

The Research Process

STAGE 1: Understand the Assignment

What are the intermediate and final deadlines? What font size, spacing & margin options are accepted?
What is the length (number of pages/words)? Are charts, tables, or images expected?
Which citation style (MLA, APA, Chicago)? Is the essay topic broad or specific?
What type of essay is expected: descriptive, analytical, argumentative, critical? What type of sources are acceptable (encyclopedia, academic journals, websites, etc.)?
How many sources and citations are expected? What point of view is being used (1st, 2nd, or 3rd person)?
Create a work schedule so that you submit your paper by the deadline.

STAGE 2: Selecting a Topic

A teacher may simply give you the topic, so you will not have to choose. A teacher may give you a list of topics from which to choose or the assignment may be open-ended. How do you select your topic?

BEGIN WITH PRELIMINARY READING!

Preliminary reading helps evaluate and refine the topic. Discover: what information is available; if the topic is interesting; if enough scholarly information is written for academic use; what notable researchers and writers are saying; and what background information is relevant.
Sources for preliminary reading: general internet searches; Wikipedia; encyclopedias; database topic pages; scanning books, magazines, newspapers, and journals.
Preliminary reading helps broaden or narrow the topic idea. Collect search terms and start the working bibliography while conducting preliminary reading.

STAGE 3: Writing a Research Question

The research question (RQ) captures the main idea of the research at hand. It allows you to specify the exact aspect of the topic you will be exploring.
Once the RQ is created, choose the appropriate resources for the topic of research. Explore and collect a wide range of books, academic journals, newspapers, interviews, websites, and magazines. The research includes securing scholarly primary and secondary sources.

STAGE 4: Collecting Scholarly Sources

Databases are searched by creating Boolean strings (connecting search terms found during preliminary reading with Boolean operators).
Resources are collected in an organized fashion for ease of reference by using EasyBib, Google Docs, or other online database research tools.
Continue building the working bibliography. An annotated bibliography or OPCVL may be assigned during this stage.
Resources are evaluated for their purpose, accuracy, authoritativeness, relevancy, and currency.

STAGE 5: Taking Notes

Accurate note taking = staying organized; integrating sources throughout the paper; accurately citing sources; recognizing themes and trends within the research; and avoiding plagiarism.
Choose a method to organize your notes. (EasyBib is recommended not only for its bibliography function, but also its note taking and outlining tools.)
Summarize, paraphrase, or directly quote the thoughts and ideas of the materials being read. Connect a specific source to each note.
One of the most common forms of unintentional plagiarism is attributing an idea to the incorrect author. Continue to work with and build the working bibliography.
Must credit the sources regardless if summarizing, paraphrasing, or quoting. Place quotation marks around a direct quote.
Write everything down that might be needed. Better to write it down now and discard it later.
While creating your note cards, also write comments, ideas, and thoughts along side the notes.
Title each note card with a specific theme or subtopic (e.g., Causes of Global Warming, Global Warming Solutions, not Card #1, Card #2).
Titling note cards helps organize thoughts and ideas when it comes time to create the outline.
How many note cards are needed? Approximately 50 - 100 note cards for a 5 - 10 page paper.

STAGE 6: Creating The Thesis Statement

The thesis statement (TS) sets out to answer the RQ. TS expresses the main idea or position. TS is not a known fact.
TS does not include specific arguments or evidence (that will be in the body of the paper), does not use 1st person ("I think ..."), does not just describe the topic ("This paper is about ..."). Common problems with TS: too factual; too vague; too subjective; cannot be proven.
TS is usually a single, complex sentence and located near the end of the introductory paragraph. It signals to the reader what is about to be argued in the essay.

STAGE 7: Creating The Outline

The outline begins with the TS.
Organize notes cards into similar themes and subtopics. (This is where placing appropriate titles on the note cards helps!)
Sort note cards by introduction, body paragraphs, and conclusion. Focus on having the same number of cards per pile to balance your arguments. Identify main points that support TS.
Note card piles should never have information from only a single source. Want to sort, classify, and sequence information from several sources.
Order ideas into a logical flow. Identify where more research is needed.
Take advantage of EasyBib's outlining tool or your word processor's outlining tool bar.

STAGE 8: Writing the Draft

Using the outline as a guide, begin writing each section. Begin with the body of the paper with TS in mind. Write the introduction and conclusion last.
The body follows the main points from the outline and includes arguments and textual evidence. The introduction presents the purpose of the paper and includes TS.
The conclusion reiterates, but does not repeat your main arguments and ties your points together.
While writing, refer to your working bibliography and add your in-text citations within your draft. This helps you keep track of your sources, prevents unintentional plagiarism, and gives credit where credit is due.
Remove from your working bibliography, those resources that were not cited within your paper. Change the title of your bibliography to Works Cited.
Consistently apply the citation style expected from your teacher (e.g., MLA, APA, Chicago).

STAGE 9: Review, Revise, Submit

Step away from your paper, even for just a day, to review your draft. Some teachers will require a peer review.
Answer the following: Did I answer my RQ? Does the TS accurately summarize my position? Do my main points support my TS? Do I have enough research & evidence? Is my paper in logical order?
Are my in-text citations noted correctly? Do the in-text citations cross-reference to the Works Cited page?
Check for spelling, grammar, and punctuation. (The computer may not catch everything!) Double-check the formatting including margins, citations, and the Works Cited page.
Submit your paper by the deadline!