



Butte College Library

3536 Butte Campus Drive, Oroville, CA 95965

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How to Research a Term Paper

How do I find a topic?

- Try to find a topic that interests you
- Find ideas in:
 - Books / Textbooks
 - Library of Congress subject heading list
 - Encyclopedias
 - Library catalog
 - Periodicals / Research databases
 - Internet
- Be aware of topics that are too:
 - recent
 - regional
 - emotional
 - complex
 - broad
 - narrow
- Ask yourself:
 - Do I understand the topic?
 - How much information do I need?
 - Does enough information exist to fill this paper?

How do I formulate a thesis?

- A thesis is a statement that states the main idea of your paper. It defines the scope and focus of your essay so that your readers know what to expect from the essay.
- Ask yourself what the focus or purpose of your paper is and then set out to prove it in the body of your paper.

How do I prepare an outline?

- List the major points and ideas of your thesis.
- Put similar points together so your paper will follow a logical order.

Where do I find information?

- Definition or Overview – Encyclopedias, subject encyclopedias, dictionaries, etc.
- Extensive Information – Books, eBooks
- Specific Topic – Journal articles (Research databases), periodicals, magazines, etc.
- Current Events – Newspapers, News web sites on the Internet; NewsBank (database)

All these can be found both online and in paper. When using Internet resources, make sure your sources are reliable, such as a from a government web page.

How do I evaluate my resources?

- Is the information from a reliable source?
- Is the information sufficient to cover my topic?
- Is it relevant to my thesis statement?
- Is the information current?
- Does the information reflect just one side of the argument or is it biased?

How do I take notes and write the text of the paper?

- Note where you find all your information, including page and author, for your citations.
- Note how you would use each piece of information based on your outline. Consider using index cards, separate pieces of paper or create notes on the computer so you can easily organize all your notes.
- Organize your notes so that they flow logically.
- Pay attention to correct writing elements such as grammar, spelling, effective phrasing of ideas and good paragraph development.
- Have someone else read through your paper to double check it.

How do I document the sources?

- Acknowledge any sources you used with proper citation format, e.g., APA, MLA.
- Remember to use citations both within the document (following quoted, paraphrased, or summarized material) and the References or Works Cited page.

Keep in mind:

- Remember that spelling and grammar does count.
- Plagiarism is a serious offense. Document all sources you used.
- Librarians are here to help. Don't hesitate to ask.

These guidelines are from *The Research Process: Books and Beyond*, by Myrtle S. Bolner and Gayle A. Poirier, 3rd edition, published by Dubuque: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 2004.

Other useful resources:

Books

Razakis, Laurie. *Schaum's quick guide to writing great research papers* [LB1047.3 .R69 2007eb](#) (eBook)

Ruskiewicz, John. *The Scott Foresman handbook for writers* [PE1408 .H2968 2007](#)

Strunk, William. *The elements of style* [PE1408 .S772 1979](#)

Gibaldi, Joseph. *MLA handbook for writers of research papers* [LB2369 .G53 2009](#)

A P A. *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* [BF76.7 .P83 2009](#)

Web sites

Research Paper Learning Module: Library Web site > *Student Learning Resources* > *Research Paper Learning Module* OR http://www.butte.edu/library/infolit/module2011/1_overview.html

Purdue Online Writing Lab (writing guide, MLA & APA citation) <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>

Research and Documentation Online (citation styles, sources for different disciplines)

<http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/resdoc5e/index.htm>

To contact us:

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