

Guidelines for Writing Research Papers

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“Research is a process of systematic inquiry that entails collection of data; documentation of critical information; and analysis and interpretation of that data/information, in accordance with suitable methodologies set by specific professional fields and academic disciplines” (Hampshire College).

“Research is a process to discover new knowledge” (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services).

A college-level research paper must demonstrate the discovery of new knowledge via legitimate scholarly resources. Writing a research paper requires that students critically think, evaluate, organize, and compose. Writing a research paper is an opportunity for students to increase knowledge and demonstrate the ability to understand new subject matter. It is a project that begins at the outset of the course and grows as you acquire new knowledge through the coursework and additional research.

A research paper is not an opinion piece; instead, it is the culmination of research, critical thinking, source evaluation, and composition. Writing a research paper requires a significant amount of time and effort investigating and evaluating resources. A research paper is not merely a reiteration of the sources; instead, it is a thoughtful analysis of the scholarly data.

Audience

Your research paper should be directed at a general audience of college students with no specific knowledge of the subject matter. Do not direct the research paper towards the instructor or others with specific scholarly or subject knowledge. In other words, you must fully explain all of your statements in such a way that an average college student can understand the paper.

Thesis Statement

Your thesis statement must be specific and should articulate what will be expressed in the paper with specific scholarly evidence. A thesis statement is a road map for the paper. The thesis statement clearly expresses to the reader what to expect from the rest of the essay. The thesis statement will respond to the questions posed in the prompt and is usually a single sentence that will appear at the end of the first introductory paragraph. The thesis statement presents your arguments to the reader.

When constructing your thesis statement, ask yourself these questions.

- Do I answer the question?
 - Reread the prompt until you fully understand what is being asked of you.
- Is my thesis statement specific?
 - Avoid vague language.
- Does the paper support my thesis statement?
 - The body of the essay must support the thesis statement. If they do not go together, something must change. The thesis must reflect the prompt and your essay.

Research and Data Sources

Research papers must include a number of well-vetted data sources.

- Scholarly works are found in peer-reviewed journals.
- Primary source documents (e.g., *Federalist Papers*, *Magna Carta*).
- Valid data sources (e.g., studies, polls, census, etc.).

Scholarly sources are written by recognized experts in a particular field of inquiry and include articles in peer-reviewed publications.

When writing a research paper, do not use non-scholarly sources.

- Wikipedia
- General Websites
- Popular Magazines
- Cable News
- Blogs or Social Media
- Movies or Novels
- Anonymous Publications

A good source for quality resources is the school library and online databases like JSTOR, EBSCO, and ProQuest. All sources that you choose to use must be from verifiable scholars or primary works.

Plagiarism

“Plagiarists are seen not only as dishonest but also as incompetent, incapable of doing research and expressing original thoughts. Even borrowing just a few words from an author without clearly indicating that you did so constitutes plagiarism. Moreover, you can plagiarize unintentionally; in hastily taken notes, it is easy to mistake a phrase copied from a source as your original thought and then to use it without crediting the source” (MLA, 8th Ed., 2016).

Plagiarism is taking someone else’s work or ideas and passing them off as your own. ALL of the sources that influenced your paper must be cited!!! You must cite your sources both “in-text” and in a Works Cited section (MLA), Bibliography (Chicago/Turabian) or Reference page (APA).

Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing is taking the concepts of experts in the field of study and putting those ideas in your own words. Paraphrasing does NOT mean that you can simply change a few words in a sentence written by someone else. Paraphrasing is applying the ideas articulated by a scholar or primary source and conveying this in your own words. You must use *in-text* citations for all ideas of another person, even if you are restating these concepts in your own words.

Adjectives

Adjectives describe a person, place, or thing. Adjectives should be avoided when possible because they can show author bias or non-objectivity. Example: The Prime Minister’s policy is terrible. This example demonstrates bias and has no place when writing an analytical research paper.

The Importance of Citing Sources in a Research Paper

A research paper must demonstrate scholarly research. A paper that is submitted without *in-text* citations and a reference page is not only plagiarized; it fails to demonstrate research.

Think of citing sources from two perspectives.

1. It is necessary to avoid plagiarism.
2. It demonstrates that you have done the research.

General Guidelines

The research paper should be well organized and structured in a linear and understandable format. This begins with a sound introduction and a succinct thesis statement. Each section must logically flow from one to another in a logical and comprehensible manner. Think of the research paper as a report summarizing your answers to the research questions via scholarly information that you gathered.

Prior to writing your research paper, be sure to refer to the writing criteria and guidelines provided by your instructor. In my courses, writing criteria and general writing guidelines are provided in the Syllabus. Be sure to read all of the writing requirements and talk to your professor if you have any questions regarding the writing standards.

Don't procrastinate or wait until the last minute to collect data and write your paper. Support all claims and statements with scholarly evidence. Do not diverge from the topic, and remember this is not an opinion paper. Refrain from using any direct quotes unless it is approved by your instructor. Write the essay entirely in your own words. Base your essay on substantiated facts and not subjective opinion. Thoroughly review, edit, and check your paper for structure, punctuation, and grammatical errors prior to submitting the assignment. Do not use personal pronouns like "I," "me," "we," "our," and "mine."

Clear Communication

When you are engaged in scholarly writing, you must clearly communicate your ideas. A reader should not have to reread a sentence or paragraph.

Avoid personification, clichés, jargon, and vague language. Keep your statements short and simple.

- Personification occurs when an object is assigned a humanlike characteristic.
- Clichés are informal expressions that include overused phrases.
- Jargon is language specific to a group or profession.
- Vague language assumes the reader knows about what you are writing. Be clear and specific!
- Avoid excessive and unnecessary verbiage.

Headings and Subheadings

For clarity and continuity, research papers should have headings and subheadings.

The Title and Primary Headings are Centered

Second Level Headings are Left Aligned with Key Words Capitalized

Third Level Headings are Left Aligned in Italics

Example of In-Text Citations (MLA)

Institutionalization theory is an essential lens by which to view the relationship between adjunct community college faculty and the institutions which employ them (Dacin and Dacin 55). This theory helps to clarify the nature of organizational relationships and the forces which may impede change (DiMaggio and Powell 148; Kezar 20). Institutionalization theory helps to explain the complexities of executing changes within an organization and offers direction for positive changes (Maxey and Kezar 564). Using institutionalization theory, prevailing norms can be assessed to uncover the factors which prohibit change (Kezar 25).

Example Works Cited (MLA)

Works Cited

- Dacin, M. Tina and Peter A. Dacin. "Traditions as Institutionalized Practice: Implications for Deinstitutionalization." *The Sage Handbook of Organizational Institutionalism*, edited by Royston Greenwood et al., SAGE Publications, Inc., 2008.
- DiMaggio, Paul J. and Walter W. Powell. "The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields." *American Sociological Review*, vol. 48, no. 2, 1983, pp. 147-160, <https://journals.sagepub.com/home/asr>.
- Kezar, Adrianna. *How Colleges Change: Understanding, Leading, and Enacting Change*. 2nd edition, Routledge: Taylor & Francis Group, 2018.
- Maxey, Daniel and Adrianna Kezar. "Revealing Opportunities and Obstacles for Changing Non-Tenure-Track Faculty Practices: An Examination of Stakeholders' Awareness of Institutional Contradictions." *Journal of Higher Education*, vol. 86, no. 4, 2015, pp. 564-594, doi:10.1353/jhe.2015.0022.