

# The Research Paper: Sources and Resources

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**— THE —**  
**RESEARCH**  
**PAPER:**  
**SOURCES AND RESOURCES**

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## PREFACE

The guiding principle of this book is practicality. Over the years, we have found the comprehensiveness of other guides for writing research papers to be both threatening and impractical for the beginner in composition classes. Hence, we see the need for a relatively concise, highly readable guide.

We have not attempted to illustrate every possible variable in documentation and bibliography. Nor have we tried to introduce students to every complex theoretical rationale for methodology. Our guide is designed to complement the discussions of the classroom instructors, not to eliminate them.

Consequently, we have opted for concise summary of theory. We illustrate fully only the most widely used types of documentation. Throughout we follow the format of the *MLA Handbook* (1984), but we have included the styles of the *MLA Handbook* (1980) and the *APA Publication Manual* (1983) in Chapter 7 for those who prefer it. Yet this guide does not neglect the essential elements of outlining, structuring, and developing the paper. We view the act of research writing as a process, and we endeavor to provide adequate illustration of major stages. Finally, we hope that our practical, concise approach helps to initiate the student into the satisfactions of systematic research. We hope to teach, above all, that good research is not produced in a vacuum, but that it deepens one's understanding of the ideas and events that have somehow merged to shape the lives of both individuals and cultures.

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JTH  
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# CHAPTER 1

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## THE PROCESS OF RESEARCH

- The Research Paper
- Selecting a Topic
- Narrowing the Topic
- Surveying the Literature
- The Working Hypothesis and Your Thesis
- Exploring the Literature
- Constructing the Outline
- Writing the Research Paper
- Documentation
- Exercises





## The Research Paper

The research paper is a detailed study of a subject that is based on work by an individual researcher or by a group of researchers. Such research may involve tracing the history of an idea or event; it may attempt to prove a scientific hypothesis; or it may analyze trends in business. The use of research distinguishes this sort of writing from other types. An essay is usually based on the personal views of the writer concerning an idea, a social phenomenon, or a political event. A critical review allows an author to present his or her opinions or analyses concerning a work of art, literature, or music. But, a research paper requires a careful blending of personal analysis and information gleaned from sources other than the author's knowledge.

All academic disciplines require this sort of writing. While the form of the research paper may differ somewhat from discipline to discipline, the general goal remains the same: to investigate thoroughly reputable sources of information, carefully selecting, analyzing, and organizing those sources that best support the theme of the research paper. Thus, the research paper is the result of careful work. As with the essay and the critical review, a certain amount of inspiration and imagination are valuable. However, neither inspiration nor imagination can eliminate altogether the need for careful organization and examination of source information. The research writer must show knowledge of a subject by selecting the evidence, by arranging the arguments, and by clearly indicating the significance of the source information.

Unlike the essayist or the critic, the research writer does not begin work with an inspiration and a blank sheet of paper. In fact, most of the work necessary to complete a research paper should be accomplished before one attempts any writing. For beginning researchers, this preliminary work with sources and resources often pays an unexpected but pleasant dividend: the actual writing of the research paper proceeds well when the preliminaries are done correctly. However, a research paper is written, not *assembled*. It is the result of using good sources and evaluating them effectively.

The following sections of this chapter contain brief descriptions of the basic elements of research, which will be discussed in greater detail in later chapters.

### Selecting a Topic

If you are selecting your own research topic, you should choose an interesting one for which research material is available. If your topic

is assigned to you, be sure that you understand the nature of the subject before proceeding further. You may want to consult with your instructor. Whatever the topic, make certain that you are aware of the formal requirements for the research paper (such as length, number and type of sources, and page formats) before actually beginning work.

### Narrowing the Topic

Perhaps your most difficult problem with research will be narrowing your topic. You may indeed have chosen a topic that interests you, but which is better suited for a longer work, perhaps even a book-length study. This problem sometimes occurs when you select a topic that is relatively unfamiliar. It can be remedied by general reading in the subject area.

A research paper on the subject of *inflation* would probably be unsuccessful. Libraries are crowded with information on this subject, and many information sources analyze the causes and effects of inflation throughout the economic history of the world. After sufficient reading, however, a more specific topic may suggest itself. Thus, the broad topic of *inflation* may be narrowed to *The Effects of Tariffs on Inflation* or *How the Federal Reserve Attempts to Control Inflation*. Literary topics must also be narrowed. With a little effort a research paper on Mark Twain can be narrowed to *Satire in Mark Twain's Early Journalism*.

### Surveying the Literature: The Working Bibliography

With the aid of standard general reference sources (see Chapter 3), you must compile a working bibliography for your paper. The working bibliography is a list of books, magazine articles, and possibly more specialized material in pamphlets, technical reports, or government publications that will furnish the needed information. When you examine the selections in the working bibliography, you should remember that, more often than not, many of the works you chose may add to your general knowledge of the subject, but may never be documented. They may also be helpful in leading you to other, more applicable sources.

One word of caution: you should not trust your memory when you begin work with source material. In most cases you will be working with too many pieces of material to remember them all. Whatever information a source suggests, whatever ideas come to

mind, you should take notes, even if all of the notes are not used later. It is most important to be systematic and accurate at this stage of your work. Avoid wasting time by needlessly having to repeat research.

### The Working Hypothesis and Your Thesis

After you have surveyed the working bibliography, you will begin to determine the direction and focus of your research. In the case of the Federal Reserve's impact on inflation, for instance, you may find that, in general, the central bank's policies historically have succeeded in reducing the rate of inflation. This generalization, soundly based on the preliminary reading, may be a good working hypothesis.

The next step is to assemble additional data that narrows the working hypothesis to a thesis—a single, overriding issue or idea. For example, more research on the Federal Reserve's impact on inflation may show that during periods of high interest rates, inflation is reduced. Consequently, a thesis for the research paper begins to evolve: to curb inflation, the Federal Reserve historically reduces the money supply through higher interest rates. You may further narrow the thesis to the Federal Reserve's response to inflation in the 1970s.

### Exploring the Literature

Now that you know the actual subject of your paper, you can begin going through applicable resource material on that subject to gather information that will support your specific interpretation. In addition to new sources, this process usually requires re-examination of sources discovered while you were preparing your working bibliography.

### Constructing the Outline

When you have taken all of your notes, you need to outline your thoughts into a coherent presentation. Reread your note cards carefully. Then, prepare your outline, remembering to add concrete details at this early stage. As the blueprint of the paper, your outline must be thorough, logical, and exact. Outlining is a crucial stage of research. Its greatest possibilities come almost naturally, for solid,

exciting research organically begins to structure itself as one idea leads to new ideas, as one relationship points to other relationships, and as one perspective illuminates several fresh perspectives. Research writing, like most other kinds of writing, is not a static, mechanical exercise. Research and writing about research begin to establish directions of their own, if allowed to. Thus, at no time is a note card, an outline, or a rough draft sacrosanct. When a new idea comes to mind from a card, a section of your outline, or from a revised paragraph, consider and nurture it. Stop and explore new ideas when they present themselves. They just might enrich the final draft of your paper.

### Writing the Research Paper

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After you have taken notes and have prepared an outline, you are ready to write the paper itself. You should find that the outline's pattern of headings and subheadings leads to a logical arrangement of the corresponding note cards.

### Documentation

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By definition, a research paper incorporates the work of other people. You must provide an accurate listing of all sources used in your own research paper. Usually this listing follows one of several standard documentary formats. Carelessness or omissions will cause your reader to suspect your ability to carry out a disciplined research project.

Some novice researchers find themselves intimidated by what they imagine is a monumental task. Indeed, individual research efforts can last for years. But, chances are that your research assignment can be completed in a matter of weeks by carefully following the procedures and guidelines recommended in this book. There is no need to be intimidated by a research task. Writing a research paper may not always be *easy*, but it is almost always *possible*.

So get started!

### EXERCISES

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1. List three topics that interest you or that are reasonably familiar to you.

2. Write a brief paragraph about each topic to show what makes the topic interesting.
3. Write a brief paragraph about each topic indicating the area of the topic you want to research.
4. Define *research*.
5. Define *documentation*.



# CHAPTER 2

## USING THE LIBRARY— WHY AND HOW

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- The Role of the Library
- Two Approaches to Using the Library
- The Physical Arrangement of the Library
- The Search Strategy
- Basic Steps in a Search Strategy
- Comprehensive Information: Government Documents
- Specific Information: Book Chapters
- Specific Information: Magazines
- Specific Information: Newspapers
- Evaluative Information: Book Reviews
- Summary





## The Role of the Library

After you have decided on a preliminary form of the topic for your research paper, you should begin to look for information on that topic in your college library. As you have read in Chapter 1, your research project will give you the chance to show that you can actually locate information about a topic. As part of completing your project, you will also demonstrate that you can analyze and organize the work of other people. Of course, before you can analyze or organize your research sources, first you must select the sources from the material available in your library. But, before you can select exactly which material to use, you must be able to locate the material on your topic that is available in your library. Explaining the process of locating research materials is the purpose of this chapter.

You may be wondering why you have to bother using the library to assemble a selection of information on a certain topic, especially if you already know about your subject. One reason you have been asked to work on a research paper is that you must be able to show that you can construct a written report without being limited to your own personal knowledge.

For example, if you were a branch manager of a chain retail store and were asked by your district manager to provide the company with a report on estimated economic growth in your area, you might be able to come up with such a report based solely on your own observations of how many other businesses in your area of town are expanding their business. You might also want to include other economic indicators you have personally witnessed, such as the resale prices of homes in your neighborhood and the unemployment rate among your friends and acquaintances.

However, your company might reject your report because there is no guarantee that your personal experiences actually reflect the reality of the economic situation. To answer this request, you probably would want to read a variety of economic reports and forecasts that have been prepared by other individuals, by the Chamber of Commerce, and by state and federal government agencies. To gain access to this material, you would visit your library and plan to spend some time there.

People write books and articles on topics such as economic forecasting for two basic purposes. First, they want to record their interpretation of data. Second, they want to make their ideas available in such a way that they can be used by other people. These recorded ideas are collected and stored by the library, but the role of the library extends far beyond the collection and storage of material.