

# Writing a Research Paper

## Research

The most important part about writing a research paper is selecting a topic that you can then research. Make sure to check out our [Writing a Research Prospectus](#) and [Library Research](#) sections for some tips and ideas to help you with your research. The key is to narrow your topic enough so that you can focus your research while still keeping it broad enough to find enough information for your paper. There is no good way to know if it is too broad or too narrow of a topic until you have actually started researching. It is a long process, so make sure you leave yourself enough time to properly research the topic.

After deciding on a topic, you can search online or on the library catalog for online and print sources. Just putting your topic into a search engine is not enough. The whole point of research is to find enough research so that you are more than prepared to write your paper. *NOTE: not all of your research will end up in your paper.*

After finding sources that you feel might be relevant to your topic, sit down and begin reading through them. You can do this in the library before you check the books out or on your computer for online resources. What you're looking for is some bit or bits of information that applies to your topic that you can use in some way. Again, not all of this information will find its way into your actual paper, but it will give you an idea as to what you need to write about or as to what information is out there.

While you're reading, make notes about possible sources – including page numbers so you can find the information later. Decide what sources you want, what sources you might want, and what sources you definitely cannot use.

## Writing

When actually sitting down to write the paper, come up with an argument or point that you want to prove in the paper. This is the beginning of your thesis statement (for help with these, check out our [Thesis Statements](#) worksheet), but most arguments change after the actual writing process. Sometimes it takes writing to figure out what you're really trying to say. If this is the case, taking the conclusion from this first draft and editing it to make a suitable introduction can often be helpful.

Introduce your claim, then immediately provide support to explain or analyze your argument. Again, a thesis is arguable – someone can agree or disagree with it. Your thesis statement sets up the layout of your paper, so make sure you can talk about thesis statement-related points in more than one paragraph.

If you're having trouble writing a thesis statement, sometimes it is easier to begin writing your paper. You can often find a thesis statement out of what you have written. It can be difficult to

set a narrow, focused thesis statement. As mentioned earlier, writing your paper about one broad topic, finding a thesis statement, and then editing the paper may help.

Direct quotations offer textual proof that your claim is valid, and they need to be used appropriately and seamlessly to be effective. Make sure to introduce the quote with your own analysis, and make sure you analyze the quote after you use it; don't immediately change topics. You want your quotes to work for you instead of supporting them. By framing quotes with your own words, you make sure that they are working to prove your argument. The same thing goes for framing paragraphs and framing your paper: you always want to start and end with your own claims and words.

Your conclusion should bring a logical closure to your paper and should summarize your argument. You want to be sure to leave the readers with a lesson or a point for having read your paper. If you're having an issue with the conclusions, make sure to check out our [Conclusions](#) worksheet.

## **Works Cited or References**

Depending on what style guide you use, make sure to collect all sources used and put them in a works cited or references section at the end of your paper alphabetically. Check out your style guide for the proper format.

As with anything else, come to Auditorium Building room 105, and let us help you.