



The Research Project

Handbook

**Everything you need to know
To write a research paper**

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2nd Edition

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Dear Student:

You are about to embark on a wonderful journey and a rite of passage as a college student. With the research assignment, you will become a scholar. This means that you will engage in the centuries-old tradition of responding to a question with a specific and purposeful method that includes analytical thinking, reading, note-taking, and integrating the ideas that others before you have put forth on your question. You will begin to think more critically about what you assumed (your hypothesis), examine your biases, filter through what others said to determine their validity and credibility, and synthesize all this to a new understanding of the question. This will be your unique contribution to the world of research.

Of course, as with any new venture, the research process can provoke some anxiety. However, we are confident that you will be able to succeed, utilizing what you have learned in class, what you have read, what you know, and determining what you need to know. Don't forget two very important sources: your peer group for their ideas and the academic support centers here at RCC: the Writing Center in Room (3)203, The Teaching and Learning Center (TLC) in Room (3)207, the Math Clinic in Room (3)206 and the Language Lab in Room (3)205. We are all here to help make this project a positive and rewarding experience while helping you acquire the skills in research you will need to continue your education.

This handbook has broken down the process of research so that it is more easily digested. There are several component parts of the research paper, and by doing an excellent job in each part you can be sure that your paper, in its entirety, will be good.

Please look at the research project as an adventure. There will be great satisfaction when you complete it, and you will always refer to what you learned in the process.

Yours truly,

Judy Kahalas
March 2011

THE RESEARCH PROJECT HANDBOOK

Student Name: _____

Please respond to these questions:

1. **Identify the Problem:** State the problem that you will address in your paper:

2. **Identify the Purpose:** State why you have chosen to research this topic. What do you hope to find out, resolve, or learn?

3. **Question:** What do you see (at this point) as the major question you would like to answer? (1 question)

4. **Discuss Anticipated Outcomes:** It is important to examine your biases and assumptions before you begin your research. Briefly describe your assumptions and determine whether they are biased in any way. Then discuss the anticipated outcomes for this project.

FORMAT

Research papers using MLA follow certain conventions in their formatting. Please familiarize yourself with the expectations of this research project:

1. A cover page that looks like this:
 - a. Your last name and page number on the upper right of every page.
 - b. Your heading on the upper left of the first page:

Roxbury Richards
ENG101-01
December 24, 2007
 - c. A title centered in the middle of the cover page (do not underline, capitalize all letters, italicize or use quotations for your own title; capitalize only the first letter of main words).
 - d. 1 inch margins around for the body of the essay.
 - e. Times New Roman, 12, for your font.
 - f. Double spaced (do not double space twice between paragraphs).
 - g. First word of paragraphs indented.
 - h. Final page is Works Cited.

YOUR CHECKLIST:

1. Last name and page number in upper right of every page (including cover):
2. Heading in upper left of first page (name, course, and date):
3. Title centered in the middle of the cover page
4. 1-inch margins around the paper
5. Times New Roman 12 font
6. Text is double-spaced
7. First word of each paragraph is indented:

8. Works Cited page □

OUTLINE

A formal outline will follow the cover page. This should not be made until you have completed your paper. Prior to submitting it, make sure that the outline reflects all your main points. This is a way you can check to make sure you have developed focused paragraphs as well. Below is a sample of an outline for “No Child Left Behind.”

“No Child Left Behind” Act

- I. Overview
 - A. Law enacted in 2001
 - B. Improvement of elementary and secondary schools nation-wide
 - C. Ensures that no child is “trapped in a failing school.”

- II. Accountability
 - A. Sets statewide standards in reading and math
 - 1. annual testing in grades 3 – 8
 - B. Ensures that all students become proficient in 12 years
 - C. Examines results by several criteria: race, poverty, language ability, disability, ethnicity
 - 1. Holds states to strict standards
 - 2. Rewards states that meet or exceed standards

- III. Choice
 - A. Provides options for students in failing Title I schools
 - 1. public schools or charter schools within the district
 - 2. supplemental educational services, including private school
 - 3. transportation to new school
 - B. Monitors funding
 - 1. Ensures that school districts spend a portion of allocated money for students
 - a. to choose another school
 - b. to seek supplemental education
 - C. Monitors improvements
 - 1. Failing schools are given 5 years to improve

- IV. Flexibility
 - A. States and school districts can use funds in ways they need
 - 1. teacher improvement, technology, innovation, or drug-free initiatives
 - 2. consolidation agreements for up to 7 states

- V. Reading
 - A. Every child should read by end of Grade 3
 - B. State funding will be distributed to local districts for identification and testing, evaluation, and teacher training in the area of reading
 - C. Early intervention for pre-schoolers of low income families to support language literacy and development and pre-reading

VI. Other Changes

- A. Teacher improvement and qualifications
- B. Initiatives to facilitate English language acquisition for LEPs
- C. Initiatives to ensure students enroll in safe and drug-free schools

USING SOURCES

Find out how many sources you are required to use for this assignment. Each of these should be carefully chosen with the following criteria:

1. **Relevant:** Is the information useful and appropriate? Will it support or expand my thesis?
2. **Current:** Is the information up-to-date?
3. **Authoritative:** Is the author an expert in this field? Have you checked credentials?
4. **Scholarly:** Is the information appropriately academic? Has the paper been published in an academic journal? Is the book appropriate for college students? Have other experts reviewed this material and responded to it? Does the author lead me to other researchers in the topic?

Step One: Skimming: Read over the table of contents, the chapter topics, and the sub-topics that are in **bold** print. Seek out what is useful to your paper. This is a preliminary reading.

Step Two: Reading: Once you find relevant information, read it with a critical eye. Is the author biased? Is the argument faulty? Is this opinion, substantiated fact, speculation, or propaganda? Make marginal notes as you read.

Step Three: Notetaking: Record exact words or sentences, paraphrase, or summarize what is relevant to your topic. Use index cards, paper and pen, or create an electronic file. Many students like to use color-coded index cards, assigning one color to each source. On one card for each color, write down all the bibliographic information: author, title, publisher, year of publication, city of publication, etc. On all the other cards, you need only put down a page number and the quote, paraphrase or summary you will use in the text of your paper.

Step Four: Integration: As you develop your paragraphs, integrate important information from your sources in appropriate places. Enhance your own ideas with quotes, summaries, or paraphrases from experts in the field. This will strengthen your argument and prove to your reader that you have studied it carefully.

Step Five: Documentation: Using intellectual property without giving credit to the owner (author) of that property is plagiarism. Familiarize yourself with the conventions of MLA and use all available tools to ensure that you have documented appropriately. Here are some suggestions: *Bibliomaker* (available only in the Writing Center); www.mla.org; www.citationmachine.net . Each of these sources will help you avoid plagiarism. Visit the Online Writing Lab of Purdue University and go through their research presentations: owl.english.purdue.edu.

YOUR CHECKLIST:

1. Information on this source is relevant to my topic:

CONTENT

Your content will be judged in two distinct ways: what your paper states and how it is written. To ensure that you have done a credible job of research and report, do the following:

- I. **Introduction:** Make sure that your introduction lets the reader know what you will be researching and what points you will develop throughout the paper. Your thesis statement should come somewhere (perhaps near the end) of this section of your paper.
- II. **Body:** This is where you will integrate your research and incorporate it with your thesis. Your use of quotes, paraphrases, and summaries will strengthen your thesis and let your reader know that you have considered your argument from multiple perspectives. But don't rely on the voice of other researchers; your voice and ideas must be more predominant in the paper.
- III. **Conclusion:** Through the use of language, let the reader know that the paper is coming to an end. In this closure, remind the reader of your main points as they leave the paper; hopefully, the reiteration of these points will leave a more lasting impression. Then conclude with a strong statement. Don't introduce any new ideas.
- IV. **Readability:** The best research can translate into the worst paper if your reader has difficulty understanding it. Use all the tricks you have to make certain that the paper reads well. Check and recheck grammar; try to avoid making errors that detract from the smooth reading of the paper. Use *spellcheck* and a second pair of eyes as well. Have a classmate read your paper and give you feedback. Try to use a variety of sentence patterns: Begin some with a clause or phrase, others with the subject, ask some questions, use complex and compound sentences and some powerful short sentences.

YOUR CHECKLIST:

1. Overview of main points in introduction:
2. Statement of position:
3. Paragraphs support and develop main points:
4. Paragraphs are focused around a specific point:
5. Content is clearly understood by reader:
6. Writing follows a format, or combination of formats:
7. Tone is appropriately academic:
8. The paper is readable and free from errors:

9. Sufficient research helped develop the thesis:
10. Conclusion summarizes, supports, and strengthens the paper:

DOCUMENTATION

The English Department uses MLA documentation (Modern Language Association). It is important that you know the conventions of this format. In addition to visiting the sites suggested on page 4, read in your handbook the section on research papers and documentation.

In the text of your paper, you must insert two important pieces of information: the last name of the author and the page number. You can do this in two ways:

According to Brenda Spatt, “This list of skills may seem overwhelming right now” (xii).

OR

Students writing a research paper may think that “this list of skills may seem overwhelming right now” (Spatt xii).

In rare cases, the author’s name cannot be found. Then you will have to mention, in an abbreviated form, the title of the work and the page number.

MLA keeps the information in the text brief so that the paper is more readable. No one wants to be continuously distracted by unnecessary information.

The Works Cited page is where your reader will go to find a thorough review of your sources. Here is where you will offer all pertinent information so that readers can find this source if they want.

Make sure that you place the words **Works Cited** in the center of the last page.

YOUR CHECKLIST:

1. Quotations, paraphrases, and summaries are relevant:
2. Quotations are used correctly and documented:
3. Paraphrases are documented:
4. Summaries are documented:
5. All sources that provided information for the text are documented within the text.

- 6. The Works Cited page contains every source used:
- 7. All required information is provided in the Works Cited:

THE RESEARCH PAPER TIMETABLE

The timetable below is provided to help you organize yourself as you complete your research paper.

TASK	WHAT YOU NEED TO DO	WHEN YOU NEED TO DO IT	DATE DUE	DATE RETURNED
1. Mind-Mapping	Use the handout that you were given and create a map of the topic you have chosen.			
2. Visual Search for sources	Go to the Library site and do the Visual Search			
3. Working Bibliography	Assemble ___ sources that will provide you with information for your research paper: 3 books 3 peer reviewed articles 1 – 3 other sources			
4. Conferences	Schedule a conference with the Writing Center. Schedule a conference with your professor.			
5. Thesis Statement and Outline	Write your thesis that you will develop in your paper. Outline your paper by creating a formal outline.			
6. Complete readings and notetaking	Read all the sources you will use and take notes: annotate, question, engage!			
7. First Draft	Submit your first draft to the online tutor. Edit and Revise. Submit.			
8. Peer Review	Meet with a classmate and provide feedback on the content and format of your papers			
9. Revise and Edit	With the feedback from your professor, review your paper by revising (reorganizing, deleting, adding) and editing (correcting grammatical errors).			
10. Final Draft	Submit a revised and edited version of your paper for a grade.			

GRADING RUBRIC FOR THE RESEARCH PAPER

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

Checklist for Research Paper

Your grade is determined by the criteria below. √ means that you have satisfied this criterion; — means that you have not satisfied this criterion; and N/A means that this is not applicable to your paper.

INTRODUCTION:

- 1. Statement of topic: _____
- 2. Statement of position: _____
- 3. Definition of unfamiliar terms: _____
- 4. Overview of what will be discussed: _____

BODY:

- 1. Well-developed paragraphs: _____
- 2. Logical flow: _____

RESEARCH SKILLS:

- 1. Subtopics related to the main thesis: _____
- 2. Paragraphs support thesis: _____
- 3. Quotations used correctly: _____
- 4. Paraphrasing used correctly: _____
- 5. Remains focused on thesis statement: _____
- 6. Sufficient and appropriate research: _____
- 7. No evidence of plagiarism: _____

GRAMMAR:

- 1. Evidence of proofreading and editing: _____
- 2. Grammar: _____
- 3. Punctuation: _____

CONCLUSION:

- 1. Summarizes main points of paper: _____
- 2. Uses language to let reader know the paper is concluding: _____
- 3. Offers an opinion or statement _____

FORMAT:

- 1. Uses correct MLA form: _____
- 2. Includes all sources that were referred to in text: _____
- 3. Uses correct margins: _____
- 4. Name and page number on top right corner of each page: _____
- 5. Double-spaced: _____
- 6. Correct font: _____

YOUR NOTES

YOUR NOTES