

Writing Your Research Paper: A Step-by-Step Checklist

Use this checklist as a guide to help you organize, research, and write a research paper.



Step #1: Lay the foundation

- _____ 1. Select your source readings
- _____ 2. Choose a topic and restrict the subject
- _____ 3. Jot down your initial opinions
- _____ 4. Develop a preliminary thesis

Step #2: Gather data

- _____ 1. Brainstorm about useful sources
- _____ 2. Collect your research materials:
 - a) books
 - b) journals and periodicals
 - c) newspapers and magazines
 - d) material from databases, such as Galileo, JStor, etc.
 - e) creative sources, such as films, interviews, close observations, etc.
- _____ 3. Document and annotate the bibliography in MLA style

Step #3: Write the draft

- _____ 1. Review your materials and take notes
- _____ 2. Develop an idea map and/or outline
- _____ 3. Place your notes in order
- _____ 4. Add quotes, avoiding plagiarism
- _____ 5. Articulate an informed opinion

Most of this material is based on the research process as described by James D. Lester in *Writing Research Papers: A Complete Guide*, 2nd ed. (1971; rpt. Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman, 1976). Some of the material has been adapted from "Writing Research Papers: A Step-by-Step Procedure," Purdue University Online Writing Lab

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Step #4: Polish the paper

- _____ 1. Rewrite as necessary, paying attention to the paper's organization and the logical progression of its ideas
 - a) put your thoughts where they best complement your research
 - b) consider the "so what?" and rework the thesis in line with your research and opinions
 - c) connect everything with effective transitions
- _____ 2. Perhaps reposition the thesis
- _____ 3. Strengthen your introduction and conclusion
- _____ 4. Double-check your citations
- _____ 5. Correct any grammatical and mechanical errors
- _____ 6. Review your formatting

Step #5: Check your work

- _____ 1. Read the paper out loud, as a whole, and listen for tone and style
- _____ 2. Make sure that the paper has a viable thesis and meets the assignment guidelines



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