-lueneburg.de/einricht/fremd/fremdspr/writing.htm>.
6. Repetition of words, phrases or ideas. You will have keywords that are crucial to your study. However, your reader does not want to read them over and over! Too much repetition makes your writing look sloppy. To reduce it, consult a thesaurus!
7. Do not moralize! You can be critical of the treatment of slaves in colonial times without sounding emotional, overly judgmental, or self-righteous. Let the facts speak for themselves.
8. Do not assume your readers know how your quotation fits in with your subject or why it is important for your topic. You must introduce your quotations and comment on and analyze key words (when appropriate). If you are not sure how to choose appropriate quotations or how to incorporate them into your paper I can recommend, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's web page on how to quote: <http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/plagiarism.html>

9. **Plagiarism.** Borrowed information (quotations, summaries, paraphrases, and any facts or ideas that are not common knowledge) must be clearly documented. **Anyone found guilty of this offense will receive no Schein for the course.**

Tips to help students understand and avoid plagiarism:

- If you cite or borrow ideas or even phrases from other people, you must give credit to them. That is unless the information is common knowledge. Can you find same information (not statistics or research data) in at least four or five other sources? If so, then there is no need to document your source.
- The sentence structure not just the words must be different from the original text.
- Use quotation marks when citing a text directly, even if it is only an original phrase.
- Do not cut and paste information from the Internet into your document. Often obvious: different style, register, or language ability.
- Read the text and then summarize the information in your own words without looking at the original text. Then cite your source and then check it against the original.
- Separate your ideas from other people's as you take notes.
- LISTING THE SOURCES AT THE END OF YOUR PAPER IS NOT ENOUGH! YOU MUST GIVE CREDIT WITHIN YOUR TEXT -- Even if you are just summarizing another person's ideas in your own words.
- When in doubt, get help. Don't risk embarrassment or tarnishing your reputation.

When borrowing ideas or quotations from other sources, it is only fair and ethical to acknowledge your sources. See examples below:

**Direct Quote:**

In his short story entitled, "Tell-Tale Heart," the narrator begins with the following words as an indicator of his emotional state: "True--nervous--very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am; but why will you say that I am mad?" (Poe 121).

**Indirect Reference:**

The first words of the story indicate that that narrator would like to convince the reader/listener that he is sane. He attempts to demonstrate his sound judgment by openly admitting his nervousness and the charge of insanity against him (Benfey 30). Those who are truly mad are generally not aware of their own mental instability and confusion.

(Since I have used my own words to explain Benfey's idea, no quotation marks are necessary. However, I must cite the source). Compare the original: "The first word is a concession - this speaker wants to communicate, to persuade. He thinks that by giving some ground ('granted I'm nervous'), he can win the battle ('but I'm not crazy')."

Please also visit the Purdue University Online Writing Lab's site on plagiarism for tips on avoiding improper citation: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/589/01/>

## F. Formal requirements



1. Mechanics The paper should be type-written in good English (American or British).
2. No title page is necessary if you follow the following format on the first page of your paper beginning in the top, left corner:

Sue Student (your name)

Dr. Völz (instructor's name)

The Sixties (Course Name)

WS 2005/2006 (Semester)

1968 (Title of your paper)

1968 was a year of assassinations. ...

3. No folders or staples please. Do not waste your money on folders or expensive binders. Just use a paper clip to hold your paper together.
4. Margins. Margins should be no larger than 2.5 cm.
5. Font size. Use 12 pt. font.
6. Page numbers. Each page should have a page number in the top right corner of the document. Numbering the first page is optional.
7. Spacing. Double space and indent all paragraphs (=einrücken). Do not skip lines between paragraphs.
8. Sources. 1 Source per page. At least half of the sources should be in English. Use a variety of different types of sources (primary sources, journal articles, books, scholarly Internet sites (not Wikipedia), etc.
9. The only acceptable style sheet is the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers (5th ed.), which is on reserve this semester in the library (Seminarapparat for Effective Writing in English).
10. You should use parenthetical citation, which means your references will be given within the text as opposed to footnotes. All the information that is needed is the last name(s) of the author(s) and the page number(s) of the source used. When citing information from the

Internet, in most cases all that is needed in your text is a shortened title of the web site (if no author is given). All the other information on the web site will be available in your works cited.

11. Longer quotes. If a quote extends more than four lines, indent the quotation ca. 2-3 cm from the left margin. If the quotation takes up more than 1/3 of a page, it should be single-spaced.

Blount explains the idolatry of the heathens by condemning one of their superstitions:

But what a madness was this, to think to flatter the Divinity with Inhumanity? to content the Divine goodness with the affliction of his Creatures, and to satisfie the Justice of God with cruelty? A Superstitious Man serveth God out of fear, whereas the truly Religious servers him out of love. Superstition suffereth neither God nor Man to live at rest, as evidently appears by these Heathen Sacrifices. (14-15)

Denying the acceptability of the heathen sacrifices to expiate sins, Blount proposes ...

12. Footnotes or Endnotes. Since students will be using parenthetical documentation, only explanatory footnotes may be used. In such cases, each footnote is to be numbered, beginning on the first page and continuing through the paper (do not start from 1 again on each page, no symbols or asterisks). Footnote numbers follow the punctuation and are slightly elevated.

13. Works Cited. Each paper will include a works cited, which contains the bibliographical information for all the books, articles, Internet pages, and sources you use in your paper. It should be double-spaced, use hanging indentation, and be in alphabetical order. Please use no symbols or asterisks before each entry. Underline the names of books, and use quotation marks for articles. If you still have questions, consult the Purdue University Online Writing Lab's page on MLA Citation: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/557/01/>

## G. Using and Documenting Internet Sources



Because the Internet is always changing, it is a good idea to print out a copy of any important information you plan on using in your paper. If you need it, you will have a copy of it later. Again, do not cut and paste information from a web site directly into your paper--not even one sentence.

Make a note of the appropriate bibliographical information on the day you visit the web site. You will need to know the author(s)/editor(s) of the document/web page, address, the title of the site, date of publication or last update, etc. This information may be on the main page/home page of site you are using, which means you may have to click around to find all the appropriate documentation.

Again, use academic sources only and give credit where credit is due.