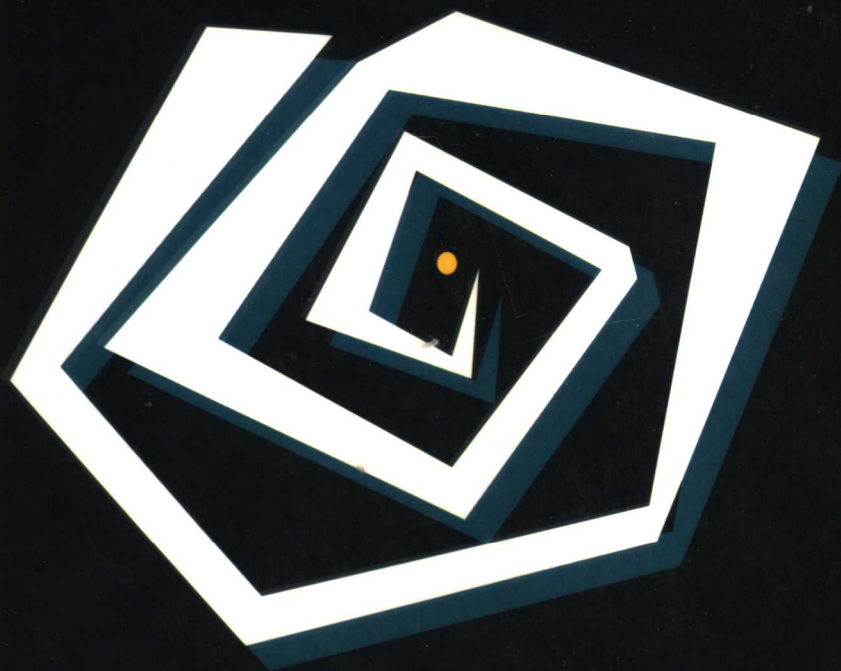


# Writing RESEARCH PAPERS

## Investigating Resources in **CYBERSPACE**



Jeannette A. Woodward

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## Investigating Resources in **CYBERSPACE**

**Jeannette A. Woodward**

**College of Santa Fe**



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*To Chris and Laura  
With much love*

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# Preface

## The Computer Revolution in the Academic World

For hundreds of years, students and scholars have conducted their research primarily by investigating printed books and journals. They have devised techniques to cope with the world of ideas contained in the billions of printed pages available. Libraries have developed intricate methods for classifying and cataloging these published works, and researchers have evolved methods for searching, discovering, analyzing, writing, and documenting scholarly thought in their respective disciplines.

With the arrival of electronically digitized information, however, researchers find themselves suddenly having to reassess these techniques. The computer changes not only the technology for putting words on a page but completely revolutionizes the way one sets about a research project.

The transition from typewriter to word processor takes away much of the drudgery of formal writing but creates some unique problems as well. Similarly, the use of electronic reference sources enables the researcher to access vast collections of information that even ten years ago few could have anticipated. Yet those same electronic storehouses of knowledge may disappear overnight. Citations to documents found on the Internet often lead nowhere when those documents are moved to a different directory or removed entirely from their host computer.

Although there is speculation about the imminent death of the book, no one really knows what the fate of the printed word will be. Some researchers imagine that all written works will be scanned and available on-line in the near future. Others say that the prospect of reading thousands of pages on a computer screen is distinctly unpleasant. Although computer screens will undoubtedly improve, eye strain lessen, and computers become more portable, it is difficult to imagine a viewing device as efficient and attractive as a book. Amid the enthusiasm over computers, some forget that books do an excellent job of communicating large amounts of information. Ultimately, some greatly improved monitor will probably come along, but for the foreseeable future, most of us prefer to read a novel or history text on paper.

# Writing Research Papers in the Digital Age

*Writing Research Papers* is a synthesis of the old and the new—of traditional methods of effectively combining research and writing coupled with new techniques for functioning comfortably and successfully in a digital world. It assumes that modern research methods require access to a computer and that students who develop good computer skills can produce superior papers. However, merely using a word-processing program and electronic information sources will not automatically improve the quality of your research paper. In fact, it might have just the opposite result. Writing with a computer encourages you to use shortcuts, some of which are beneficial. Others, like the ability to cut and paste from the works of others, can be potentially disastrous. Tools and techniques to organize information become absolutely vital when you can view only the text that is displayed on the screen at any one time.

Balance is called for in the area of technical sophistication. You and your classmates have a wide range of computer skill levels. Some of you have been playing video games for years, while others approach the computer with great trepidation. This book will attempt to walk the fine line between boring the experienced computer user and confusing the novice. Although a basic knowledge of computer commands is certainly useful, simply knowing which keys to press is only one small part of the writing process. More important are methods of working with information in a computer environment.

With this in mind, *Writing Research Papers* is designed to aid you in writing a well-thought-out research paper using electronic sources and equipment as well as more traditional methods. Chapter 1, "Understanding the Research Process," gives an overview of the research process. It clarifies the differences between formal and informal research, between primary and secondary sources, and between fact papers and thesis papers. This chapter also offers you helpful, practical advice on buying a computer, choosing software, and managing the large amounts of data you will generate in the process of writing your research paper.

Chapter 2, "Selecting a Topic," guides you through the all-important task of choosing a topic for your paper from doing preliminary research to refining your topic and writing the thesis statement. Chapter 3, "Planning a Research Strategy," can help you map out your approach to the research paper, from planning your time wisely through organizing your materials. The last section of this chapter is aimed at helping anyone who may not be accustomed to working with computers feel more comfortable with them. It includes hints on navigating in and around documents, adjusting to and reading documents on the computer screen, and composing with a keyboard instead of pen and paper.

Chapters 4 and 5 explore the resources available to you in a library. Chapter 4, "Getting to Know the Library," walks you through the library, explaining how to make use of the various indexes, electronic and card catalogs, and other search

facilities to track down the information you need. Chapter 5, "Investigating Library Resources," explains the traditional research materials that are available for you to use. Beginning with encyclopedias and almanacs, the chapter also covers periodicals, government documents, accessing information at other libraries, and personal interviews.

Chapter 6, "Investigating the Internet," opens your field of research far beyond the library walls. A thorough explanation of the Internet, the chapter begins with the basics, such as on-line services and downloading files, for anyone who is not yet familiar with the Net. Such tools as the World Wide Web, Gopher, Telnet, WAIS, search engines, electronic mail, and discussion lists are explained. The chapter also includes helpful information on getting help on the Net, finding addresses, and accessing periodicals, books, and museums.

To help you gather information for your paper, Chapter 7, "Reading, Evaluating, and Note Taking" addresses reading critically, evaluating material, and effective note taking. In Chapter 8, "Writing the Rough Draft," guides you through the process of putting it all together, writing the rough draft of your paper. This chapter covers such essential skills as developing your tone and style, writing consistently and well, and using quotations correctly. It also shows how to use a computer or word processor most effectively when you are writing. It finishes by introducing the subject of acknowledging sources.

Chapter 9, "Documenting Your Sources," covers all you will need to know to correctly credit your sources, both print and electronic. It thoroughly explains the MLA, the APA, and the Chicago styles of documentation. Detailed explanations and examples for documenting various kinds of sources in each of these styles are included. Two student-written papers, one in the MLA style and one in the APA style, demonstrate these methods of documentation in use. A helpful section on how to use all of this information to write research papers in all of your classes is also included.

The final chapter, "Revising Your Paper," helps you revise and polish your drafts into your final paper. The appendix includes addresses and telephone numbers of various organizations to aid you in finding further material for research.

## Working in Both Worlds

Electronic information sources are so new that the academic world is still reeling from their impact. This book is far from the last word on the subject. Standards for citing electronic sources, for instance, are still somewhat experimental, as are the new tools designed to access digitized information that appear almost daily. It is inevitable that electronic formats that today look so promising will be considered dinosaurs tomorrow. Books about the Internet are said to be out-of-date before they're published. This book, therefore, attempts to achieve a delicate balance, introducing you to new technology and new methods,

while at the same time introducing the tools that are still necessary to access print information sources.

The introduction of the computer into the writing process is an exciting development. It can free you from the more tedious aspects of a formal writing project and allow you to expend your efforts on developing insightful ideas and expressing them in the most precise and compelling language. To that end, it is hoped that this book will enrich and enliven the process of writing your research paper; that it will not only help you with procedures and models but will aid you in acquiring the skills to adapt them to the technology of the rapidly emerging digital world of the future.

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