



How to Construct a Research Paper

Clarify What to Do

1. Choose a **topic** (and a backup topic)
 - i. Are you interested in the topic?
 - ii. Will learning about the topic help you in the course (e.g. final exam)?
 - iii. Will learning about the topic help you in future courses?
 - iv. Will learning about the topic help you in your career?
 - v. Is your audience interested in the topic? (Ask!)
 - vi. Has your professor approved the topic?
2. Do **exploratory reading** to see how your topic is being dealt with in literature; focus your topic.
3. Write a **one-paragraph proposal** of what you will do, make a working or temporary outline of some sort.

A **research proposal paragraph** should include four things:

- The principal purpose of the paper (to explain? to analyze? to argue?)
- The intended audience
- Your voice as the writer (What image of yourself do you want to create: advocate, critic, etc?)
- A working thesis statement or a research question

Gather Data

1. Create a working bibliography or list of resources.
2. Gather all the resources available to you.
3. Is there enough information available to you on your topic?

Locate, Examine, Read, and Record Sources

1. Locate sources.
2. Read quickly to find the best sources.
3. Read and take notes.
4. Optional: Conduct original research (e.g. interviews).

Organize for Writing

1. Re-evaluate your notes and select those most relevant.
2. Turn the working thesis into a carefully worded thesis statement.
3. Turn the working outline into a formal outline which grows out of the thesis statement.
4. Gather more information on any sections that are too weak.
5. Optional: Write a mini version of your paper in 30 minutes.

Write

1. Write a rough draft.
2. Revise: Make any major changes in areas such as ideas and organization.
3. Edit: Check citations, bibliography, and format, as well as spelling, grammar, and sentence structure.

Revising

Tip #1: Leave adequate time to revise your completed paper.

Leave at least one-third of your available time for revising, editing, and final proof-reading. Even if you revise as you write, you should build in revision time at the end of your writing process; ideally after a break of a few days.

Tip #2: Revise in waves-go through your paper several times.

To paraphrase an old saying, 'it's hard to see the forest for the trees'; similarly, in revising, it's hard to see different kinds of problems at the same time.

Try going through your paper several times, each time refocusing your attention, working from larger to more narrow concerns. This hand out offers a checklist for revising based on such a sequence; as you go through it, revise your paper until you are able to answer 'yes' to each question.

Revise for content, structure, and transitions

- Have you done everything required by the assignment? (Reread the assignment to make sure.)
- Have you provided enough evidence and discussion to support your arguments?
- Is your title specific to your topic?
- Have you assumed a general audience, unless otherwise instructed?
- Does your thesis sum up the main point of your paper?
- Is the structure (Intro., body, conclusion) of your paper effective?
- Do the opening sentences of paragraphs (and sections) capture the main point of the paragraph (or section), and provide a link to the thesis or to the previous paragraph (or section)?

Revise for paragraph development and use of sources

- Are all your paragraphs effectively focused and developed?
- Are your paragraphs coherent—does each sentence flow logically from the one before?
- Have you used your sources effectively? Do they support the point you are making?
- Have you used quotation marks or inset the text to signal quoted material?
- Have you cited the source for all quotations and borrowed information, even if it is paraphrased into your own words?

Revise for sentence style and clarity

- Are your sentences all clear and readable?

Tip: Read your paper aloud. If a sentence seems confusing, ask yourself how you would explain it to a younger person. This strategy works in simplifying your point.

- Have you used pronouns effectively?

Tips: Get rid of the words “you”, “your”, “I”, “me”, and “my” except when referring to personal experience, if applicable.

After the word “this”, add a word to clarify the reference.

- Is your prose concise?

Tips: Cut unnecessary references to your paper e.g. “In this paper I will...”

Get rid of unnecessary “it is” and “there are” phrases.

Edit for mechanical matters: grammar, spelling, punctuation, format, and documentation

- If writing about literature, have you generally used the present tense throughout your paper?
- Have you edited systematically for errors in your paper?
Tips: Check to make sure all your verbs are in correct tense, correct form, and proper agreement with the subject.
Use **Effect** (noun) for consequence and **Affect** (verb) for Acting on.
Use **than** for all comparisons
- Do final proofreading, just in case.

Proofreading

- Is each paragraph fully developed, covering one aspect of the subject area?
- Does one paragraph lead logically and smoothly to the next?
- Are the connections between the ideas made clear by the use of transitions?
- Did the words you chose give the exact meaning you wanted them to?
- Is there any irrelevant material which needs to be eliminated?
- Is the paper convincing? Are all areas strong? Any weak spots?
- Is your thesis statement clear and concise?
- Are all ideas or words from other persons properly documented?
- Is your References (APA) or Works Cited (MLA) page attached to the essay?