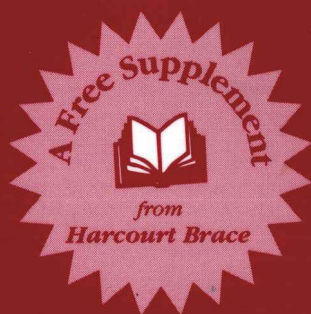


# WRITING IN THE DISCIPLINES



THIRD EDITION

# WRITING IN THE DISCIPLINES

Third Edition

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# **PREPARING TO WRITE FOR RESEARCH**

## **IDENTIFYING A RESEARCH QUESTION OR FORMING A HYPOTHESIS**

In all disciplines, research is conducted to answer questions that someone wants answered. Consequently, when you as a student receive a writing assignment involving research, you must first identify the explicitly posed or the underlying question and then conduct research to answer it. The more sharply focused the question is, the more focused the response will be. If the assignment is fairly open and does not express a question, you will need to identify a question that you would like to have answered or that you think someone else would like to have answered. As you go through your notes on classwork, readings, and other sources, try to identify such a question. The answer to this question will be your paper's thesis statement.

Some scientific research begins with a question, and some begins with a tentative answer to a research question, which researchers call a hypothesis. If you begin with a question, the purpose of your research and subsequent paper will be to answer the question. If you begin with a statement that is a tentative answer to your question (a hypothesis in the sciences), the purpose of your research and paper will be to prove or disprove this statement.

## **ANSWERING A RESEARCH QUESTION OR SUPPORTING A HYPOTHESIS**

The various disciplines require you to answer your question or support your hypothesis with different types of research. Some questions, particularly those in the humanities, may be answered by library research; however, others will require methods of data collection like field research, case studies, analyses of statistics, and questionnaires.

Once you have determined the type of research you need to conduct and either located your sources or designed your tools for data collection, you must think critically. Ask yourself how relevant, valid, and accurate your sources are. If your sources are not believable, your readers will question your credibility as a researcher and the argument you will develop. Therefore, as you choose your research materials—and later, as you take notes—you need to make judgments about the credibility of sources.

## TAKING NOTES

Whether you are a student of humanities, social science, natural science, or business, you will find note taking an important part of preparation for writing. Once you have mastered note-taking skills, you can apply them to writing assignments in any discipline.

Whenever you have a writing assignment or anticipate getting one, determine the questions the assignment is asking or will ask you to answer. Then begin to take notes on relevant material: observations, interviews, and textbook and library readings.

For instance, when you are reading a book or article, survey it, checking the headings and subheadings in the table of contents, and especially the index, for subjects you need to read carefully or to skim. As you read, underline and annotate sources whenever possible, and then take notes on index cards. Concentrated reading can help you narrow your focus still further as you see connections among ideas and develop new perspectives. As you read and take notes, you will move toward a thesis. This thesis will answer the stated or implied question behind your assignment and become the statement that your paper will support.

## MAKING NOTE CARDS

Using index cards may seem cumbersome, but their advantages become obvious when you go about arranging and rearranging material. Often you do not know where you will use a particular piece of information or whether you will use it at all. You will be constantly rearranging ideas, and the flexibility of index cards



makes adding and deleting information and experimenting with different sequences possible. Students who take notes in a notebook or on a tablet find that they spend as much time untangling their notes as they do writing their paper.

At the top of each card, *include a short heading* that relates the information on your card to your area of interest. Later, this heading may help you make your outline.

Each card should *accurately identify the source* of the information you are recording. These sources may be media, conversations or interviews, records, articles, or books. You need not include the complete citation, but you must include enough information to identify your source. "Wilson 72," for example, would send you back to your bibliography card carrying the complete documentation for *Patriotic Gore* by Edmund Wilson. For a book with more than one author, or for two books by the same author, you need a more complete reference. "Glazer & Moynihan 132" would suffice for *Beyond the Melting Pot* by Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan. "Terkel, *Working* 135" would be necessary if you were using more than one book by Studs Terkel.

Here is one good note-card format. It illustrates notes taken from a book, but the format is applicable to all types of note taking.

		Art Style & Self Image	Short heading
Author, page	—	Alschuler 260	
Note	—	Children's view of themselves in society is reflected by their art style. A cramped, crowded art style using only a portion of the paper shows their limited role. The society consists of home, school, and friends.	

As you take notes on note cards, you can do several things that will make the actual writing of your paper easier.

**Put only one note on each card.** If one card contains several different points, you will not be able to try out different ways of arranging those points.

**Include everything now that you will need later to understand your note.** You might think, for instance, that this makes sense:

Peyser--four important categories of new music

But in several weeks you will not remember what those four categories were. They should have been listed on your card.

**Put an author's comments into your own words whenever possible.** Word-for-word copying of information is probably the most inefficient way to take notes. Occasionally you will want to copy down a particularly memorable statement or the exact words of an expert on your topic, and such quotations can strengthen your paper. But in your paper, for the most part, you will summarize and paraphrase your source material, adding your own observations and judgments. Putting information into your own words now keeps you from relying too heavily on the words of others or producing a paper that is a string of quotations rather than a thoughtful interpretation and analysis of ideas.

**Remember to record your own observations and reactions.** As you read your sources, get into the habit of writing down all the ideas—comments, questions, links with other sources, apparent contradictions, and so on—that occur to you. If you do not, you will probably forget them. But be sure to bracket your own reactions and observations so you will not confuse them with the author's material.

**Indicate what kind of information is on your note card.** If you copy an author's exact words, place them in quotation marks. If you use an author's ideas but not the exact words, do not use quotation marks. (Do not forget, however, to identify your source.) Finally, if you write down your own ideas, enclose them in brackets ([ ]). This system helps you avoid confusion—and plagiarism.

The student who wrote this note card was exploring the way the press portrayed President Richard Nixon during the Watergate crisis. Note that he has included only one note on his card, that both his note and its source are as complete as possible, and that he has clearly identified the first sentence as a summary ("The authors say . . . ") and the other comments as his own.

## Watergate

Woodward &amp; Bernstein 366

The authors say that by the summer of 1973 both Alexander Haig and Henry Kissinger urged Richard Nixon to cut his ties with his aides. [Is there any evidence of this? What sources support this? Seems doubtful.]

*Quotation Note Cards*

You *quote* when you copy an author's remarks just as they appear in your source, word for word, including all punctuation, capitalization, and spelling. When recording quotations, enclose all words that are not your own within quotation marks and identify your source with appropriate documentation. Check carefully to make sure that you have not inadvertently left out quotation marks or miscopied material from your source.

## Matterhorn Accident

Whymper 393

"Others may tread its summit-snows, but none will ever know the feelings of those who first gazed upon its marvelous panorama, and none, I trust, will ever be compelled to tell of joy turned into grief and of laughter into mourning."

*Paraphrase Note Cards*

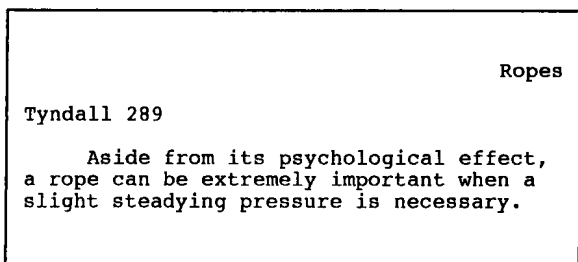
A *paraphrase* is a detailed restatement, in your own words, of the content of a passage. In it you not only present the main points of your source, but also retain their order and emphasis as well. A paraphrase will often include brief phrases quoted from the original to convey its tone or viewpoint. When you write a paraphrase, you should present only the author's ideas and keep your own interpretations, conclusions, and evaluations separate.

You paraphrase when you need detailed information from specific passages of a source but not the author's exact language. For this reason paraphrase is especially useful when you are presenting technical material to a general audience. It can also be

helpful for reporting complex material or a particularly intricate discussion in easily understood terms. Although the author's concepts may be essential, the terms in which they are described could be far too difficult for your readers to follow. In such cases paraphrase enables you to give a complete sense of the author's ideas without using his or her words. Paraphrase is also useful when you want to convey the sense of a section of a work of literature or a segment of dialogue.

**Original:** Tyndall, Hours of Exercise (on the advantage of using a rope while mountain climbing):

Not to speak of the moral effect of its presence, an amount of help upon a dangerous slope that might be measured by the gravity of a few pounds is often of incalculable importance.



### *Summary Note Cards*

Unlike a paraphrase, which is a detailed restatement of a source, a summary is a general restatement, in your own words, of the meaning of a passage. Always much shorter than the original, a summary provides an overview of a piece of writing, focusing on the main idea. Because of its brevity, a summary usually eliminates the illustrations, secondary details, and asides that characterize the original. Like a paraphrase, a summary does not contain your interpretations, conclusions, or evaluations.

You summarize when you want to convey a general sense of an author's ideas to your readers. Summary is a useful technique when you want to record the main idea, but not the specific points or the exact words, of something that you have read. Because it need not follow the order or emphasis of a source, summary enables you to relate an author's ideas to your topic in a way that paraphrase and quotation do not.

## Ropes

Tyndall 289-90

In the 1800s, climbers thought ropes would help prevent falls by steadying mountain climbers who had lost their balance. However, the rope could be fatal to all tied to it if a climber actually fell.

*Computer Note Taking*

More and more researchers are beginning to save their notes on computer files. Sometimes this is done in the course of preparing an annotated bibliography. This task simplifies the preparation of your final paper greatly as it is often possible to copy sections from your notes into the main body of your paper. When you enter your notes into a "notes file" on computer, try to visualize your screen as an index card. Be sure to enter the complete bibliographic citation in the proper format. If you do so, you can assemble all the citations from your notes to prepare the bibliography.

**ORGANIZING IDEAS**

As you take notes, you need to organize your information into categories, each of which should be unified by a topic sentence that advances your argument. Each topic sentence will be supported by specific details and examples culled from your research. For instance, a sociological description of the "working mother" might provide these particulars: age 34; 81.6 percent employed with a household income of \$40,000; interested in buying self-improvement, career guidance, jewelry, and beauty aids. These facts and figures can help to support a general point you may wish to make about the working mother.

Papers in all academic disciplines often include the following components.

1. An introduction in which you pose a research question and state your thesis.

2. A short review of literature describing the work of others out of which your research question grew.
3. Evidence to support your thesis.
4. Acknowledgment of opposing points of view and an explanation of how they differ from your point of view.
5. A conclusion which restates your thesis and summarizes your research.

This general arrangement covers a wide array of papers. Suppose, for instance, you were arguing the benefits to children of having a working mother. After using an interesting anecdote or example or statistic that had appeared in a newspaper, you could state the following thesis: "Children of working mothers often develop better social skills and greater financial responsibility as a result of their experiences in child care." This thesis could be followed by a narrative paragraph describing the available information on the development of children of working mothers. You would then go on to break down your supporting argument into its major parts. After supporting each aspect of your thesis with evidence, you can present opposing points of view and show their shortcomings. Then, restate your thesis in your conclusion.

All academic disciplines rely on certain familiar patterns of organizing material. *Comparison and contrast* is one such standard method of arranging ideas. In comparison and contrast, you bring together the similarities and dissimilarities of the subjects you are writing about to support a particular statement. The following paragraph from a sociology textbook supports the statement "Mexican-Americans have faced a great deal of prejudice and discrimination" by comparing and contrasting their experiences to those of blacks and Anglos.

Clearly Mexican-Americans have faced a great deal of prejudice and discrimination. Like blacks, Mexican-Americans were segregated in restaurants, housing, schools, public facilities, and so on. They were frequently the victims of violence, which included beatings by police and servicemen. Today, the effects of the prejudice and discrimination directed against Mexican-Americans can still be seen. For instance, they

are more likely than Anglos to hold blue-collar jobs with a large number in service jobs such as janitors. Their unemployment rate averages about six points more than that for Anglos. Their median family income is only about 74 percent of the income of Anglo families. Mexican-Americans are more likely than both blacks and Anglos to experience job layoffs and cutbacks in work time. About 36 percent of the teenagers drop out of school, which is more than twice the rate for Anglo teenagers and almost double the rate for black teenagers (from Daniel M. Curran and Claire H. Renzetti, *Social Problems: Society in Crisis*, Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1987).

Often information is organized in the order in which it occurs or in the order in which a procedure is carried out. For instance, a history paper might be organized *chronologically*, following the order in which certain historical battles were fought; a section of a scientific paper might be organized as a *process*, following the step-by-step procedure of a scientific experiment or describing a natural process such as digestion. Other familiar patterns of organizing ideas include *cause and effect* and *classification*.

## ASSIGNMENTS IN ACADEMIC WRITING

Academic disciplines share certain assignments. For instance, in any discipline you may be required to write a literature survey, an abstract, or a proposal. In addition, each discipline has certain assignments—laboratory reports and case studies, for example—that are particular to it.

The most common assignments in college writing ask you to analyze a problem, a situation, or a work such as a literary text. The result is analytic papers in which you research a specific problem, gather data related to that problem, and propose specific solutions or applications of your solutions. These assignments usually require original thought, a clear statement of the problem, and suggested solutions. Most academic papers require research whether it is done in the library or the laboratory. Here is a research assignment from a marketing class.

Provide your classmates with a list of subsidiaries owned by a parent corporation. Example: General Electric owns RCA, RCA owns Avis Car Rentals and Random House Publishers, Random House owns Harlequin, and so on. Take a survey of

the major companies with which your fellow students have had negative or positive experiences, including the number of times they have dealt with a company and what the results of their dealings have been. Can you make any generalizations about major conglomerates and their subsidiaries and how they affect the ordinary consumer? Should Congress pass laws that restrict the size of the companies? Write a research paper for your congressional representative explaining why he or she should support or reject such legislation.

Here is an English assignment that requires you to research dialects of English.

Write or tell a story about the area in which you grew up. Analyze your story to see whether you have used localized idiomatic phrases. Do your classmates understand them? Are there phrases they have used that you cannot understand? Can you define the particular dialect you are using? After doing some library research, write a paper for an audience of foreign students about how English usage varies across the United States.

Other assignments may require you to gather information about an area and its culture. For instance, in history you may be asked to gather information about the Tigua Indians; in political science you may be asked to talk to county officers or other local politicians. In these cases you will report on your findings. Writing a coherent paper requires focusing on a single idea and gathering specifics and details to support it.

## RESEARCH SOURCES

The reference section of any library is the best place to find general research sources. The reference section of the library contains sources as diverse as encyclopedias, atlases, quotation books, and bibliographies as well as information that indicates where you actually find other material. In addition to the library's catalog, the reference section contains indexes, bibliographies, and computerized materials that can tell you where to find material on the research topic of your choice. One way to start your research is to browse in the subject section of your catalog. If you cannot find your topic in the subject section,



search *The Library of Congress Subject Headings*, which lists the various names under which a subject might be listed.

## GENERAL LIBRARY SOURCES

The following list is a guide to some of the major sources—indexes, encyclopedias, bibliographies, and other library materials—that you can use to find general research information.

### Indexes

- Biography Index*
- Government Documents Index*
- Magazine Index*
- New York Times Index*
- Public Affairs Information Services Index*
- Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature*
- Wall Street Journal Index*
- Washington Post Index*

### Encyclopedias

- Academic American Encyclopedia*
- Encyclopedia Americana*
- Encyclopaedia Britannica*
- Micropaedia*
- Propaedia*
- The New Columbia Encyclopedia*
- The Random House Encyclopedia*

### Bibliographies

- Books in Print*
- The Bibliographic Index*
- The Subject Guide to Books in Print*
- Paperbound Books in Print*

### Other Sources

- Dissertation Abstracts International*
- Editorials on File*
- Monthly Catalog of United States Government Publications*
- Historical Atlas*
- Encyclopaedia Britannica World Atlas*
- Facts on File*
- Statistical Abstracts*
- World Almanac*