

# How to write a research paper

## A. SELECTING AND NARROWING YOUR TOPIC

**STEP 1: Choose a subject:** For your research paper, you may be assigned a particular topic, given suggestions, or you may develop your own subject. In the latter two cases, be sure to choose a subject that is relevant to the course, that you find interesting, and that there is information available for.

**STEP 2: Narrow the topic & establish a thesis:** Within a broad or general topic, you will need to select a subtopic. By reading general information on the subject (for example, in textbooks and library reference books such as encyclopedias), you will discover the main aspects of the subjects and you can choose a subtopic.

You will also need to establish a thesis for your paper. A thesis is a statement of the main idea of the paper -- what point will you prove in the paper? What is the argument that will be supported by the research? Write the thesis statement as the answer to a question or problem. E.g., if your topic is "marriage breakdown", possible thesis statements could be:

*As divorce is easier to get and society more tolerant of single parents, the rate of marriage breakdown goes up correspondingly.* (Answer to question)

*If divorce laws were tightened up, people might have more incentive to make marriages work.* (Solution to problem)

*Marriage breakdown has disastrous effect on children.* (Cause and effect)

## B. GATHERING INFORMATION

### STEP 3: Library research

- *Find a good variety of sources.* Type in the essential keywords of your topic in the "Search All" (Discovery Search) search box of the Library website (<http://yukonu.ca/library>) and click on "Search". Online resources will display a button that links directly to the source ("view full text" for articles, or "view ebook" for ebooks).

Magazines and newspapers are excellent sources for up-to-date information, but peer-reviewed articles will give you more reliable account of actual studies and ideas within a topic. Searching specific subject guides will also give you a better idea of individual databases you can try for your search. Databases such as Canadian Newsstream (for newspaper articles) Academic Search Complete, Canadian Periodicals Index Quarterly, JSTOR, and CBCA Complete are good for an initial exploration of your topic and for more in-depth research.

- *Find other library resources.* Whenever items are not available locally, you have the option to request an interlibrary loan and obtain the item from another institution. The option to request interlibrary loans is also available from results in the Discovery search and on the databases.

**STEP 4: Prepare a preliminary bibliography:** Complete this step along with Step 3 as you use the Library Discovery Search and databases. Start using the "Cite" button on Discovery or databases and to copy the citation to a Word document. This can be used as a working bibliography to keep track of the sources you found and could provide information for your final bibliography.

**STEP 5: Take notes.** Skim through the resources you found to get the main ideas of each item. Make notes of the important points in your working bibliography. Make use of abstracts, indexes and tables of contents whenever possible.

Try to make your notes as short as possible. Explain the author's ideas with your own words or quote the author's exact words (direct quotation). Use quotation marks for direct quotations and remember to indicate also the page or paragraph number (for websites) from which you are extracting the quote.

## C. ORGANIZING INFORMATION.

**STEP 6: Read through your notes and determine the major points:** Be sure to go back and fill in any gaps in your research. When your research is finished you can finalize your thesis statement and revise it if necessary.

Your final thesis statement may be the same as your original statement or it may be quite different, depending on the findings of your research. You may find that constructing an outline will help you organize your notes and thoughts. An outline is especially useful when you are writing the first draft of the paper.

State the thesis in a sentence, and sketch an outline as follows:

### I. First major point

A. -----

1. ----- 2.  
-----

### II. Second major point

A. -----

1. ----- B.  
-----

1. -----

a. -----

### III. Third major point ...

**STEP 7: Write the first draft:** Write the introduction, telling the reader what the essay is about. Include your thesis statement in the introduction (if you have writer's block the introduction can be left until later). Write the body of the paper following your outline, developing each point further. Write down the source and page number (when available) of each idea from your notes. When you are writing the first draft, concentrate on content and logical organization of ideas, not on grammar and writing style. Lastly write a conclusion and decide on a title. If you are including diagrams, decide on which ones you will use and where you will put them.

**STEP 8: Revise the draft:** Read your draft over several times. Each time you read through the paper, concentrate on revising a different aspect. During the initial sweep concentrate on content (has your point been made? Does your paper have unity?). Next look at the composition of the paper (does one paragraph follow another? Is each paragraph complete? Examine the sentence structure for run-on sentences etc., and consider your choice of words). Lastly, examine the paper for important details such as spelling and punctuation.

**STEP 9: Write the final copy:** Type your final copy and be sure it follows the citation style guidelines (Cite Your Sources page of [Help & Guides](#)) recommended by your instructor. Use your working bibliography to refer to sources you consulted. Document your sources of information carefully throughout the paper with in-text citations and a reference list.

**STEP 10: Proof-read.** Read over your final copy carefully, especially looking for typing errors. Neatly, make all needed corrections before handing in your paper. Ideally, have someone else proof-read your work as well.