

### Essay 3: The Research Paper

**Purpose:** A research paper is like an essay, except it usually is longer and uses outside sources to support your arguments. A research paper has a clearly written thesis statement covering a topic that is open to debate. A research paper carefully develops each point. When you write a research paper, you must develop your position by reacting to information from other sources. You must explain why you agree or disagree with those sources. You must get involved with your topic. Remember: The main purpose of a research paper is to give your ideas and opinions about the topic and to use other sources to support your position.

This assignment meets **all course outcomes:**

- compose essays, including formal research paper(s)
- use conventions of Standard American English
- demonstrate competence in research and documentation
- demonstrate competence in critical reading skills

#### STEP 1: MAKE A SCHEDULE

It is very important that you immediately try to set up a schedule to determine when you will try to complete each step of the process of writing your paper. Use your personal calendar to help you plan ahead. Be realistic when you make this schedule but remember that you do have a deadline: the date the paper is due. Mark down when each step of the process will be started (or completed) or show the activity to be done every day. It is probably easiest to start with the due date and work backwards, figuring out when you would need to start each step in order to finish the paper on time. Be sure to allow extra time for those steps which may cause you difficulties.

#### STEP 2: PINPOINT THE TOPIC

You will have some guidelines for choosing a topic, but most of the topic search will be in response to your own interests.

1. Select a topic that is interesting to you. It should be a question that you want to answer, a condition you want to investigate, an issue you want to explore – something that you will enjoy learning about. You will do a much better job if you are interested in what you are reading about.
2. Make sure information is available on your subject. Check the libraries to see if you will be able to find enough sources to write your paper. Make sure the sources you want are actually in the libraries. You should also do some preliminary reading. This means that you will actually read a few journal articles, books, or chapters of books on your topic. You can get a better idea of the material and can use these readings to help you formulate a thesis statement. This “pre-reading” will also “jump-start” your thinking about your paper and motivate you to keep going.

3. Pick a topic that is narrow enough that you will be able to develop it in the time available. Keep in mind that you will have only a certain amount of time to write your paper. Make sure you select a topic that you can deal with in that time frame.

### STEP 3: DEVELOP THESIS STATEMENT

Your thesis statement (or thesis) is your opinion or assertion about your topic. It is the point you are trying to prove. Think of it as being one side of an argument. The more specific your thesis statement is, the easier it will be to do the research and write your paper. If you are having trouble developing a statement, try asking a question that your paper can answer. Before you try to develop your thesis, you should do some preliminary reading about your topic. You will probably get some good ideas that will help you settle on a thesis. Below is sample topic with a thesis written as both a statement and a question:

TOPIC	STATEMENT	QUESTION
Computer games	Computer games help students learn.	Do computer games help students learn?

### STEP 4: DEVELOP OUTLINE

The next step is to develop a basic outline to help you plan your paper and guide your search for sources. This outline will give you structure as you do your research and can help you pull your information together for your first draft. Your outline should indicate the main points you will cover, the order in which you will do so, and the relationship between main ideas and supporting details. Be aware that you might have to change your outline while you are doing your research as you find new ideas or decide not to write about one of your topics. Here is a sample outline for the thesis statement (and question) listed above. Note that at this point the outline is not very detailed. It does give you an overview of the paper, however.

#### BASIC OUTLINE:

- I. Introduction
- II. Background
- III. Advantages
- IV. Disadvantages
- V. Examples
- VI. Conclusions

### STEP 4: SELECT SOURCES

It is important that you spend some time evaluating the source to make sure it is reliable and can help you with your paper. Use all the research tools you have learned throughout this semester including primary and secondary research. Explore different databases from The Valencia Library. Be sure to follow the requirements set by this course. Search engine searches are not permitted; you must access and navigate the library's article collection and learn how to use keywords and advanced searches to find appropriate articles.

### STEP 6: WRITE THE DRAFT

1. If you have time, put everything away for a day or two after you have finished all of your research and taken your notes so that you can subconsciously sort out all that you have learned. When you go to write your draft after this short break, you will be able to look at it from a fresh perspective.
2. Organize your research and findings.
3. Write what you know first, even if this means starting in the middle of your paper. Usually, once you get started writing one section your thoughts about the others will begin to flow more easily and you will be able to write those other parts. Do not worry if you do not start writing at the beginning. When you are all through writing the different sections, you will be proofreading the entire paper to make sure each section flows into the next one. If needed, you can add transitions at this time.
4. Take frequent breaks. Writing your paper may be a long and frustrating process. You will be more effective if you work in short sessions rather than trying to write your whole paper in one sitting. Your subconscious will also be able to sort some of your ideas out during the breaks.
5. Write as clearly as you can. Use short sentences and simple language. Stick to your points and make sure each sentence and each part of your paper work to support your thesis. Do not assume your reader will understand what you are talking about. Explain everything in simple terms.
6. Avoid using a lot of quotations. Rather, try to use your own ideas and words. If you do use quotations, try not to have many long ones. It will often be much easier for your reader to follow your points if you put them in your own words.
7. Use variety in your writing. Your paper will be much more interesting if you vary your sentence structure and wording.

## AVOID PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism means using someone else's ideas, words, or statistics in your writing without giving credit to the source (without proper documentation). There are several ways to avoid plagiarism. Each of these methods requires you to give proper documentation.

**Summary** Write a shortened, condensed version of the original source in your own words. You still must give credit to the original source by using proper documentation.

**Paraphrase** Rewrite a portion of the original text in your own words. A paraphrase is usually about the same length as the original and follows the source sentence by sentence and idea by idea. It must not change the sense of the original. You still must give credit to the original source by using proper documentation.

**Quotation:** Copy words/sentences/expressions directly from the original source. The spelling, punctuation, wording, and order of words must be exactly like the original source. You still must give credit to the original source by using proper documentation.

You must provide documentation for:

- any and all data, facts, or information not commonly known or commonly accepted and/or open to question or dispute
- all exact words, phrases, and passages taken from a source, including special terms or words that the author makes up or uses in an unusual way

You should not provide documentation for:

- ideas that you come up with on your own, including your own observations and conclusions
- familiar proverbs, famous quotations, or common knowledge (information that is found in several of your sources can be considered to be common knowledge)

#### STEP 7: REVISE AND PROOFREAD

After you have written your paper, you **MUST** proofread it.

##### CHECK THE CONTENT:

- Check for accuracy. Double-check each statement, question, and reference to make sure you have not copied something incorrectly, omitted any necessary information, or given the wrong facts or improper documentation.
- Check your Works Cited page carefully, as well. This is not an exciting job, but it is extremely important.
- Check for flow. Read your paper through from start to finish to make sure your ideas, sentences, and sections flow from one to another. If you think your reader might be confused by something you have written, take the time to revise it.
- Read your paper aloud. Do this at least once. It is often easier to hear your mistakes than it is to see them. Let someone else read it. After you have worked so hard on your paper, you may not be able to see errors. (You may unintentionally read into it something that is not there, for example.) Someone else may be able to catch problems that you cannot see.
- Check for consistency. Make sure that all parts of your paper are working toward the support of your thesis statement. If you find that a passage does not really have anything to do with supporting your thesis, consider revising that part of the paper.
- **CHECK THE FORM:** Read it several times. Look for one type of error each time you read through your paper. For example, read it once to check for spelling errors, once for punctuation errors, once for capitalization, once for run-on sentences, etc. If you know that you tend to make a certain kind of error when you write, make sure you read your paper through at least once to look only for that kind of error.
- Check the requirements. Make sure you have met all of your instructor's requirements and specifications for the paper.
- Check to make sure that you have followed the required style format that your pages are neat and in order, and that you have stapled or bound your paper as required.

Guidelines- The following guidelines must be present in your work:

- Write a research paper about **something you love**
- Elements of the research paper must align with the **LECTURES taught in this class, specifically in Learning Modules 5, 6, and Research Week 3.**
- 5-8 pages in length
- Academic essay format must be followed- intro with thesis, body paragraphs, conclusion.
- MLA 8 format and citation (in-text and Works Cited) required
- Academic research must be used. Use the research tools you learned in this class, only. Primary and secondary sources permitted- secondary sources **required**. All secondary sources **MUST be taken from the Valencia library database**

**Plagiarism is the use of someone else's words, ideas, pictures, design, and/or intellectual property without the correct documentation and punctuation. Any form of plagiarism will result in an F on the particular assignment, and possible F in the course.**