

Developing and Writing an Academic Paper

Writing a research paper requires a series of steps, starting with developing a research question or hypothesis, to the final proofreading of the paper. As you progress through each step of your plan, creative decisions you make or information you acquire may change the order of the steps depending on the subject, your knowledge of the subject, and your sources. For example, sometimes you need to do just a bit of background research and reading before you can develop a research question. Sometimes you need to go back and find additional sources to corroborate your viewpoint. The research writing steps represent a general, ideal, movement through the research writing process. In reality, writers often repeat or circle back as needed.

The following 10 Steps are your links to further information on the research writing process:

[Step 1. Developing a Research Question](#)

[Step 2. Developing a Research Thesis](#)

[Step 3. Finding Sources](#)

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STEP 1. Developing A Research Question

It's absolutely essential to develop a research question that you're interested in or care about in order to focus your research and your paper. For example, researching a broad topic such as "health care" is difficult since there may be hundreds of sources on all aspects of health care. On the other hand, a focused question such as "What are the pros and cons of health care in an HMO?" is easier to research and can be covered more fully and in more depth.

- **Spend the time needed to formulate your research question.** The most crucial step in the writing process is that you think and develop a research question before you actually do a lot of research. The worse situation that you can get into, as a student, comes from doing too much unfocused research before identifying your own viewpoint, the one that you will eventually need to support. If you do too much unfocused research first, then the tendency is to try to include all of it in the paper. The result is a hodgepodge of information that's not focused, developed fully, or indicative of your own thoughts. It's also not efficient to do too much research before you really know what you're looking for.
- **Develop a usable research question.** Choose an appropriate topic or issue for your research, one that actually can be researched, then list all of the questions that you'd like

answered about this topic yourself. Choose the best question, one that is neither too broad nor too narrow.

- **If you know a lot about the topic, develop a research question based on your own knowledge.** Once you determine what you do know, then you're ready to do some general reading in a textbook or encyclopedia in order to develop a usable research question.
- **Stick to one topic or issue.** A topic is what the research paper is all about. It provides a focus for the writing. Of course, the major topic can be broken down into its components or smaller pieces (e.g., the major topic of patient compliance may be broken down into social, medical, and economic elements). But the important thing to remember is that you should stick with just one major topic in order to have a coherent piece of writing.

An issue is a concept upon which you can take a stand. While "patient compliance" is a topic, "How to achieve greater patient compliance" is an issue, or a "point of discussion, debate, or dispute."

- **Choose a question that is neither too broad nor too narrow.** For example, if you choose "patient-health care professional communication" (a topic that can be researched), you might ask the following questions:
 - a. What relationship does communication play in patient compliance?
 - b. What can we do to develop more effective communication between patient and health care professionals?
 - c. Should communication skills be taught to health care professionals?

Once you have completed your list, review your questions in order to choose a usable one that is neither too broad nor too narrow. In this case, the best research question is "b." Question "a" is too narrow, since it only deals with one aspect of communication. Question "c" is also too narrow, and actually should be answered as a part of the reasons on why communication skills should be made more effective. Question "b," on the other hand, is focused enough to research in some depth.

STEP 1. FOLLOW-UP

Click Exercise 1 to test your ability to determine whether a question can or cannot be researched.

Click Application to evaluate the researchability of your own research question.

STEP 2. Developing A Research Thesis

The research paper begins with a thesis. The purpose of the thesis is described below.

- **The thesis statement or hypothesis is the "answer" to your research question.** Just as it is important to take the time to create an interesting and researchable "question" your thesis or hypothesis should reflect a similar amount of effort. If your research question is "What can we do to develop more effective communication between patient and health care professionals?" then your thesis "answer" might be, "A health care professional's ability to effectively communicate with patients is essential to high-quality medicine, it improves patient satisfaction, recall during examinations, understanding of the disease process, adherence to treatment, and outcomes of care." Keep in mind that your thesis at this point is a "working thesis" which you will finalize only after completing the research.
- **The thesis focuses your ideas and information for the research paper.** Remember that word "focus." Student writers often make the mistake of forgetting the focus and making the research thesis far too broad in order to include a lot of research. Yet depth more than breadth is the hallmark of a sophisticated research paper.
- **The thesis has distinctive characteristics.** Whenever you are writing to explain something to your reader or to persuade your reader to agree with your opinion, there should be one complete sentence that expresses the main idea of your paper. That sentence is often called the thesis statement. Based on everything you've read, and thought, and brainstormed, the thesis is not just your topic, but what you're saying about your topic. Another way to look at it is, once you've come up with the central question, or organizing question, of your paper, the thesis is an answer to that question. Remember, though, while you are still writing your paper, to consider what you have to be a "working thesis," one that may still be "adjusted." As you continue to write, read, and think about your topic, see if your working thesis still represents your opinion.
- **The thesis prepares the reader for the rest of the paper.** The thesis statement usually comes within the introductory paragraph, which prepares the reader to listen to your ideas, and before the body of the paper, which develops the thesis with reasons, explanations, and evidence or examples. In fact, if you examine a well-written thesis, you will find hidden in it the questions your reader will expect you to answer in the body. For example, if your thesis is "Cannibalism, if practiced tastefully, can be acceptable in extreme circumstances," the body of your essay will develop this idea by explaining HOW it can be practiced tastefully, WHY it would be acceptable, and WHAT you would consider extreme circumstances.

The following are some suggestion for writing the thesis.

- **Write the thesis as a statement.** Make sure your thesis is in the form of a statement, not a question. "Can we save the Amazon rain forest?" is an ear-catching question that might be useful in the introduction, but it doesn't express an opinion or perspective as the following statements do:

"We can save the Amazon rain forest by limiting tourist presence, boycotting goods made by companies that deplete the forest's resources, and generally educating people about the need to preserve the rain forest in order to preserve the earth's ecological systems."

"We cannot save the Amazon rain forest since the companies that deplete its resources in their manufacturing are so widely-spread throughout the world, so politically powerful in their respective countries, and wealthy enough to fight the opposition fully."

- **Don't go overboard!** Make sure your thesis expresses your true opinion and not an exaggerated version of it. Don't say "Computers are wonderful" or "Computers are terrible" if what you really believe is "Computers do more good than harm" or "Computers do more harm than good." Why commit yourself to an extreme opinion that you don't really believe in, and then look like you're contradicting yourself later on?
- **Focus further.** Make sure your thesis covers exactly the topic you want to talk about, no more and no less. "Drugs should not be legalized" is too large a thesis if all you want to talk about is marijuana. "Boxing should be outlawed" is too small a thesis if you also want to discuss wrestling and football. Bite off as much as you can chew thoroughly-- then chew it!
- **Choose the right shape for your thesis.** Shape your thesis to fit the question you wish to answer. A thesis can come in many forms, including the following:
 - Simply stating an opinion
 - "Universal health care is desirable for all Americans."
 - Indicating categories or reasons
 - "Universal health care is desirable for all Americans because it will reduce health care costs and promote better public health."
 - Showing two aspects of a topic and emphasizing one (in this sample, the 2nd topic in the sentence is emphasized)
 - "While universal health care is desirable for all Americans, political in-fighting make it impossible to implement."

STEP 2. FOLLOW-UP

Click Exercise 2A to choose the best thesis statement for a given research topic.

Click Exercise 2B for more practice in selecting appropriate thesis statements.

STEP 3. Finding Sources

Once you have defined your research question and postulated a thesis, it is time to begin researching the topic. There are a variety of sources that you can tap to develop the database of information you will need to create your research paper. However, gathering information can be a complex undertaking. For starters, there are a tremendous number of resources available. Secondly, information can be scattered in a number of places. Your primary places for locating sources will be:

- The library
- Computer sources (CD-ROMs, etc.)
- The Internet/World Wide Web

This section provides an overview of important concepts and techniques in gathering information for research papers. You should read this section before going to more specific information on types of sources, documentation, etc. and before trying the sample exercises.

Using sources to support your ideas is one characteristic of the research paper that sets it apart from personal and creative writing. Sources come in many forms, such as magazine and journal articles, books, newspapers, videos, films, computer discussion groups, surveys, or interviews. The trick is to find and then match appropriate, valid sources to your own ideas.

But where do you go to obtain these sources? For college research papers, you will need to use sources available in academic libraries (college or university libraries as opposed to public libraries). Here you will find journals and other texts that go into more depth in a discipline and are therefore more appropriate for college research than those sources written for the general public.

Some, though not all, of these sources are now in electronic format, and may be accessible outside of the library using a computer. The University of California Digital Library (<http://www.lib.uci.edu/cdl.html>) has access to the entire U.C. library system through Melvyl.

The following are the types of sources you may consult when writing your research paper. To learn more about a particular source, click on its hyperlink name.

- [Primary and secondary sources](#)
- [Online Catalog](#)
- [Magazines and Journals](#)
- [Indexes and Abstracts](#)
- [Newspaper Indexes](#)
- [Reference Books](#)
- [National Library of Medicine, MEDLINE, and Medical Subject Headings \(MeSH\)](#)
- [Library of Congress Subject Heading Index](#)
- [Books](#)
- [Other Computer Resources \(CD-ROM, specialized databases, etc.\)](#)
- [Internet/World Wide Web](#)
- [Knowledgeable People](#)
- [Interlibrary Loan](#)

- [Reference Librarian](#)

Primary and Secondary Sources

Primary sources are original, first-hand documents such as creative works, research studies, diaries and letters, or interviews you conduct. Secondary sources are comments about primary sources such as analyses of creative work or original research, or historical interpretations of diaries and letters. You can use a combination of primary and secondary sources to answer your research question, depending on the question and the type of sources it requires.

If you're writing a paper on the reasons for a certain personality disorder, you may read an account written by a person with that personality disorder, a case study by a psychiatrist, and a textbook that summarizes a number of case studies. The first-hand account and the psychiatrist's case study are primary sources, written by people who have directly experienced or observed the situation themselves. The textbook is a secondary source, one step removed from the original experience or observation.

For example, if you asked what the sea symbolized in Hemingway's story "The Old Man and the Sea," you'd need to consult the story as a primary source and critics' interpretations of the story as a secondary source.

STEP 3. FOLLOW-UP

To practice differentiating primary and secondary sources, select Exercise 3.

Online Catalog

The online catalog has replaced card catalogs in many libraries as a means of listing and indexing what is in the library. You use an on-line catalog the same way you use a card catalog: look up a source by author, title, or subject. (So don't feel intimidated if you haven't yet searched on-line; anyway, the directions are right on the screen.) Most of the searches that you do for a research paper will be subject searches, unless you already know enough about the field to know some standard sources by author or title.

When using an online catalog or a card catalog, make sure to jot down the source's name, title, place of publication, publication date, and any other relevant bibliographic information that you will need later on if you choose to use the source in your research paper. Also remember to record the call number, which is the number you use to find the item in the library.

Magazines and Journals

Magazines are written for the general public, so they contain articles that do not present a subject in depth. Journals are written by and for professionals in various fields and will provide you with in-depth, specific information.

Your professors will expect you to use some journals; in fact, the more advanced your courses are, the more you should be using journal articles in your research (as opposed to magazine articles).

How do you find articles to answer your research question? It's inefficient to go through volumes of magazines and journals, even if you could think of appropriate ones. Most magazine and journal articles are referenced in either an index or abstract.

Indexes & Abstracts

An index lists magazine or journal articles by subject. Find the correct subject heading or keyword to search for articles. Write down all the information for each article. Check the index's abbreviation key if you can't understand the abbreviations in the entry. Make sure to write down all of the entry's information so you can find the article if your library carries the magazine or journal. If not, you can use the information to request the article through interlibrary loan.

Specific indices (the "correct" plural of index) exist for journals in just about every field of study (Business Index, Social Science Index, General Science Index, Education Index, and many more), while there's only one major index to general interest magazines (The Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature). Many libraries have many of these indices on their on-line systems; check with the reference librarian if you have a question about indices available on-line.

An abstract is like an index with a brief description of the article's content added. You'll soon see that it's great to be researching in a field that has an abstract, since this short explanation can help you make an early decision about the relevance of the article to your research question or working thesis.

A bound, printed abstract takes two steps to use. The first step is the same--find the appropriate subject heading in the index portion and write down all of the information in the entry. Note that the entry will also include a number or some kind of an identifying code. Then use the number or code in the "abstracts" portion to find a description of the type of information that's in the article.

Many libraries have abstracts in CD-ROM form. Because indexes will be accessed in different ways and because the technology is changing so rapidly, follow the on-screen instructions and/or ask the reference librarian.

Again, if an article seems appropriate, write down all of the entry information so you can find the article in your library or through interlibrary loan and so you'll have the information for your works cited or references list at the end of your paper.

Newspaper Indexes

The most commonly used index to newspaper articles is the New York Times Index, organized alphabetically by subject. Find the appropriate subject heading and jot down the information so you can find the article, which is usually on microfilm, unless you're dealing with a very recent

issue of the Times. Your local newspaper also may publish an index, which may be useful if you are researching local history or politics.

Reference books

There are many general reference books that may be useful to your research in a variety of ways.

- General Encyclopedias (Britannica, Americana, etc.)
- Specialized Encyclopedias (e.g., music or medical terms)
- Facts on File, Statistical Abstracts
- Other reference books

Encyclopedias provide background information about a subject. Note that you should confine your use of encyclopedias to background information only, since their information is too general to function as an appropriate source for a college paper.

Specialized encyclopedias and dictionaries provide background in specific fields (e.g., a dictionary of music terms, a biographical encyclopedia of American authors, explanations of legal terms).

Facts on File and Statistical Abstracts provide brief bits of statistical information that can aid your research. For example, if you're doing on a paper on airline safety since deregulation, it's a safe bet that you can find statistics on airline safety problems in one of these reference books.

Other reference books abound (e.g., Book Review Digest, medical and legal dictionaries, etc.). Take time, at some point, to browse your library's shelves in the reference section to see how many different types of reference books exist and to consider how you may use them. It will be time well spent.

National Library of Medicine, MEDLINE and Medical Subject Headings (MeSH)

The National Library of Medicine provides online access to search the 11 million references and abstracts in the MEDLINE database. It's PubMed retrieval engine provides links to over 700 journals for full text of articles (some publishers may require a subscription) and pre-selected sets of relevant MEDLINE articles. Use the NLM's Medical Subject Headings (MeSH) for searching MEDLINE and PubMed; and gain access to printed articles/abstracts through its' Loansome Doc document delivery service (there may be local charges).

Library of Congress Subject Heading Index

The Library of Congress provides an indexing system; most academic libraries index their books using Library of Congress subject headings. The Library of Congress publishes a Subject Heading Index listing all of the subject headings that they use.

Why bother knowing this information? The Subject Heading Index is a good tool for you as a researcher. If you're not getting exactly the right books you need through your on-line subject search, check this index to find the appropriate subject heading to use.

If you are finding too much information, check this index to see at a glance all of the various headings and sub-headings for the subject. You can get an idea of how to narrow down and focus your subject simply by scanning these various headings and sub-headings.

Just note that these subject headings relate to books only. Magazine and journal indexes and abstracts will use their own subject headings (but the Library of Congress headings can at least give you an idea of the types of headings to use).

Books

The important thing to remember here is that, by the time a book is printed, the information is at least a couple of years old. So if you're doing research that requires very recent information, a newspaper, magazine, or journal is your best bet.

If currency is not an issue (and it's not, in many cases), then a book's fuller treatment of a subject is a good choice.

It's also useful to move from virtual cyberspace into actual, physical space and "real time" when you search for books. That means that you should get yourself into the library. Sometimes a look through the stacks (the shelves on which the books are located) will turn up additional information that's relevant to your research question or working thesis.

Other computer resources (CD-ROM, specialized databases etc)

Many libraries today, especially if they are larger libraries, have information available on CDROM or through what are called specialized databases. Be sure to tell a reference librarian what you are working on, and ask her advice on whether or not there is information available on CDROM or through a specialized database.

CD-ROM's often are put out by groups such as History Societies (there is an entire set on the Civil War, for example). Government documents are currently available on CD-ROM and often offer updated information (census data, for example). The reference librarian can tell you which CDs might be the most helpful and can help you sign them out and use them.

There are many specialized databases. Some examples are ERIC, the educational database, and Silver Platter, which offers texts of recent articles in particular subjects (the whole article is available right through the computer, which is often less time-consuming than looking through the stacks for it) The American Psychological Association has the titles of articles on specific subjects (psychology, sociology, etc). Sociofile is another example. Ask your reference librarian to see exactly what is available. One good thing about specialized databases is that you already know the source and orientation of the article. You also know that the source is a valid and reputable one. You will need the reference librarian's help getting into specialized databases--

most libraries require that the databases have passwords. Warning: Bring your own paper if you plan on doing this type of research! Many libraries allow you to print from the databases, but you must supply your own paper.

Internet/World Wide Web Research

Internet research is another popular option these days. You can research from home if you have Internet search capabilities, or you usually can research from the library. Most libraries have Internet connections on at least a few computers, although sometimes you need to sign up for them in advance. Even if there doesn't seem to be much of a crowd around, be sure to sign up on the sheet so that you don't have someone come along and try to take your spot.

Internet research can be very rewarding, but it also has its drawbacks. Many libraries have set their computers on a particular search engine, or a service that will conduct the research for you. If you don't find what you are looking for by using one search engine, switch to another (Lycos, Excite, Web Crawler, and HotBot are all good choices).

The Internet can link you up with individuals who might have expertise on the topic you are researching. You can find these people by joining electronic discussion groups (newsgroups) or maillists. These forums are usually categorized by topic (e.g., a maillist on ecology). By posting a question to the group or maillist, you can obtain useful information from knowledgeable people willing to share their expertise.

Internet research can be time consuming. You will need to search much the way you would on the library database computers--simply type in key words or authors or titles, and see what the computer comes up with. Then you will have to read through the list of choices that you are given and see if any of them match what you think you are looking for.

WARNING ABOUT INTERNET AND WORLD WIDE WEB RESEARCH!: There are a lot of resources on the Internet that are not going to be valuable to you. Part of your Internet research will include evaluating the resources that you find. Personal web pages are NOT a good source to go by--they often have incorrect information on them and can be very misleading. Be sure that your Internet information is from a recognized source such as the government, an agency that you are sure is a credible source (the Greenpeace web page, for example, or the web page for the National Institute of Health), or a credible news source (CBS, NBC, and ABC all have web pages). A rule of thumb when doing Internet research: if you aren't sure whether or not the source is credible, DON'T USE IT!!

Knowledgeable People

Don't underestimate the power of interviewing knowledgeable people as part of your research. For example, if you're researching a topic in local history, consult the town historian or a local resident who experienced what you're researching. People who have "been there" and "done that" can add a real richness to your research. (Who better than a former Olympic athlete to provide information about the emotional effects of athletic competition?)

You can consult knowledgeable people in print as well. If you find one or two names that keep popping up in your research (if others consistently refer to these names and list works by these people in their bibliographies), then you should consult sources by these people, since it's likely that they are considered experts in the field which you are researching.

Interlibrary Loan

If your library doesn't carry the book or journal article that you need, you probably can get that source through interlibrary loan. The one catch is that it may take 3-4 weeks' time to get the source from another library. Starting early will assure that you have time to get the sources that you want to consult.

One big tip for using interlibrary loan: the librarian will need full and specific information to order the material. So get in the habit of writing all of the information down as you compile your list of sources. For books, write down the author, title, publisher, place, and date of publication. For articles, write down the article title, journal title, author, volume, date, span of page numbers, and the name, year, and page number of the reference source in which you found the article listed. The library needs this information to order your source.

Reference Librarian

Don't be afraid to approach this person, who really is there to help you. One **BIG TIP** for working with a reference librarian: you'll get more help the more specific you are. The librarian will immediately be able to suggest a number of places to look if you tell him that your research question is "Why is smoking being banned in public places?" or if you tell her that your thesis is "Smoking should be banned in the workplace because of health, safety, and economic reasons." On the other hand, if you tell the librarian that you're researching "smoking," you won't get as much direct help because the topic is so vast.

STEP 4. Evaluating Sources

It's not enough just to find sources; you need to ask both specific as well as general questions to determine whether your source answers your research question. There are four questions to ask when evaluating sources:

1. How well does the source answer the research question? The way you decide if the source has appropriate information for you is by consulting the table of contents and indexes in a book; in an article read the captions under pictures and diagrams, and then read the first sentence of every paragraph.

For example, if you've interested in getting information about drug use among health care professionals, a general magazine article on physician impairment may not answer that question directly.

2. Is the information provided by an expert? You want to consider your sources' credentials. A person who has considerable experience and training in an area is an expert. That expert's informed opinion can greatly substantiate your point of view.

For instance, if your research questions asks about the safest way to dispose of medical waste, your uncle, who works in hospital maintenance and has an opinion on everything, may tell you stories about what he's seen, but he should not be regarded as an expert on medical waste disposal. As a source, his usefulness is limited.

3. Is the source valid? Is the information presented objectively from an unbiased viewpoint? Do you, for example, accept a claim from the National Association of Tobacco Growers that nicotine is not an addictive drug?
 - o Do the authors let you know their sources of information? Be careful of a newspaper article that attributes a quote to "an informed source" without telling the reader whom that source is.
 - o Do the authors let you know their research methods as well as results? You may want to think twice about using a source that claims that 9 out of 10 doctors recommend surgery for dimples when you don't know how many or what kind of doctors they surveyed.
 - o Is the research current if currency is important? If you're writing a paper on nuclear waste disposal, a report written in 1952 is not valid.

You need to ask all of these questions to make sure that your sources are good ones to use.

4. Are there a variety of sources? Another thing to keep in mind is that you want to collect a variety of perspectives and opinions on your topic. Therefore you won't want to rely too heavily on one author, or look for material on just one aspect of your topic.

STEP 5. Taking Notes

- **How to take notes.** First of all, make sure that you record all necessary and appropriate information: author(s), title, publisher, place of publication, volume, span of pages, date. It's probably easiest to keep this basic information about each source on individual 3x5 or 4x6 notecards. This way when you come to creating the "Works Cited" or "References" at the end of your paper, you can easily alphabetize your cards to create the list. Also keep a running list of page numbers as you take notes, so you can identify the exact location of each piece of noted information. Remember that you will have to refer to these sources accurately, sometimes using page numbers within your paper and, depending on the type of source, using page numbers as part of your list of sources at the end of the paper.

Many people recommend taking all your notes on notecards. The advantage of notecards is that if you write very specific notes, or only one idea on one side of the card, you can

then spread them out on a table and rearrange them as you are structuring your paper. They're also small and neat and can help you stay organized.

Some people find notecards too small and frustrating to work with when taking notes, and use a notebook instead. They leave plenty of space between notes and only write on one side of the page. Later, they either cut up their notes and arrange them as they would the cards, or they color-code their notes to help them arrange information for sections or paragraphs of their paper.

- **What to put into notes.** When you take notes, your job is NOT to write everything down, nor is it a good idea to give into the temptation of photocopying pages or articles.

Notetaking is the process of extracting only the information that answers your research question or supports your working thesis directly. Notes can be in one of three forms: summary, paraphrase, or direct quotations. (It's a good idea to come up with a system--you might simply label each card or note "s" "p" or "q"--as a way of keeping track of the kind of notes you took from a source.) Also, a direct quotation reproduces the source's words and punctuation exactly, so you add quotation marks around the sentence(s) to show this. Remember it is essential to record the exact page numbers of the specific notes, since you will need them later for your documentation.

Work carefully to make sure you have recorded the source of your notes, and the basic information you will need when citing your source, to save yourself a great deal of time and frustration--otherwise you will have to make extra trips to the library when writing your final draft.

- **How to use idea cards.** While doing your research you will be making connections and synthesizing what you are learning. Some people find it useful to make "idea cards" or notes in which they write out the ideas and perceptions they are developing about their topic.
- **How to work with notes.** After you take notes, re-read them. Then re-organize them by putting similar information together. Working with your notes involves re-grouping them by topic instead of by source. Re-group your notes by re-shuffling your index cards or by color-coding or using symbols to code notes in a notebook.
 - Review the topics of your newly grouped notes. If the topics do not answer your research question or support your working thesis directly, you may need to do additional research or re-think your original research.
 - During this process you may find that you have taken notes that do not answer your research question or support your working thesis directly. Don't be afraid to throw them away.

It may have struck you that you just read a lot of "re" words: re-read, re-organize, re-group, re-shuffle, re-think. That's right; working with your notes essentially means going back and reviewing how this "new" information fits with your own thoughts about the topic or issue of the research.

Grouping your notes should enable you to outline the major sections and then the paragraph of your research paper.

STEP 6. Working With Quotations

- **Using quotations in your paper.** A research paper blends your own ideas and information from expert sources. It is NOT a series of direct quotations strung together. A common complaint of faculty is that students use too many direct quotes in their papers instead of formulating their own ideas about the paper topic and using quotes rather sparingly as one way to substantiate their point of view on the topic.

Use summaries and paraphrases most often to support your own ideas. Use direct quotations only when the information is so well presented (or in the interest of clarity, emphasis, or accuracy), that you think the exact language of the source should be used.

Remember that when you do choose to use direct quotations, you need to retain the exact wording, spelling, and punctuation of the original source. And remember, too, that just like when using a direct quotation, you must cite your source when summarizing or paraphrasing.

- **How to leave out part of a quotation.** Yes, you can leave out words you deem unnecessary in a quotation, but you can't take out words that will change its meaning. For example, if the quotation is "This movie is wonderful drivel," you can't quote it as "This movie is wonderful . . ." and leave out the word "drivel," since it changes the meaning of the quotation.

For specific guidelines on deleting words from quotations, click [here](#).

- **Adding information to a quotation.** You can add information to a quotation in order to define a word or phrase, to clarify the quotation's information, or to make a brief comment on the quotation's information. The information that you add always should be brief; reserve your major comments on the quotation's information to be placed after the quotation ends.

For specific guidelines on adding words to quotations, click [here](#).

- **Long quotations.** If you decide to use a quotation that is longer than four lines, it is not put in quotation marks but rather indented from the left.

Once again remember that you will need to document or show the source of the quotations you use, so make sure that you have recorded all necessary information about the source.

- **Using a quote within a quote.** If you need to quote something that already includes a quotation in it, then place the regular "double" quotation marks at the beginning and the

end of the complete quotation, and use special "single" quotation marks for the quote within the quote. It looks like this:

"Blake disposes of Menroy's definition of realism, which he calls 'naturalism in disguise'" (Zwerbe, 1995, p.13).

Deleting Words from Quotations

- **Deleting Words at the Start of a Quotation.** If you are deleting words at the beginning of a quotation, simply start the quotation at the appropriate place to show that words have been left out: For example:

The New York Times reports, however, that screening for cystic fibrosis is "quietly creeping into clinical practice" (Swerdlow, 1986, 66).

- **Deleting Words in the Middle of a Quotation.** To delete words in the middle of a quotation, show that words have been omitted by using ellipses, a series of three periods separated by spaces.

If you choose to leave out the middle phrases you could do it this way: "'Human improvement' is a fact of life . . . because of consumer demand" (Kevlev, 1994, 75)

- **Deleting Words at the End of a Quotation.** If you leave out words at the end of a quotation and the end of the quotation also coincides with the end of your sentence, place the ellipses at the end of your sentence:

Today we have the "Republicans, who are more nationalist than socialist, and the Democrats, who are more socialist than nationalist" (Smith, 1995, 3).

If you leave out words at the end of a quotation and more of the sentence follows, then simply work the quotation into the structure of your sentence, without using ellipses:

Today we have the "Republicans, who are more nationalist than socialist, and the Democrats, who are more socialist than nationalist," thus confirming the dilemma of modern U.S. politics (Smith, 1995, 3).

Adding Words to Quotations

Show any added information by placing that added information in square brackets within the quote. If your computer or typewriter does not have square bracket keys, then draw the brackets in. You cannot substitute parentheses for brackets, since they carry a different meaning. (Parentheses indicate that the added information is part of the direct quotation itself and not your own.)

For example:

Holmes stated that "The chair on which the body was found was covered in a formerly yellow, now a brownish, blood-stained tabaret [upholstery with satin stripes]" (Smith, 1989, p. 5). (In this case, you'd need to define "tabaret" for a general reading public.)

Or:

"He [William Dean Howells] was 'fierce to shut out' of his study the voices and faces of his family in 'pursuit of the end' which he 'sought gropingly, blindly and with very little hope but with an intense ambition, and a courage that gave way under no burden, before no obstacles'" (Kirk and Kirk, 1993, p. xxxvi). (In this case, you'd need to clarify the person to whom the "he" refers.)

Or:

"Stephen Crane's experience as a journalist [as Berryman affirms] provided the impetus for his fiction" (Walcutt, 1978, p. 22). (In this case, the writer provides a brief comment on the information to let the reader know that two major critics of Crane agree.)

STEP 7. Writing Summaries and Paraphrases

The ability to summarize and paraphrase is an essential academic skill all students must develop. Writers use summaries and paraphrases in research papers to substantiate their ideas since they do not need to use every word of every relevant source.

A summary is a condensed version of the main ideas of all or part of a source, written in your own words. A paraphrase is a rewording of a particular point in a source.

You can be accused of plagiarism if you only change a few words of the original source and use that as your summary or paraphrase. Instead, you should work carefully to use your own words and sentences.

To write a summary or paraphrase, first read and reread your source until you understand exactly what it is saying. Then put the source and any notes away. Write down the relevant information from the source. At this point you may still be using phrasing and language from the source. So next, rewrite this information into your own words and sentences so it becomes a coherent part of your paper written in your own style.

Remember, do not include your own ideas or commentary in the body of the summary or paraphrase. Your own ideas should come after the summary or paraphrase. You don't want your reader to become confused about which information is yours and which are the sources. And you always have to document summaries and paraphrases since the ideas are not your own.

STEP 8. Building the Essay Draft

- **Overview.** Once you know what you want to talk about and you have written your thesis statement, you are ready to build the body of your essay. The thesis statement will usually be followed by the body of the paper, the paragraphs that develop the thesis by explaining your ideas and backing them up with examples or evidence. This is, of course, the most important part of the paper, because you are giving your reader a clear idea of what you think and why you think it. (After you have completed the body of your paper, you can decide what you want to say in your introduction and in your conclusion.)
- **Development options.** For each reason or main aspect you have to support your thesis, remember to state your point clearly and explain it. One useful technique is to read your thesis sentence over and ask yourself what questions a reader might ask about it. Then answer those questions, explaining and giving examples or evidence.

Compare and contrast: show how one thing is similar to another, and then how the two are different--emphasizing the side that seems more important to you. For example, if your thesis states that "Jazz is a serious art form," you might compare and contrast a jazz composition to a classical one.

You may show your reader what the opposition thinks--that is, reasons why some people do not agree with your thesis--and then refute those reasons--show why they are wrong. On the other hand, if you feel that the opposition isn't entirely wrong, you may say so, that is, concede, but then explain why your thesis is still the right opinion.

Think about the order in which you have made your points. Why have you presented a certain reason or main aspect that develops your thesis first, another second, etc.? If you can't see any particular value in presenting your points in the order you have, think about it some more, until you decide why the order you have is best, or else decide to change the order to one that makes more sense to you.

Finally, as you build the body of your paper, keep revisiting your thesis with three questions in mind. First, does each paragraph develop my thesis? Second, have I done all the development I wish had been done? Third, and most important, am I still satisfied with my working thesis, or have I developed my body in ways that mean I must adjust my thesis to fit what I have learned, what I now believe, and what I have actually discussed?

- **Linking paragraphs.** Remember that you are the driver, and your readers are along for the ride. You don't want to make any sudden turns that will confuse your readers, annoy them, or distract them for a moment because they need to "get their bearings." That's why it's important to link your paragraphs together, giving your readers cues so that they see the relationship between one idea and the next, and how these ideas develop your thesis. Your goal is a smooth transition, a smooth movement from paragraph A to paragraph B, which explains why cue words that link paragraphs are often called transitions. (Still,

your link between paragraphs may not be one word, but several, or even a whole sentence.)

Here are some ways of linking paragraphs:

- To show simply that another idea is coming: **also, moreover, in addition**
- To show that the next idea is the logical result of the previous one: **therefore, consequently, thus, as a result**
- To show that the next idea seems to go against the previous one, or is not its logical result: **however, nevertheless, still**
- A grab-bag of other choices for "special occasions": **most importantly** (to show you've come to your strongest point), **on the other hand** (to show a change in topic), **finally** (your final point, of course)
- **Introductions.** The first thing to remember about your introduction is--it doesn't have to be the first thing--the first thing that you write, that is. After you have brainstormed and come up with a thesis and developed it in the body of your paper, then you can decide how to introduce your ideas to your reader. There can be a thousand introductions to the same paper--each designed to establish rapport with a different kind of reader.

The goals of an introduction are to:

- get your reader's attention / arouse your reader's curiosity
- provide any necessary background information before you state your thesis (often the last sentence of the introductory paragraph)
- establish why you are writing the paper. You already know why you are writing, and who your reader is; now present that reason for writing to that reader.

Hints for writing your introduction:

- Use the W's of journalism to decide what information to give: who, what, when, where. Remember that a history teacher doesn't need to be told "George Washington was the first president of the U.S." - keep your reader in mind.
- Add another W--why--as in "Why is this paper worth reading?" The answer could be that your topic is new, or controversial, or very important.
- Catch your reader by surprise by starting with a description or narrative that doesn't hint at what your thesis will be. For example, a paper could start, "It is less than a 32nd of an inch long, but it can kill an adult human," to begin a paper about eliminating malaria-carrying mosquitoes.
- **Conclusions.** There can be many different conclusions to the same paper (just as there can be many introductions), depending on who your readers are and where you want to direct them, what follow-up you expect of them after they finish your paper. Therefore, re-stating your thesis and summarizing the main points of your body should not be all that your conclusion does. In fact, most weak conclusions are merely re-statements of the thesis and summaries of the body without guiding the reader toward thinking about the implications of the thesis.

Here are some options for writing a strong conclusion:

- Make a prediction about the future. Sure, you convinced us that thermal energy is terrific, but do you think it will become the standard energy source? When?
 - Give specific advice. If your readers now understand that multi-cultural education has great advantages (or disadvantages, or both--whatever your opinion might be), what should they do? Whom should they contact?
 - Put your topic in a larger context. Once you have proven that physical education should be part of every school's curriculum, perhaps we should consider other "frill" courses which are actually essential.
 - A final, important reminder: just as a conclusion should not be just a re-statement of your thesis and summary of your body, it should also not be an entirely new topic, a door opened that you barely lead your reader through and leave them there lost. Just as in finding your topic and in forming your thesis, the safe and sane rule in writing a conclusion is, neither too little nor too much.
-

STEP 9. Documenting Sources

Documenting means showing where you got source information that's not your own. Remember that a research paper blends your ideas with ideas and information from other sources.

Documentation shows the reader what ideas are yours and what information and ideas you've taken from a source to support your point of view.

- **Why document?** By correctly documenting, you establish your credibility as a writer and researcher. You're letting your reader know that you've consulted experts whose ideas and information back up your own thoughts and ideas. Consequently, you make your viewpoint or argument more believable.

When you don't document correctly, your academic integrity can be called into question, because it may seem as though you're passing off others' ideas as your own. Academic integrity involves not only acknowledging your sources, but also creating your own ideas. Academic integrity, explained in this way, sounds relatively simple. However, the particular applications are a bit trickier. The most common academic integrity problems that most students encounter are:

- relying too heavily on others' information in a research paper,
- relying too heavily on others' words in a paraphrase or summary,
- citing and documenting sources incorrectly, and
- relying too heavily on help from other sources.

The most egregious violation of academic integrity is when a student uses a writing assignment for more than one course, or when a student "borrows" a paper and passes it off as his or her own work. Plagiarism is a serious offense within the academic community and can be cause for dismissal from college. Whether you intend to or not, you are guilty of plagiarism when you don't credit others' ideas within and at the end of

your paper. Remember, even though you may have rewritten ideas and information using your own words in a paraphrase or summary, the ideas and information are not yours. You must cite your source!

- **What should you document?** The basic rule for documentation is to document any specific ideas, opinions, and facts that are not your own. The only thing you don't have to document is common knowledge.

For example: you DO have to document the fact that 103 cities in New York State were originally settled by English settlers, since this is a specific fact that is not common knowledge. You do NOT have to document the INFORMATION that New York State has places named for English cities, since this IS common knowledge.

There are two categories of common knowledge, information that's known to the general public and information that is agreed upon by most people in a professional field. Yet sometimes common knowledge can be tricky to define. A good rule is if in doubt, document.

- **Can you document too much?** If you find yourself needing to document almost every sentence, then it means you have not thought enough about your topic to develop your own ideas. A paper should not just be a collection of others' ideas and facts. Sources should only support or substantiate your ideas. The rule of thumb is that whenever you use information from sources you should comment on the information. Your comment should be approximately the same length as the source itself.
- **Where will you document?** You must identify your sources in two places in your research paper: at the end, and in your paper as you use direct quotations or paraphrases or summaries of ideas and information from the sources you've researched.

Citing sources at the end of the paper is easy. You merely put your notecards with the source information on them in alphabetical order according to the authors' last names, and then follow the correct format for providing the essential source information.

The good news about documenting your sources within the text of your paper is that footnotes are out of date. Today most research papers put the basic source information inside parentheses right in the text of the paper. The parentheses come at the end of the sentence, or group of sentences that contain the source's information.

Merely documenting paraphrases and summaries at the end of paragraphs leaves your reader confused. Does the documentation refer to the last sentence? the whole paragraph? part of a paragraph? So you also need to show where the source's information starts as well as ends. The easiest way to do this is to use a phrase such as "According to Dr. James Watts . . ." or "Carly Simon maintains that . . ."

- **How will you document?** – APA Style

The American Psychological Association (APA) provides specific guidelines for documenting sources. Click any of the following to view the corresponding APA guidelines:

Documenting sources in the body of your paper
Documenting sources at the end of your paper
Sample reference page

Documenting Sources in the Body of Your Paper (APA Style)

To learn how to format requires you to put basic information about your source in parentheses within the text (no footnotes) of the paper. Remember that the reader needs to be able to separate your ideas and information from the source's ideas and information. Therefore, you must identify the beginning and end of any material that is not your own. If you use a direct quotation, the reader can identify where it begins and ends by your use of quotation marks. Immediately following the end quotation mark, and before the period at the end of the sentence, include parentheses with the author's last name, the publication year, and the exact page number. This information should be separated by commas. For example, if you quoted from page 10 of a 1994 book by Mary Smith, the citation would look like this:

". . . the final decision must be made by the constituents" (Smith, 1994, p. 10).

Most of the time, you will not use direct quotations, but will summarize and paraphrase ideas from the source. Let your reader know the beginning of the summary or paraphrase by identifying the author. For example, start the summary by saying " Smith states," or "According to Jones." Since you already identified the author at the beginning of the summary or paraphrase, you only need to include the publication date right after the author's name in the text:

According to Philip Jones (1995) summer school should be mandated for any student who fails to maintain a C average.

If you are using a source that has no author, such as a newspaper article, you must use a shortened form of the title in the parentheses, along with the date and the page number:

According to a New York Times editorial, there is something deeply troubling about the way we are avoiding the plight of Bosnians. ("See No Evil" 1995, p. B16).

Here is the format for some of the other kinds of sources you will most often need to document.

- A book with two authors: put the names of both authors either in the text of your paper or in the parentheses, with the date and the page number, at the end of the material from that source. In the parentheses use "&" between the authors' names.
- A book with an editor: use the same documentation as for one author.
- An article by one author: use the same documentation as for one author.

Documenting Sources at the End of Your Paper (APA Style)

The American Psychological Association calls the list of sources the "References" page. A sample "References" page has certain general characteristics:

- sources are listed alphabetically, by authors' last names
- sources without authors are listed alphabetically by either the editor's last name or by the title of the work (disregarding the words "a," "an," and "the")
- author's first names are always abbreviated by using the first letter
- each source entry starts at the left margin
- 2nd & subsequent lines of each entry are indented 5 spaces
- capitalize the first word and all proper nouns in the titles and subtitles of books and articles
- do not put article titles in quotation marks

Here are five of the most used types of entries are these found on the ending reference page for a research paper. NOTE: Titles have been italicized. When writing your papers, either underline or italicize titles.

1. A book with one author

- author's last name, first initials [separated by a comma]
- date of publication [in parentheses and followed by a period]
- title of book [underlined and followed by a period; only the first letter of the first word capitalized]
- place of publication [followed by a colon]
- publisher's name [followed by a period]

Baker, H. A., Jr. (1984). *Blues, ideology, and Afro-American literature: A vernacular theory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

2. A book with more than one author

- author's last name, first initial [followed by "&"]
- 2nd author's first name, first initial
- date of publication [in parentheses and followed by a period]
- title of book [underlined and followed by a period]
- place of publication [followed by a colon and 2 spaces]
- publisher's name [followed by a comma]
- date of publication [in parentheses and followed by a period]
- title of book [underlined and followed by a period; only the first letter of the first word capitalized]
- place of publication [followed by a colon]
- publisher's name [followed by a period]

Raye, L., & Knight, S. (1995). *Somebody's watching, God: A collection of essays on Zora Neale Hurston*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

3. A book with an editor

- editor's last name, first initial [separated by a comma]

- Ed. abbreviation [in parentheses and followed by a period]
- date of publication [in parentheses and followed by a period]
- title of book [underlined and followed by a period; only the first letter of the first word capitalized]
- place of publication [followed by a colon]
- publisher's name [followed by a period]

Bloom, H. (Ed.). (1987). *Zora Neale Hurston's their eyes were watching God*. New York: Chelsea House.

4. An article from a professional journal

- author's last name, first initials [separated by a comma]
- date of publication [in parentheses and followed by a period]
- title of the article [only the first letter of the first word capitalized]
- title of the journal [underlined; only the first letter of the first word capitalized]
- volume of the journal [underlined]
- issue of the journal [in parentheses and followed by a comma]
- span of pages [followed by a period]

Wolff, M. T. (1982). Listening and living: reading and experience in *their eyes*. *Black American literature forum*, 16 (1), 29-33.

5. Online material from the Internet

- author's last name, first initials [separated by a comma]
- date of publication [in parentheses and followed by a period]
- the word Online. the location if available. the word "Internet," and the date you accessed the material [each followed by a period]
- the word "Available" and the electronic address, if your instructor asks for this information [separated by a colon and ending with a period]

Hurston, Z. N. (1937). *Their eyes were watching God*. Online. U of Minnesota Lib. Internet. 26 July 1995. Available: gopher.cic.net.

There are many other entry formats for the various types of sources:

- a work in an anthology
- an article in a journal paginated by issue
- an article in a newspaper
- a videotape
- a musical composition
- a lecture

To view a sample reference page in APA style, click [here](#).

Sample Reference Page (APA Style)

References

Baker, H. A., Jr. (1984). *Blues, ideology, and Afro-American literature: A vernacular theory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Bloom, H. (Ed.). (1987). *Zora Neale Hurston's their eyes Were watching God*. New York:Chelsea House.

Hurston, Z. N. (1937). *Their eyes were watching God*. Online. U of Minnesota Lib. Internet. 26 July 1995. Available: gopher.cic.net.

Raye, L., and Knight, S. (1995). *Somebody's watching, God: A collection of essays on Zora Neale Hurston*. Boston:Houghton Mifflin.

Wolff, M. T. (1982). Listening and living: reading and experience in *their eyes*. *Black American literature forum*, 16 (1), 29-33.

STEP 10. Revising and proofreading the draft

Writing is only half the job of writing. What's the answer to this riddle? Well, the writing process begins even before you put pen to paper. And, once you finish actually writing, the process continues. What you have written is not the finished essay, but a first draft--and, as you go over it each time to improve it, a second draft, third draft, as many as necessary to do the job right. Your final draft, edited and proofread, is your essay, ready for your reader's eyes.

Remember, though, that revision of an essay is not simply proofreading. Proofreading is checking over a draft to make sure that everything is complete and correct as far as spelling, grammar, sentence structure, punctuation, and such matters go; it's a necessary, if somewhat tedious and tricky job, one that a friend could help you with--even if that friend is a "Spellchecker" on a computer. No machine can help you with true revision, however, nor would you want it to--a re-vision of your essay, how you see things now, deciding whether your thesis and body, and also your introduction and conclusion, really express your vision.

Revision is global, taking another look at what ideas you have included in your paper and how they are arranged; proofreading is polishing, one spot at a time. That's why revision should come before proofreading: why polish what you might be changing anyway?

The following are hints for revising and proofreading.

- **Leave some time--an hour, a day, several days--between writing and revising.** You need some distance to switch from writer to editor, some distance between your initial vision and your re-vision.

- **Double-check your writing assignment to be sure you haven't gone off course.** It's all right if you've shifted from your original plan--if you know why you did and are happier this way.
- **Read aloud, and slowly.** You need to get your eye and your ear to work together: at each point that something seems "funny," read it over again; if you're not sure what's wrong, or even if something's wrong, make a notation in the margin and come back to it later. Watch out for "padding." Tighten your sentences to eliminate excess words that dilute your ideas. Also be on the lookout for points that seem vague or incomplete; these could be wonderful opportunities for rethinking, clarifying, and further developing an idea.
- **Get to know what your particular quirks are as a writer--every writer has them!** Do you give examples without explaining them, or forget links between paragraphs? Leave an extra re-reading or two just for your personal "favorites."
- **Get someone else into the act!** Have others read your draft, or read it to them. Invite questions, and ask questions yourself, to see if your points are clear and well developed. Remember, though, that some well-meaning "amateurs," including spouses, can be too easy--or too hard--on a piece of writing, especially one by someone close. Never change anything unless you are convinced that it should be changed.
- **Keep tools at hand,** such as a dictionary, a thesaurus, and a writing handbook. Use them!
- **If you're word processing your paper,** remember that computers are wonderful resources for editing and revising.
- **When you feel you've done everything you can,** first by revising and then by proofreading, and have a nice clean final draft, put it aside and return later to re-see the whole essay. There may be some last minute fine-tuning that can make all the difference.