

Writing Research Papers: Transcript

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Slide 1: Introduction

Hello, my name is Dr. Peter A. Zitko.

I have been teaching college courses for several years, and one thing that I have learned is that writing research papers often causes a lot of stress among my students.

Moreover, writing a research paper is somewhat different than other forms of writing. For instance, a person who is adept at writing novels or other creative works may find that writing a research paper is difficult or frustrating.

For this reason, I have created a brief video presentation to help undergraduate college students learn some of the nuances of writing a good research paper.

While this video is designed, in part, for my own students, the guidelines that I will be discussing are valuable for all college students who want to improve their research paper writing skills.

However, it is always important to follow the guidelines which are preferred by your professor. To begin, I would like to take a few moments and define research. Indeed, research is the foundation of the research paper.

Slide 2: What is Research?

Hampshire College defines research as “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.”

I will admit, when reading this in its entirety, this definition is somewhat complex and not easily understood by a research novice.

To better understand this definition, I would like to break it down into more digestible pieces of information.

Slide 3: What is Research?

When conducting college-level research, you must utilize quality data. Data is the information that you use as the foundation of your research paper.

In short, quality data is information that is attained from reliable resources like scholarly journals, primary source documents, and dependable databases.

You should refrain from using any data which is not derived from a dependable resource.

For instance, if you are conducting research about political ideology, you would refrain from using such things as opinion pieces, personal websites, or general internet searches.

Slide 4: What is Research?

Not only should you use valid, scholarly resources, but you must always document the sources of your information.

This is done by using parenthetical citations, or what is known as *in text citation*, and, in a more comprehensive reference page or pages at the end of the document.

Slide 5: What is Research?

When writing a research paper, it is essential to let the content emerge from the data you collect.

In other words, you should not begin writing your essay with a preconceived conclusion of your topic.

Your conclusion will be derived by critically analyzing and interpreting the data.

It is poor research methodology to attain resources to prove your point and eliminate others that do not align with your predetermined outcome.

Indeed, this is not research at all.

Slide 6: What is Research?

Suitable methodologies require some specific clarification.

For experienced researchers or students who are working on capstone projects or dissertations, suitable methodology means steeping your research in quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods research.

For my first or second-year college students, these methodologies do not typically apply.

Nonetheless, when writing a research paper, even if you are not doing an in-depth study requiring strict quantitative or qualitative methodologies, students must still abide by an approved writing style.

For my courses, students will utilize MLA, APA, or Chicago/Turabian styles.

Students enrolled in two-year community colleges typically utilize MLA or Modern Language Association writing style.

In the social sciences, APA, or American Psychological Association, is often the preferred writing style manual.

You should always refer to your professor to confirm which style should be utilized for your research paper.

Slide 7: What is Research

The Office of Research Integrity, a division within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, advises, “Research is a Process to discover new knowledge.”

This is a simple, yet an excellent reminder that research is not about what you already know, it is about what you don’t know.

Slide 8: What is Research

Remember, a college-level research paper must demonstrate the discovery of new knowledge by using legitimate data and scholarly resources.

It is not about what you already know. It is about what you learn by conducting research.

Slide 9: Writing a Research Paper

Before delving into specifics concerning the writing of a research paper, a few key tips are warranted.

First, the student researcher must crucially think, evaluate, organize, and compose.

Slide 10: Writing a Research Paper

Second, rather than viewing the research paper as a burden, think of it as an opportunity to increase your knowledge and understand new subject matters.

Slide 11: Writing a Research Paper

Do not procrastinate, begin your research at the outset of the course and continue to increase your knowledge of the topic by using your coursework as a foundation that is built upon through your continued research of the topic.

Research papers that are thrown together at the last minute seldom receive good grades.

Slide 12: Writing a Research Paper

Always remember, a research paper is not an opinion piece. Rather, it is the culmination of research, critical thinking, source evaluation, and composition.

Do not make the mistake of thinking a research paper will be a quick and easy afternoon project. A research paper requires a significant amount of time and effort.

And understand, a research paper is not simply a reiteration of the sources. Instead, it is a thoughtful analysis of scholarly data.

Slide 13: Writing a Research Paper

There are several types of research papers, but we are going to compare two popular forms.

An argumentative or persuasive paper is one in which the writer introduces a topic and takes a specific stance on the subject.

As the name suggests, the author is arguing a point in an attempt to persuade the reader about her or his point of view.

The problem with this type of paper is that it lends itself to researcher bias. Hence, I seldom assign argumentative papers.

An analytical paper, in contrast, is an exercise in exploration and evaluation of a topic in which the student does not take a specific stance.

In other words, the data is presented without bias, and conclusions are drawn from the research.

If you are one of my students, this is the approach that you will be using for your research paper.

Always maintain a neutral stance when conducting research and let the data drive your conclusion.

Whenever possible, avoid topics in which you will have a difficult time keeping your personal opinions and biases in check.

Slide 14: Writing a Research Paper

The last point that I would like to make before delving into the actual process of writing a research paper is to consider who the audience will be comprised of.

This is extremely important. Just imagine if a typical high school student was asked to read and comprehend a scholarly research article written by an MIT physics Ph.D. for other professionals in the field of physics.

I would not like to say a word about the audience if you are enrolled in one of my classes.

Slide 15: Writing a Research Paper

For my courses, students should direct the research paper towards a general audience of college students with no specific knowledge of the subject matter.

That is to say, the paper should be written at the level of a college student. Not so difficult to read that it requires a lawyer to decipher, and not so rudimentary that it does not delve deeply into serious or complicated topics

Keep in mind that you should not direct your research paper towards an instructor or your college peers who have specific knowledge of the subject.

Indeed, you must explain all concepts and themes, which you introduce, and do not make the assumption that the reader already understands specific references.

For example, if you include a statement concerning topics like popular sovereignty or the International Relations theory of Realism, you must explain these concepts to the reader.

Even historical events like the Articles of Confederation, the Ratification Debates, or the Peace of Westphalia, may not be understood by all readers and must be explained within the context of your paper.

In short, the writer must inform the reader thoroughly.

Slide 16: Starting the Paper

To begin your research paper, make sure that you fully understand the writing prompt and guidelines provided by your instructor.

Based on these guidelines, the topic, and your initial research, it is good practice to create a preliminary outline of your paper.

This outline will help you develop headings and subheadings, which you will use and revise as you proceed through the writing and ongoing data collection processes.

Let us now look at an example prompt for a research paper.

Slide 17: Starting the Paper

For this example, we will use a prompt which you might be asked to write a research paper about in an introductory course in American Politics.

Imagine that you are asked to “Compare and contrast the two primary political parties and their conservative vs. modern liberal (progressive) belief systems. Consider the approach of each party and ideology to moral, economic, societal, and national security issues. Explain how they are alike and how they are different. Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of each party and their prevailing ideology.”

This is a very complex undertaking, so be certain to read and reread the prompt so you fully understand what questions you must address. To make this task easier, it is a good idea to break the prompt into components.

Slide 18: Starting the Paper

For instance, you can narrow this down to four primary issues you must address.

1. Compare and contrast the two primary political parties.
2. Define and explain what is meant by conservative and modern liberal ideologies.
3. Explain how each political party and underlying ideology addresses moral, economic, societal, and national security issues.
4. Consider the strengths and weaknesses of each party and conservative vs. modern liberal/progressive ideology.

These four main issues begin to form an initial outline for your primary headings.

Slide 19: Starting the Paper

However, within each of these four principal categories, you may choose to use a number of second-level headings.

For instance, you might begin a section by defining what is meant by ideology and how this differs from a political party. This would be a first-level heading in bold font and centered on the page.

I should mention that I am using APA style headings because MLA is rather weak and ambiguous in terms of heading and subheading styles.

This might be followed by sub-sections, which define conservatism and modern liberalism as individual sections. Each of these sections would be delineated by a second-level subheading. The titles will be left-aligned in bold.

Learning how to use subheadings is essential when writing research papers. This makes the article easier to read and identifies to the reader what lies ahead. Remember, however, this is an initial outline and will likely change as you collect data and begin the writing process.

Slide 20: Outline Example

To exemplify changes that may take place in your initial outline, I have created a more thorough and somewhat different outline based on new information and a refined rough draft of the paper.

Notice that I included a title, introduction, and thesis statement. Research papers always begin with this introductory paragraph. More on thesis statements later.

Following the introduction, I have decided to start the essay by defining ideologies, followed by sections that explain conservatism and modern liberalism.

The ideologies heading will be centered in bold, and my two 2nd level headings will be left-aligned also in bold font.

Slide 21: Outline Example

You will notice that I have decided to structure the paper a little differently than initially conceived.

I have decided to address each of the two political parties separately. It doesn't matter which party is first, but it is essential to define each political party separately.

These sections will logically begin with a brief introduction and overview of each political party under a first-level heading.

Next, I have reduced the policy preferences of each political party to three rather than four. This was a matter of research. As I conducted the research, I felt that moral and societal issues were logically compatible and could be articulated in the same section.

Slide 22: Outline Example

My final sections include a comparison of the two political parties and several subsections.

The placement of the comparison section is very important. It would be illogical to compare and contrast the two parties before defining ideology, the political parties, and policy positions.

Finally, the paper always ends with a substantive conclusion or discussion.

Keep in mind, this breakdown is entirely hypothetical and is only being used to demonstrate the thought process behind creating an outline.

This outline is certainly not the only approach you could use to address the prompt.

However, I highly recommend using outlines to guide your writing process.

Moreover, headings and sub-headings not only help the person reading a paper, but they also help the author in writing the essay.

Slide 23: Starting the Paper

I would like to say a few final words about starting your paper.

First, once you have completed an outline, begin or continue to collect data and formulate a preliminary thesis statement.

Secondly, remember that your initial outline will probably change as you proceed through the data collection and writing processes.

You should never feel bound by an initial outline. Be malleable and open for change. Sometimes you might have to toss the initial outline and begin fresh.

Lastly, once you have read and understood the prompt, created an outline, and completed a fair amount of research, begin to create a rough draft of your research paper.

But now, let's turn to the thesis statement.

Slide 24: The Thesis Statement

Your thesis statement must be specific and should articulate only what is expressed in the paper.

When appropriate, always support your thesis statement with scholarly evidence.

The thesis statement will appear at the end of the first introductory paragraph.

This will usually always be on the first page of your paper. People sometimes tend to write a very long introduction.

This is not necessary, keep the introduction brief. The details will be expressed in the body of your essay.

Once again, be flexible, your thesis statement will likely change as you acquire new data. Revise your thesis statement accordingly.

Slide 25: The Thesis Statement

Think of your thesis statement as a road map for the paper. It tells the reader where you are heading and what to expect from the rest of the essay.

Slide 26: The Thesis Statement

The thesis statement will reflect the questions posed in the prompt and is usually, but not always, a single sentence.

Please, do not make your instructor search your paper for a thesis statement. If you do, you are not likely to score high on the paper.

Let us now look at a few thesis statement examples.

Slide 27: The Thesis Statement

Before we begin, I want to mention the examples that I am using come from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill writing center.

Imagine you are a student enrolled in an American history class, and you are asked to compare and contrast the reasons that the North and South fought the Civil War.

The first example of a thesis statement claims, “The North and South Fought the Civil War for many reasons, some of which were the same and some different.”

What do you think? Is this a good thesis statement.

No, this is a weak thesis statement. It is vague and doesn't really explain anything.

This statement does not demonstrate any research. Anyone might surmise that the North and South fought the Civil War for many reasons, some different and some the same.

Slide 28: The Thesis Statement

Our next example claims, “While both sides fought the Civil War over the issue of slavery, the North fought for moral reasons while the South fought to preserve its own institutions.”

What do you think? Is this thesis statement better or worse than the first?

This is a much better thesis statement. Maybe not the best, but certainly much better.

Let us now look at one more example.

Slide 29: The Thesis Statement

“While both Northerners and Southerners believed they fought against tyranny and oppression, Northerners focused on the oppression of slaves while Southerners defended their own right to self-government.”

How about this one?

Yes, this is a good thesis statement.

A reader doesn't have to agree with the thesis statement. Indeed, they might not.

It is up to you, the author, to support the thesis statement with scholarly evidence in the body of the paper.

Let us turn now to research and data sources.

Slide 30: Research and Data Sources

A research paper must include a number of well-vetted data sources.

This includes scholarly works found in peer-reviewed journals.

Primary source documents like The Federalist Papers, memoirs, interviews, speeches, and other original documentation.

A primary source is firsthand evidence about some event, person, or object.

Valid data sources are also useful when conducting research. Depending on your topic, you may have to refer to studies, opinion polls, census data, or other sources of legitimate information.

The key here is the data must be valid.

For example, I might be interested in learning about world population growth.

I enter “world population growth” into a Google search and up pops a blog where Bob, the author, claims that the world population will double in the next ten years.

Is this good data? No. Bob may be a nice guy, but what would lead us to believe he is an expert in population data. So, where do we go?

I continue my search and find a website called Compassion.com. This website seems legitimate, it claims world population increases by 1.1 percent, or just over 80 million people per year. But should you rely on this data? Probably not.

However, this website attained this information from a somewhat reliable source, a study by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

This is much better data as it was derived from experts in the field of population.

In addition, this data was supported by a PEW Research Study with identifiable authors and is fairly good data.

Bottom line, research is a little bit like being a detective. Whenever possible, dig as deep as you can and look for confirming sources. Always use the most reliable source.

Slide 31: Research and Data Sources

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

When writing a research paper, these are the predominant resources to utilize.

In terms of sources, you should avoid, do not use Wikipedia or general websites. Even if the website has an official-sounding name like history.com, RealClearPolitics.com, or Political Wire.

Avoid popular magazines, cable news shows, blogs, social media, novels, movies, and anything that is anonymous.

Yes, and avoid our poor blogger named Bob.

Slide 32: Research and Data Sources

A good source for you to use if you have access is your institution's electronic library. Online databases like JSTOR, EBSCO, and ProQuest, are excellent sources for attaining scholarly resources.

Most databases will allow you to limit your selection to articles written in peer-reviewed journals.

Google may be an interesting search tool to gain some preliminary information, but it will seldom produce the type of scholarly sources you will want to use for your research project. Albeit, I have used Goggle Scholar with some limited success.

Remember, all of the sources that you choose to use must be from verifiable scholars, primary works, or legitimate databases.

If you are my student, rest assured, I will check all of your sources.

A research paper is only as good as the resources that you use!

Slide 33: Citing Sources and Plagiarism

Undoubtedly, you already know that plagiarism is unacceptable. Indeed, only a small percentage of my students are tempted to plagiarize.

Nonetheless, it does occur, and I am obliged to comment on this unhappy topic.

I would like to read to you what the MLA manual says about plagiarism.

“Plagiarists are seen not only as dishonest but also as incompetent, incapable of doing research and expressing original thoughts” (MLA, 8th Ed., 2016).

“Even borrowing just a few words from an author without clearly indicating that you did so constitutes plagiarism” (MLA, 8th Ed., 2016).

“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).

Indeed, plagiarism is unacceptable, and I, for one, do not tolerate academic dishonesty.

Be diligent and careful. If you write down a direct quote from an article, even while compiling your draft, always cite the work, so you don't accidentally include it without a proper citation in your paper.

Do this, not only for direct quotes but also for any and all ideas or insights that you attain from the work of another person.

Do not be afraid of citing extensively throughout your paper.

Remember, you must demonstrate that you have done the research, and in-text citations, along with a comprehensive reference page, is the way to do this.

Slide 34: Citing Sources and Plagiarism

But what is plagiarism?

Very simply, plagiarism is taking someone else's work or ideas and passing them off as your own.

Don't do this!

All of the sources that influenced your paper must be cited!

Slide 35: Citing Sources and Plagiarism

You must cite your sources both in-text and in a works cited page (MLA), bibliography (Chicago/Turabian), or reference page (APA).

Let us now look at an example of an in-text citation for a direct quote. This example comes from an MLA example paper which is available at the Purdue Online Writing Lab.

A student writes, “With the improvements in transportation, twenty-five percent of farmers’ products were sold for commercial gain, and by 1825, farming ‘became a business rather than a way of life’ (Hurt 128)”.

This sentence includes an in-text citation at the end of the sentence.

This is in MLA format, and if you are using APA or Chicago style, you should refer to those specific writing style manuals.

Slide 36: Citing Sources and Plagiarism

In general, I do not allow students to use more than one or two direct quotes in a paper. I prefer paraphrasing because it demonstrates the student's understanding of the topic.

Always refer to your syllabus and instructor guidelines concerning the use of direct quotes.

This next example comes from the same work provided by the Purdue Online Writing Laboratory.

This, however, is an example of using an in-text citation for a paraphrase.

Notice in this example, there is no direct quote, but the author is acknowledging the source of information by using an in-text citation.

Slide 37: Citing Sources and Plagiarism

So, what is paraphrasing?

Paraphrasing is applying the ideas articulated by a scholar or primary source and conveying this in your own words.

Paraphrasing does NOT mean that you can simply change a few words in a sentence written by someone else.

You must use “in-text” citations for all ideas of another person, even if you are restating these concepts in your own words.

In addition to citing your sources in-text, you must also provide a more comprehensive works cited page, bibliography, or reference page.

We will now take a look at an MLA style works cited page followed by an APA style reference page.

Slide 38: Citing Sources and Plagiarism

Once again, this information was attained via the Purdue Online Writing Laboratory. Notice that the references are in alphabetical order and utilize hanging indents.

The first line is left-aligned, and all other lines in each citation are indented. The opposite of how you would construct the body of your paper.

In addition, you can see that there is enough information included so the reader can actually find the source for further reading or verification.

Slide 39: Citing Sources and Plagiarism

In APA, which I greatly prefer or MLA, you will notice the formatting is similar but somewhat more comprehensive. Sources are still alphabetized and utilize hanging indents.

With the exception of books, these sources include websites where you can find the information, like my own work listed last, or DOI numbers, which stands for digital object identifier.

The DOI number is used to identify the work in an electronic journal article.

Slide 40: Citing Sources and Plagiarism

I cannot stress enough; how important it is to use good sources and properly cite those sources when writing a research paper.

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. First, it is necessary to avoid plagiarism, but secondly, it demonstrates that you have done the research.

Slide 41: General Guidelines

Now for some general guidelines

The research paper should be well organized and structured in a linear and logical format.

This begins with a sound introduction and a succinct thesis statement.

Each section must logically flow from one to the next in a comprehensible manner.

Think of the research paper as a report summarizing your answers to the research questions via scholarly information that you gathered.

Slide 42: General Guidelines

Prior to writing your research paper, be sure to refer to the writing criteria and guidelines provided by your instructor.

In my courses, writing standards and general writing guidelines are provided in the Course Syllabus.

Be sure to read all of the writing requirements and talk to your professor if you have any questions regarding the preferred writing standards.

Slide 43: Good Practices

With regard to good writing practices, never procrastinate or wait until 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 a research paper is not an opinion paper.

Refrain from using too many direct quotes unless it is approved by your instructor.

As I previously mentioned, I do not like my students using direct quotes.

To avoid using direct quotes, write the essay entirely in your own words.

Slide 44: Good Practices

Always base your essay on substantiated facts and not subjective opinion.

Thoroughly review, edit, and check your paper for structure, punctuation, and grammatical errors before submitting the assignment.

Do not use words like “I,” “Me,” “We,” “Our,” and “Mine” when writing your essay. Research papers should not use personal pronouns.

And don't do what I did and end a sentence with etcetera.

Slide 45: Clearly Communicating Ideas

At this point, I would like to bring up the extremely important topic of clearly communicating ideas. This is an area in which many students struggle.

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

It is a good idea to have a friend, family member, or peer read your paper before you submit it to the teacher.

Ask this person to be critical and whether they clearly understood the paper from beginning to end.

Slide 46: Clearly Communicating Ideas

Some additional points which will help you to become a better writer and clearly communicate your thoughts are personification, also known as anthropomorphizing, clichés, jargon, vague language, and KISS or keep it short and simple.

We will take a quick look at each of these five issues.

Slide 47: Clearly Communicating Ideas

I will admit, personification is a difficult habit to overcome. If you attentively listen to this lecture, you will notice, I have engaged, at times, in personification.

This is somewhat acceptable when using the spoken word but should be avoided when writing a research paper.

But what is it?

Personification occurs when an object is assigned a humanlike characteristic when it is not human.

Here are some examples

I will let you view these on your own, but let's take a look at the final entry in this table.

The column on the left reads, "The paper discusses information about student scores."

This is an impossibility. A paper cannot discuss anything. A paper does not have a mouth.

Therefore, the author should rewrite the sentence, like "The paper includes information about student scores."

Personification should be avoided.

Slide 48: Clearly Communicating Ideas

Another thing that should be avoided in scholarly writing is the use of Clichés.

Clichés are informal expressions that include overused phrases.

They are vague, unoriginal, boring, and lack credibility.

I have provided a few examples of clichés in this table.

The first example used two clichés in a single sentence but is easily rewritten without the use of a single cliché.

My favorite cliché, however, is “There’s no such thing as a stupid question.”

Actually, there is.

For instance, if someone were to ask me, after watching this video, if it is good practice to write a research paper the day it is due by directly copying a Wikipedia article.

Well, I might put that into the category of stupid questions.

Slide 49: Clearly Communicating Ideas

Jargon should also be avoided.

Jargon is language that is specific to a group or profession and is not appropriate in your research paper.

For instance, if we look at the second example, *quid pro quo* is legal jargon, and *earmarks* are political jargon, which people who are politicians, lawyers, or political scientists, may understand. But people who are not immersed in these professions may not understand.

Slide 50: Clearly Communicating Ideas

While I have not found the use of jargon to be particularly problematic among my students, the use of vague language is a big issue.

Refrain from using vague language, and do not assume the reader knows about what you are writing. Always be clear and specific.

Here are a few examples.

Do not use the word this, unless it is followed by a descriptive noun. Better yet, don't use it at all.

The first example reads, "This is a problem because it impacts the tenets of federalism." This is vague. What is "this?"

A better way to write this sentence is, "Increasing power at the national level is a problem because it impacts the tenets of federalism." Now the reader knows what "this" is.

Likewise, in the second example, who is "they," and in the third example, who is "she." Always be specific when writing a research paper.

Slide 51: Clearly Communicating Ideas

Lastly, when writing a research paper, keep your sentences short and simple. This doesn't mean you can't use college-level words, just don't try to put a bunch of ideas into one lengthy sentence, particularly when there is a more concise way to write the sentence.

No-one will be impressed.

Have some pity on the reader. Imagine having to suffer through this, "Having read this, one can conclude that dual sovereignty has succumbed to forces which have led to an imbalance between federal and state authority, sovereignty, and power in the United States and its approach to federalism."

When it can be simplified into "The United States has realized a transfer of power from the states to the federal government."

Slide 52: Adjectives

It is also important to avoid, or at least be very careful when using adjectives.

Adjectives are expressive. They describe a person, place, or thing.

This fact, in and of itself, is not the problem.

Adjectives, however, should be avoided when possible because they can frequently show author bias or subjectivity.

For example, “The President’s policy is terrible.”

Well, the President’s policy may indeed be terrible, but don’t decide for the reader, let the reader decide based on the objective content of your paper.

Likewise, “The President’s policy is fantastic” is a judgment call that shows bias.

Your job as a researcher is to present the facts.

Both examples demonstrate bias, and this has no place when writing an academic research paper.

Now we will take a look at some actual passages from student papers as an exercise in critiquing the content.

I call this, the Don’t Do This!!! Section

Slide 53: Don’t Do This!!!

I would like to read you this passage before we take a closer look.

History of The Declaration of Independence

The united states would not be where it's at if it wasn't for the strong fight they overcame in the fight with Great Britain. The declaration of independence plays a huge role into the United States even in today's modern America. The Declaration of independence was a document that declared the thirteen colonies independent from Great Britain. It was a long process to go through due to Great Britain not cooperating and being stubborn through the way. The Declaration of independence had a very bad and difficult journey and took lots of time for colonists to be heard. Colonists risked their life in order to have the declaration seen by King George and have him change his mind on certain things occurring. All those things are what shaped America on what it's like today.

Undoubtedly you have found a few flaws in this passage, but pause the video for a few moments and try to pick out as many errors as you can.

Slide 54: Don't Do This!!!

Now you could not have known this, but the research paper prompt did not ask for a “History of the Declaration of Independence.” This is not an insignificant point.

When writing your research paper, you must stick to the prompt provided by the instructor and do not stray from the writing prompt, or fabricate something different.

Slide 55: Don't Do This!!!

In this first sentence, there are a number of issues. The first thing that stands out is United States is not capitalized. For college students, capitalization errors are unacceptable. Secondly, when writing a research paper, be sure to spell words out completely. Contractions should not be used.

Slide 56: Don't Do This!!!

Moreover, who are “they,” and what was “the fight.” This is vague and makes the assumption that the reader already knows what the writer is articulating.

It is like being thrown into the middle of a bad movie in which the viewer has no idea what is happening.

Slide 57: Don't Do This!!!

In the second sentence, we can see again, the author failed to utilize proper capitalization.

Slide 58: Don't Do This!!!

In addition, the statement is vague and empty.

What does it mean “plays a huge role into the United States even in today’s modern America?”

Although, to give credit where credit is due (sorry for the cliché, but I couldn’t resist), the author does capitalize United States and America.

Slide 59: Don't Do This!!!

The final five words of this second sentence do not provide any substance at all and should be eliminated.

Taken in its entirety, there is no valuable information in this sentence. It is just filling page space.

When writing a research paper, the author must put time and effort into each and every word of each and every sentence.

When writing a sentence, always ask yourself if what you are writing is important, has substance, and if it is necessary.

If not, eliminate the sentence, or start over.

Every sentence must have significance and logically flow from one to the next.

Slide 60: Don't Do This!!!

The third sentence is also problematic for a number of reasons. First of all, it assumes the reader has some understanding of the “thirteen colonies.”

It is the writer's obligation to introduce the reader to the topic. The reader may have no knowledge of American history.

Amusingly, or sadly perhaps, the writer does get the Declaration of Independence half right this time.

Obviously, the author understands that it should be capitalized, but failed to do so correctly.

Although I do not know the circumstances behind the writing of this paper, my guess is the student attempted to throw this together a couple of hours before it was due.

Yet, I typically give students a couple of months, or more, to do the research and write their papers.

Again, never procrastinate when writing a research paper, it does not end well.

Slide 61: Don't Do This!!!

On another note, be careful not to use the same word, or similar word when writing sentences.

Use a Thesaurus.

The use of the word declared is too similar to declaration and could easily be substituted with something like *avowed*.

Slide 62: Don't Do This!!!

The fourth sentence in this opening paragraph is vague and pointless.

What does it mean, “It was a long process to go through due to Great Britain not cooperating and being stubborn through the way.”

This sentence serves no purpose, is poorly written, and should be eliminated.

Slide 63: Don't Do This!!!

The fifth sentence is equally destitute of any literary substance.

First, the Declaration of Independence did not take a journey.

Second, what is meant by it “took lots of time for colonists to be heard.”

I teach political science, and I am baffled by this statement.

Slide 64: Don't Do This!!!

“Colonists risked their life in order to have the declaration seen by King George and have him change his mind on certain things occurring.”

Well, all I can say is, could this be any vaguer and more cryptic?

Once again, there is no substance in this sentence.

Slide 65: Don't Do This!!!

“All those things are what shaped America on what it's like today.”

All I can think of is, “All what on what?”

Slide 66: Don't Do This!!!

Besides the lack of any literary substance, this paragraph did not have a thesis statement or any cited sources.

Slide 67: Don't Do This!!!

The bottom line is, don't do this.

If you struggle with writing, get help, and practice.

Writing does not come easy, but it is an essential and integral part of being a successful college student.

I would like to move on now to an example of a plagiarized paper and a few other common writing errors.

Slide 68: Plagiarism Example

While I understand you may not be able to read the words on the screen, this is not important.

This is a copy of one page of a paper that was entirely plagiarized.

This was a document returned to me from Turnitin.com. Each of the color-coded sections was copied directly from various internet pages, word for word with no citations.

Surprisingly, this was turned in by a former student, an A student, very smart, and had always turned in exceptional work.

When I asked this student why she/he had done this, the student informed me that she/he had waited until the last minute and opted to cheat on the paper.

This student no longer has a 4.0 GPA. Please don't do this.

Slide 69: Don't Do This!!!

Now back to more, don't do this!

This is a single sentence from a paper I received. I have included this for a couple of reasons.

First, this is an example of a very common problem.

But what is the problem?

I will read this to you, "A textbook, 'American Government and Politics Today', written by Barbara A. Bardes, Mack C. Shelley II, and Steffen W. Schmidt, these authors write about many historical events that occurred and the politics behind it."

Did you find any problem with this sentence? Maybe several!

But first, what is the point behind this sentence? This is not only inappropriate, but the statement also does not contribute, in any way, to the substance of the paper.

There is a second issue, which I find to be very common among my students.

Slide 70: Don't Do This!!!

Most of what is written, even if there was value to the sentence is inappropriate.

When referring to authors, use last names only.

If the reader wants to know the name of the textbook, she or he can find it in the reference page.

Not to mention, it is rather apparent that a political science textbook would contain information about many historical events.

But the last thing I would like to point out is regarding tense. Since the textbook was written in the past, the proper tense should be "wrote," not "write."

Slide 71: Don't Do This!!!

Here is another opening paragraph written by a student.

“Why do we celebrate the 4th of July? From what was gained from the 4th of July? To whom or what exactly have we derived independence from? But most important of all, what has caused the people to strive for their independence in the first place? Frankly, everyone had first derived from one of the Allied Powers, Great Britain and all eventually grew to hate their king at the time.”

What do you think the issue is?

Slide 72: Don't Do This!!!

Do not ask questions when writing a research paper. Make statements!

In addition, do not use personal pronouns. In this instance, the use of the word “we” is assumptive, and for some readers, it may be very offensive.

The author assumes the reader identifies as “we.” But what if the reader is not from the United States?

Slide 73: Don't Do This!!!

But once again, with the exception of advanced research papers, it is generally poor form to ask questions in your research paper.

Slide 74: Don't Do This!!!

In addition, be clear and factual when formulating sentences and paragraphs.

This final sentence, “Frankly, everyone had first derived from one of the Allied Powers, Great Britain and all eventually grew to hate their king at the time.”

The word “frankly” has no place in this paper. The Allied Powers refers to World War II-era alliances, and who was “everyone” that grew to hate their king.”

Be very careful with making definitive statements like “everyone.” Not to mention, there are no citations for this passage. And no thesis statement at all.

Slide 75: Don't Do This!!!

We will not look at one more paragraph as an exercise in identifying writing errors.

This student rights,

“Over the decades the United States had been having struggles with the british, so after the american revolution war. The thirteen british north colonies became the “United States of America, after the United States of America declared itself independent on July 2,1776. Later the Declaration of Independence was adopted by the Second Continental Congress on August 2,1776 (Barbara 35). The Declaration of Independence was written by Thomas Jefferson who became inspired by John Locke philosophy words.”

Now pause the video and see how many writing errors you can spot.

Slide 76: Don't Do This!!!

I have highlighted a few of the errors in this paragraph.

British is not capitalized, nor is American Revolution. American Revolution war should read the American Revolution.

British north colonies is incorrectly written and factually incorrect. United States has one quotation mark, why I do not know.

The United States of America did not declare itself independent, this is an impossibility.

August 2, 1776, was not the day the Declaration of Independence was adopted.

The citation reads (Barbara). This is the authors first name, plus there were additional authors. The citation should read (Bardes et al.) or more appropriately include the other authors.

The phrase “by John Locke philosophy words” is incoherent.

There might be more. I got tired.

Slide 77: Don't Do This!!!

But on the lighter side, one of my all-time favorite student quotes came from a student, who when describing the authors of the Federalist Papers, referred to them as...

“Alexander Hamilton and his Gucci gang, John Jay and James Madison, the Bad Boys of the Constitution.”

Slide 78: Resources

There are many writing resources available that can help you learn to become an even better writer.

I have useful websites listed on the screen. In addition, it is very helpful to use bibliographic software or applications like Endnote or KnightCite.

To end this lecture on writing research papers, I want to thank you very much for taking the time to view this presentation, and I truly wish you the best of luck in your writing endeavors.

Please feel free to visit my website, send me an email, or even a research paper that you are writing.

Have a great day!

The college writing center and library.

The Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL)

<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/658/1/>

Harvard College Writing Center

<https://writingcenter.fas.harvard.edu/pages/resources>

Amherst College: Online Resources for Writers

<https://www.amherst.edu/academiclife/support/writingcenter>

Hamilton College: Writing Center

<https://www.hamilton.edu/academics/centers/writing>

Peter A. Zitko: Education Website <https://www.zitko.net/>