

Rutgers Learning Centers

At Camden Campus

WRITING: RESEARCH PAPERS

A student's first attempt at preparing a research paper can be overwhelming. The instructions may seem vague, the handbooks may seem unclear, and resource materials may seem puzzling. Following is a series of steps that will assist you to complete your research paper in a thorough and a timely manner:

Verify style and length of paper with your professor — MLA, APA, ACS or CBE — each style has a format for presenting texts, citations, works cited and bibliographic information.

Establish a time schedule — Don't just highlight due dates; each research section takes time — Plan accordingly!

Find a topic — Ideas can come from personal experience, discussion with others, your imagination. Also look for a topic by checking computerized bibliographies, book indices, encyclopedia articles. Consider ideas that would interest your audience. Develop a primary thesis: What is the idea that you would like to prove, analyze or maintain?

Gather data — Is your research limited to only specific years and specific sources? Read articles, essays, books, reviews, abstracts and periodicals. Record bibliographic information of each promising source on the front side of an individual 3 X 5 index card; record important ideas and quotations. Be sure to copy information accurately and completely.

Take notes — Prepare a preliminary outline:

- (1) What are you going to talk about (main idea)?
- (2) What do you want to learn, analyze or explain about your idea?
- (3) Write each of your thoughts or questions on a separate note card. Keep these cards separate from your bibliography cards.
- (4) Group cards together into some major categories. You are now ready to prepare your working outline.

Make a working outline — Note cards should be arranged as follows:

- (1) Introduction
- (2) Thesis
- (3) Several concrete discussion ideas that support your thesis
- (4) Relevant personal opinions supported with documentation

Bibliography cards should be arranged in the same sequence as your note cards. Prepare your outline, listing main and supporting ideas with their associated bibliographic quotations.

ANY QUOTE OR RESTATEMENT OF MATERIAL THAT IS NOT YOUR OWN MUST BE CITED

Write the first draft of your paper — This step is sometimes called the "rough" draft — not because it is difficult but because it is not as polished as your final draft will be. Following the sequence of your note and bibliography cards, your paper should have an introduction, a thesis statement, several examples that support your thesis, and a conclusion that relates to your thesis. Your paper should also include a list of works cited in the MLA or APA format, etc.

Editing and completion — Make smooth paragraph transitions; check grammar, punctuation, spelling. Verify citations for completeness and accuracy. Prepare and read your final draft.

For more information, visit or call your nearest Rutgers Learning Center, or visit our website: <http://rlc.rutgers.edu>

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