THE RESEARCH PROJECT Handbook

Everything you need to know to write a research paper

Roxbury Community College
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5th edition
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WHAT IS A RESEARCH PAPER?

A research paper is an expanded essay that presents your own interpretation of research you conduct on a particular topic. The form of a research paper is similar to an essay -- Introduction, a Body composed of supporting paragraphs, and a Conclusion -- but the process of writing a research paper is very different from writing other essays.

When you write an essay, you can plan ahead what you want to say. When you write a research paper, you begin with a question and a general idea of what you believe is the answer, and then you seek out information from experts and informed sources. As you learn more about the subject, your ideas may change, and so will the shape of your paper. You may even find that you want to answer a different question. This is fine! Expect to make changes and revisions to your paper as you learn more about your subject and as you develop your own interpretation of the information you gather.

STRUCTURE

1. Introduction. The first paragraph(s) of your paper should introduce your topic to the reader, and give a general idea of the points you will be covering in the paper. Your thesis statement will appear in the introduction. If you use terms or words that may be unfamiliar to the reader, the introduction is a good place to define them.

2. Body. This main portion of your paper will include a logical flow of supporting paragraphs that discuss and develop your topic and support your thesis statement. Include your own ideas and interpretation of your research, along with quotes and paraphrases from informed sources that support the statements you make. Be sure to avoid plagiarism by using citations for quotes or ideas from your research sources. Remember to acknowledge opposing viewpoints and explain why you do not agree with them.

3. Conclusion. The final paragraph(s) should bring your paper to a conclusion by summarizing the main points you have covered in the paper, and restating the thesis statement that your paper has developed and supported.
**TIMETABLE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>task</th>
<th>what you need to do</th>
<th>when you need to do it</th>
<th>date due</th>
<th>date returned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Mind mapping</td>
<td>Create a map of the topic you have chosen. Narrow down this topic.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Thesis statement and outline</td>
<td>Write your thesis that you will develop in your paper. Create a tentative, working outline.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 Search for sources</td>
<td>Starting with the RCC library databases, locate relevant sources. The sources may be on-line or in print.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 Working bibliography</td>
<td>Assemble sources that will provide you with information for your research paper.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 Conferences</td>
<td>Schedule a conference with your professor, to make sure you’re on the right track. Schedule a conference with the Writing Center for more support.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6 Complete readings and note taking.</td>
<td>Read all the sources you will use and take notes: annotate, question, engage!</td>
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<tr>
<td>7 Revise Outline</td>
<td>Revise your initial outline, based on what you’ve learned.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8 First draft</td>
<td>Have a tutor read your first draft. Based on his or her feedback, edit (correct grammatical errors) and revise (reorganize, delete, add).</td>
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<tr>
<td>9 Peer review</td>
<td>Meet with a classmate to give and receive feedback on the content and format of your papers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10 Revise and edit</td>
<td>With the feedback from your professor, review your paper by revising and editing.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11 Final draft</td>
<td>Submit a revised and edited version of your paper for a grade.</td>
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FINDING YOUR TOPIC AND DEVELOPING A THESIS

1. Identify the problem: state the problem or main topic that you will address in your paper.  
   Example: Obesity in America

_____________________________________________________________________

2. Identify a specific question about the problem: What do you hope to find out, resolve, or learn?  Do not select a question to which the answer is common factual knowledge, like “Is Obesity increasing in America?” Select a question that is researchable, and that could have more than one answer.  
   Example: Why are more Americans becoming obese?  (i.e, Is it because of technology? fast food? lack of exercise?)

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

3. Starting Thesis: What do you see (at this point) as your answer to this question? Your answer, or Thesis, will be your answer to this question, and will reflect a position you take on your topic. Your research will support that position.  
   Example: Americans are becoming obese because they spend too much time on their computers and watching TV.

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

Keep in mind that your answer to the question, or the position you first take on the issue, may change as you research the topic and learn more about it. You can change your thesis during the process of writing a research paper!

See “Developing an Outline” (pg. 6) for further explanation.
DEVELOPING AN OUTLINE

By this point, you have identified the problem your paper will address, and have decided upon a question you will try to answer. You even have a strong hunch what your answer (or thesis) is. The next few steps, drafting an outline, doing research, and redrafting your original outline, are dynamic, and could get messy! Don’t panic: the point is to learn something along the way, and build a strong paper through this process.

1. Draft a Starting Outline: Start with what you know.
2. List what you don’t know Be honest about what you don’t know.
3. Do Preliminary Research: Find sources that will help you learn something more.
4. Take notes: Identify useful facts, quotes, and data to use in your paper.
5. Analyze Information: Has your thesis (answer to the question) changed?
6. Revise your Outline: Go back to the beginning and revise your starting place.

The process looks something like this:
Draft Outline; start with what you know or assume

Introduction

Identify the Problem: Obesity in America
Pose a question: What are the major factors leading to the rise in obesity?
Starting thesis: The main cause of obesity in America is the development of new technology which encourages people to become sedentary and fat.

Body of Paper

Supporting evidence. Development of new technology - personal computers, smart phones, online streaming, robot devices, etc. - has increased with the rate of obesity

Other points you will look at, as other possible factors, in order of importance:
  a. decrease in average salaries, household incomes - no money for healthy meals
  b. proliferation of fast food, offering cheap, instant meals that are fattening, not filling
  c. availability of gastric bypass surgery? (this enables fat people to keep on eating until they can lose weight through surgery)
  d. food addiction? is there even such a thing?

Conclusion

American overdependence on new technology has caused us to become fat. Instead of sitting for so many hours each day, we should use the time-saving technology to make time for more exercise in our lives.

List what you don’t know but need to find out.

- Rate of obesity: how fast is it increasing? Social cost: how dangerous or costly is obesity?
- Development of technology. How many people own personal computers, smart phones, tablets, etc.? How many hours do people spend watching an electronic device?
- What is the average American salary? How does it compare to the 1980’s?
- What do recent films, books, and articles say about fast food?
- How does bypass surgery effect the rate of obesity?
- Is there such a thing as “food addiction”? 
RESEARCHING YOUR TOPIC

Preliminary Research - Find Useful Sources

FINDING SOURCES

You will need to use a variety of sources to find the information you need. Each of these sources should be carefully chosen with the following criteria. (remember U-SCAR):

1. **Unbiased**: While all authors are biased in some way, do you know what the bias is? Is it a credible source that is not sponsored by a profit-making organization or lobbying group?

2. **Scholarly**: Is the author an expert in this field? Have you checked credentials? Is the information appropriately academic? Has the paper been published in an academic journal? Have other experts reviewed this material and responded to it? (Is it peer reviewed)? Does the author lead me to other researchers on the topic?

3. **Current**: Is the information up-to-date? While an older date of publication doesn’t necessarily discredit the source, be aware of the time context in which the source was written.

4. **Appropriate**: Does the information in this source support your thesis?

5. **Relevant**: Is the information useful?

SEARCH THE RCC LIBRARY DATABASE

Start your search in the online RCC Library Database where you can investigate what other academics have written on your subject.

- Begin with the section titled *Articles.*
- Opt for the *Subject List,* and, scrolling past other options, choose the category, *General.*
- Click on the first button, “*AcademicOneFile*”, a search engine of academic articles.
- In the boxes next to the term “*Key Words*”, insert terms you’re researching. (In our example, you might write “childhood obesity” or “new technology” or “single parent families” or “American salaries”.)
Under **more options**, just below the Key Words box, click the boxes next to **documents with full text**, and **peer reviewed publications**.

Skim through the articles that appear, checking for relevance and usefulness to your project.

Another category in the RCC Library Database Articles section, is called **Issues and Controversies**. This group of sources includes general topics on which opposing opinions are presented. For this paper, you might choose **Diet & Nutrition** or **Diseases and Epidemics**.

Explore through other sections too: there’s a lot hidden in these databases!

**OTHER HELPFUL SOURCES**

Continue your research using other sources. For this subject, you may wish to go to

**Books**
*Example: Fast Food Nation, by Eric Schlosser*

**Magazines**

**Newspapers**

**Television News:**
*Example: [www.nbcnews.com](http://www.nbcnews.com) NBC “How the Computer is Making You Fat”*

**Radio Stations:**
*Example: [www.npr.org](http://www.npr.org) National Public Radio Nora Volkow: “No, Really, This Is Your Brain on Drugs”*

**Book Reviews**
*Example: [www.kirkusreviews.com](http://www.kirkusreviews.com) (review of Fast Food Nation, by Eric Schlosser)*

**Online News Sources:**
*Example: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/) Huffington Post essay on Gastric Bypass Surgery*

**Movies**
*Example: SuperSize Me*
Other websites of organizations.

**Take Notes: Identify useful facts, quotes, relevant data**

**CITING SOURCES**

There are two reasons to identify all the sources used in your research paper:
1) To avoid plagiarism (presenting someone else’s ideas or words as your own).
2) To show your reader how to find the sources you used.

Whether using direct, word-for-word quotations, (or lyrics, visuals, diagrams, charts, etc.), or referring to the idea of another person, you must include the author, title, city of publication, publisher, date of publication, and type of source (print, web, movie, etc.) This information must be included in your bibliography, the final page of your paper. Therefore, during your research, as you locate useful sources, **keep a record of this information**. A useful hint: in the RCC database, at the bottom of many articles, the article’s MLA formatted information is provided, appropriate for your bibliography. Cut and paste that, and you’ve saved yourself a lot of time.

Additionally, In-text citations are required in the body of your paper, showing the page number or url address of the quote or idea you are using. Again, **keep a note of each page or url address for every quote or idea as you go along**. This is not something you want to go hunting for the day before a paper is due!
Analyze information

You have gathered many sources of information on the topics of obesity, new technology, family incomes, American eating habits, the fast food industry, and even the nature of addiction. Now, you need to make sense of all of this information.

As you consider each source, answer the following questions:

- How does this source expand your understanding of your topic?
- Identify and paraphrase the author’s argument. What claim does the author make?
- How does this argument support or differ from your tentative thesis?
- How does this argument fit into the spectrum of other scholars’ perspectives surrounding the topic? Compare and contrast.
- Identify at least two significant quotes from the text. Be certain to cite the quotes properly.

Revise Outline

By now, you've collected some relevant, reliable, and startling pieces of information. You've kept a record of quotations, ideas, and statistics you want to use in your paper. AND, after thoughtful analysis, you've changed your thesis! Now, instead of thinking that new technology is the biggest factor leading to obesity, you think that the fast food industry is the major cause. Not a problem. You can still use all the information you've collected to date.

So, back to the drawing board:

Your revised outline looks like this:

Introduction

**Identify the Problem:** The rate of obesity in America is rising dangerously. Obesity is dangerous to our health and taxing on our economy.

**Revised thesis:** The main cause of obesity in America is the fast food industry, which is designing cheap and addictive food that has come to dominate the American diet.
Body of Paper

Supporting evidence
Like the tobacco industry, the fast food industry makes huge profits from pushing dangerous products that they know to be addictive

Other points you will discuss
- decrease in average salaries leads more people to buy cheaper meals
- parents needing to work two and three part-time, no-benefit jobs have less time and energy for (a) preparing balanced meals and (b) keeping their children active
- cut back in school budgets has led to (a) less nutritious meals and (b) fewer athletic offerings in schools
- gastric by-pass surgery is popular and dangerous, but not an incentive to eat
- some people can become addicted to food, specifically, sugar, fat, and flour.

Conclusion
We need to stop buying and consuming fast foods. Furthermore, we should expose the health dangers of fast food, limit the industry’s sale of dangerous chemicals, and restrict the public advertising of non-nutritious food targeted to children.
MLA & APA STYLE, DOCUMENTATION, AND FORMAT

Roxbury Community College uses two styles for research papers. **MLA Style** is used for papers in the Humanities (English, History, Art, etc.). **APA Style** is used for papers in the Sciences (Nursing, Statistics, Sociology, etc.). Check with your professor to be sure which style you should use.

Your research paper will include information, ideas, and quotations from informed sources. Throughout your text, you must include an "**in-text citation**" each time you refer to, summarize, paraphrase, or quote from another source. This short citation gives the reader basic information about your source. Citations are necessary to help you avoid **plagiarism** - presenting someone else's ideas or words as if they are your own. In-text citations give “credit where credit is due” to the sources you use in your research. Remember that citations enhance your paper, because they demonstrate the research you did, and also because they highlight your critical thinking by clearly showing which ideas and conclusions are your own.

In-Text citations direct the reader to the bibliography at the end of your paper, where you will include information that enables the reader to locate your source material. In MLA style the bibliography is called the “**Works Cited**” page. In APA style, it is called the “**References**” page.

MLA style and APA style each have different requirements for creating in-text citations and the final bibliography page. Each style also has different and specific formatting requirements, including **Title or First Page, Running Headers, spacing, margins, quotes**, etc.

**On-line Sources for Formatting & Documenting Your Paper**

There are many online sources for learning about MLA or APA documentation and format. We recommend [www.purdue.edu/owl](http://www.purdue.edu/owl), where you will find detailed information and also samples of each style.

For help creating your Works Cited or References page, we recommend [citationmachine.net](http://citationmachine.net). The site provides a form for entering information about your source, and then creates and correctly formats the citation for you. It also gives you the option to copy and paste the citation directly to your paper.

**Need help?**

Remember, you can always schedule an appointment with a tutor at any point while you are working on your paper. We can assist you with selecting a topic, formulating a thesis, outlining, researching, writing, editing, or formatting.

**Do not wait until the last minute!** Go to [http://rcc.mywconline.net](http://rcc.mywconline.net) to schedule an appointment at the Writing Center (203) or the Learning Center (207).
## GRADING RUBRIC FOR THE RESEARCH PAPER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(grades A and B)</th>
<th>(grade C)</th>
<th>(grades D and F)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>THE SUCCESSFUL PAPER WILL HAVE THE FOLLOWING:</strong></td>
<td><strong>THE PASSING PAPER WILL HAVE THE FOLLOWING:</strong></td>
<td><strong>THE FAILING PAPER WILL HAVE THE FOLLOWING:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A strong thesis statement that states a position that is arguable.</td>
<td>A thesis statement that states a position, but may not be arguable.</td>
<td>A thesis statement that is neither a position nor an argument.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sufficient and effective research that supports the thesis.</td>
<td>More research than is needed.</td>
<td>There is a lack of research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration of authoritative sources (through quotes, paraphrases, or summaries.)</td>
<td>The integration of sources is not sufficient to sustain the paper’s credibility.</td>
<td>Failure to integrate sources and virtually no evidence of research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logical and organized development of ideas that support the thesis.</td>
<td>The paper needs better organization and support.</td>
<td>Poor development and lack of support for thesis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No evidence of fallacies.</td>
<td>Reasoning is somewhat flawed by fallacies.</td>
<td>Lack of sound reasoning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective writing with few or no errors that make the paper readable.</td>
<td>Some errors that detract from the readability of the paper.</td>
<td>Several errors that make the paper difficult to read and understand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective citations, with no evidence of plagiarism, that give credit in the text as well as on the Reference page.</td>
<td>Some errors in citations, either in the text of the paper or in the Reference page.</td>
<td>Poorly cited and reflects plagiaristion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence of analytical thinking and creative ideas.</td>
<td>The paper needs either more analytical thinking or more creative ideas.</td>
<td>No evidence of analytical thinking or creative ideas.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evidence of the student’s voice written in a formal tone that reflects academic writing.</td>
<td>The student’s voice needs to be more visible in the paper; the language needs to reflect an awareness of formal academic writing.</td>
<td>No evidence of the student’s voice or an understanding of academic writing.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Successful acknowledgement and refutation of opposing points of view.</td>
<td>The paper recognizes opposing points of view but does not sufficiently acknowledge them.</td>
<td>The paper fails to recognize opposing points of view.</td>
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