

How To Write a Research Paper

Ten tips and tricks for conducting a research project and writing a research paper

I. Topic Selection

For a research paper, essay, report or article, you learn information about a subject, then set forth a point of view and support it with evidence from authorities known as sources. All of your sources must be declared via citations within the research paper.

The typical research paper, essay, report or article is an informative document, which sheds light on an event, person or current issue. It also may be persuasive.

If a subject intrigues you, you will do a better job on the finished product. As you home in on a general topic, consider using the brainstorm and freewrite techniques. Eventually, you must narrow your general topic to a specific research question.

- Brainstorming, sometimes known as thinking on paper, means jotting down ideas in a computer file or on paper. Rapidly write rough notes of everything you can think of on the subject-
- Freewriting can help you find your ideas by writing quickly, with no plan, and without stopping for ten to twenty minutes. Don't worry about what to say first; start in the middle. Ignore grammar, spelling and organization. Let your thoughts flow into a computer file or onto paper as they come. If you draw a blank, write your last word over and over. More ideas will follow. Freewrite more than once, then write a sentence, which begins, "My main point is ..."

Good writing has a subject, purpose and audience. Consider the audience for your work, and how your purpose limits the subject. Think about how important your topic is in relation to the purpose of your investigation. Keep in mind the availability, variety and worth of materials you will be able to find. Consider the amount of time available.

Unsuitable topics: A research paper topic would be a poor choice if it were. ...

- Too broad: Should you try to cover the entire subject of Space Exploration, The History of Witchcraft or the Life of Napoleon in one research paper? No. You should narrow the scope of your topic to include only a portion of a broad subject.
- Too subjective: A personal topic, such as "Why My Church Is Best," may be unsuitable because you probably won't be able to support it from library sources.
- Too controversial: Avoid any subject about which you can't write objectively.
- Too familiar: Your work on a research paper should lead to discovery of things you don't already know. Don't submit a research paper already written for another purpose.
- Too technical: Don't write about a topic that you still don't understand thoroughly after you have completed your research.

II. Forming a Research Question

After topic selection, form a research question and hypothesis. A hypothesis is a working idea that your evidence may support. You will have a hypothesis in mind as you start looking into your subject.