

DEVELOPING A RESEARCH PAPER

The following steps are suggested to help a student approach a research paper assignment:

1. Investigate topic choices
2. Write a research question
3. Find and evaluate sources
4. Take good notes using those sources
5. Assemble the paper

Investigate topic choices

- Consider topic choices based on the assignment requirements.
- Review a variety of sources to narrow the topic: class, textbook, discussion, assignment, personal interest.
- Get an overview or understanding of the choices. This will help determine the quantity and quality of support material and help narrow the topic choice.

Write a research question

- It should not be too broad or too narrow, nor should it be simply a statement of fact.
- Provide the answer. This will be the focus of the paper and should be specific, manageable, and interesting.
- Form other questions about the selected topic that will assist in focusing the research effort. Think of both factual (who, what, where, when) and interpretive (why, original thinking) questions.

Find and evaluate sources

- Look for resources that answer the research question.
- Review the assignment for the types, timeliness, and quantity of sources needed.
- Consider and collect a variety of support materials: print (books, magazines, and newspapers), electronic (databases, websites), audio (TV, radio, and film), primary, and secondary.
- Look for sources that provide the following: background information, explanations of concepts, evidence, examples, varied perspectives, expert opinions, and visual aids.

Take good notes on the sources

- Record the bibliographic information for each source. This is the basis of the works cited, reference or bibliography section.
- Takes notes only on information that relates to answering the research questions.
- Keep logs (or note cards) of each source on facts, quotes, opinions, supporting evidence, and other relevant data.

Assemble the paper

- While performing the above steps, it may be necessary to revise the research question.
- The answer to the research question will be the thesis (what the research paper is about) and it will appear in the introduction.
- Use the log notes to help organize the paper, and create a working outline or plan.
- Create a draft and incorporate the supporting sources.
- Get feedback and revise the paper.
- Review assignment requirements and document all appropriate material.
- Do a final proofread and edit before submitting.

(Source material: *The Everyday Writer*, 4th edition)