Guide to Writing Research Papers
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A research paper IS/DOES:
✓ Require many reliable sources to back up your thesis/claim.
✓ Take up a position and support it with evidence.
✓ Usually about events (historical or current), textual arguments, or personal interests.
✓ Contain an introduction with a thesis, and a body with an argument and counterargument, and a conclusion, with a works cited in the very end.

A research paper is NOT:
✓ A regular essay—some essays are exploratory, some are textual analysis, but they do not usually require you to do severe research.
✓ A book report—you will not be reviewing a book, telling readers about plot, characters, etc., reading and focusing on just one book.
✓ A journalism/communications piece—many journalists argue with emotional appeal to win an audience over without much evidence.

Advice for attempting a research paper:
✓ Plan well
  o Read the prompt/directions for this paper; ask the instructor about anything unclear in the directions.
  o Brainstorm a few different issues/concepts that you are interested in; take notes on any ideas that you feel may have potential.

✓ Research
  o Start searching databases, journals, and libraries for your research material.
  o Interviews and other primary research is important evidentiary support.
  o After reading through many articles, relevant websites, and/or books, think about what you’ve read and develop research questions.
  o You should be able to see the many smaller, focused topics within your larger research area; choose one of those focused topics to work with.
  o Create a working hypothesis from this focused research information—you will revise this some as you progress, so don’t feel that you have to make it concrete just yet.
  o Close reading: Reread over your source information highlighting and/or taking notes (annotating)—if you just highlight, you may not remember later why you highlighted that line.
Begin Writing

- After closely reading your beginning groups of source information, write a rough outline that covers the main pieces of evidence and counter-arguments that you've found thus far.
- You should then be able to clarify your hypothesis to a solid thesis statement with a claim + reasons/evidence.
- Revise your outline to include where within your argument each piece of information would best fit. This way, you can see where you may still need some research, and/or where you have too much of their info and not enough of yours.
- WRITE. Often, students find that fleshing out that outline into body paragraphs and then working on the introduction and conclusion paragraphs is helpful, because they can review their rough draft of the paper body and write accordingly. Sometimes the introduction paragraph can cause writer’s block, but your approach to writing is yours; just start writing.

Revision

- You will first want to revise for higher order concerns (HOCs), such as focus/purpose and/or development/evidence. These are big-ticket items that may make you do some re-writing, and thusly change things that lower order concerns (LOCs) encompass.
  - **Focus/Purpose**: You will want to stay focused on your thesis, maintaining the purpose of the assignment. Review the list you just made for organization; it should look similar to or at least follow your thesis statement. If there was a prompt, review that and your list to see if you are responding well. Also, consider the purpose of responding to audience—who are you targeting, and are you reaching out to them?
  - **Development/Evidence**: The evidence you bring into a research essay needs to be relevant to your cause, as recent as possible, written by credible authors, and clearly support the paragraph claim.
After HOC revision work, you will want to edit for LOCs, such as spelling, sentence variety, and more.

- **Spelling:** Review commonly misspelled words such as they’re, their, and there to be sure you are using the correct one.

- **Sentence Variety:** Sometimes sentences can all start sounding the same, so you may want to play with punctuation, order information, and subordination/coordination to gain sentence variety. If you have three short sentences in a row, consider a way to connect a couple of them to offer the reader a variety of pace when reading.

- **Tone/style:** be sure that you are approaching the assignment with the proper attitude—is it serious or relaxed? Also, having uneven tone or switching up style might get confusing for your audience. Look for style shifts such as using professional language and slang in the same paper.

- **Tense:** if you are writing with a certain tense, maintain that tense throughout. Look for your verb use: are they all in the same tense? Most papers are written using active voice for concision.