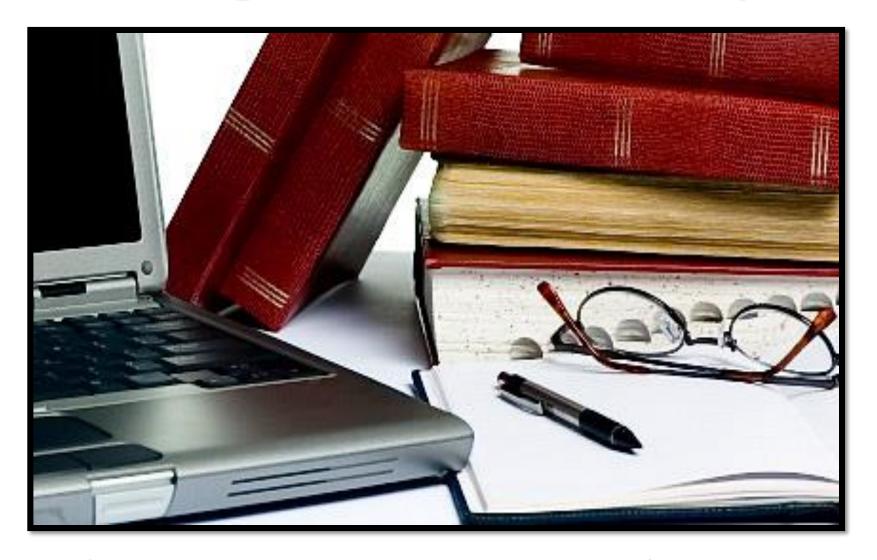
Writing a Research Paper



Liberty University Center for Writing and Languages

Writing a Research Paper

- Choosing Your Topic
 - Narrowing Your Topic
- Writing a Thesis Statement
- Creating an Outline

Choosing Your Topic



Choosing Your Topic

- **Breadth**. You may need to start broad and let your research take you narrower.
- **Originality**. Choose a topic that will allow you to contribute to the field, rather than just regurgitate facts.
- **Sources**. On the other hand, also choose a topic that has scholarly grounding.

Narrowing Your Topic

- Focus on a specific TYPE or CLASS
- Focus on a particular PLACE or REGION
- Focus on a certain TIME PERIOD
- Focus on a certain ASPECT
 - Social, legal, medical, ethical, biological,
 psychological, economic, political, philosophical, etc.
- Focus on a specific POPULATION
 - Gender, age, occupation, ethnicity, nationality, educational attainment, species, etc.
- Focus on a RELATIONSHIP with two or more topics
- COMBINE different kinds of focuses

Narrowing Your Topic

Tips: Use journalistic questions: who?, what?, when?, where?, why?

Review recent literature (journals, trade papers, etc.)

Recall questions asked in class.

Apply your paper to your career goals.

Talk to your professor.



THESIS STATEMENT

- The thesis statement is like an outline in miniature. It is a "roadmap" for the rest of the paper.
- A typical thesis statement gives brief mention to each of the paper's main points, and it also states the overall argument the writer wishes to make.
- It directly answers the question asked of you.
- It makes a claim that others might dispute.
- It is usually a single sentence near the end of the first paragraph that presents your argument to the reader.

IDENTIFYING A STRONG THESIS STATEMENT

- Do I answer the question?
- Have I taken a position that others might challenge or oppose?
- Does my thesis pass the "So what?" test?
- Does my essay support my thesis specifically and without wandering?
- Does my thesis pass the "how and why?" test?

THESIS STATEMENT EXAMPLES

Essay Topic: Compare and contrast the reasons why the North and South fought the Civil War.

- Poor Example: "The North and South fought the Civil War for many reasons, some of which were the same and some different."
- Better Example: "While both sides fought the Civil War over the issue of slavery, the North fought for moral reasons while the South fought to preserve its own institutions."
- Best Example: "While both Northerners and Southerners believed they fought against tyranny and oppression, Northerners focused on the oppression of slaves while Southerners defended their own right to self-government."

THESIS STATEMENT EXAMPLES

Essay Topic: Write an analysis of some aspect of Mark Twain's novel <u>Huckleberry Finn.</u>

- Poor Example: "Mark Twain's <u>Huckleberry Finn</u> is a great American novel."
- Better Example: "In <u>Huckleberry Finn</u>, Mark Twain develops a contrast between life on the river and life on the shore."
- Best Example: "Through its contrasting river and shore scenes, Twain's <u>Huckleberry Finn</u> suggests that to find the true expression of American democratic ideals, one must leave "civilized" society and go back to nature."

The Writing Process

- 1. Outline
- 2. Draft

3. Revise

4. Edit



Benefits of an Outline

- Aids in the process of writing
- Helps you organize your ideas
- Presents your material in a logical form
- Shows the relationships among ideas in your writing
- Constructs an ordered overview of your writing
- Defines boundaries and groups
- Prevents you from "straying" from the topic

Creating an Outline

- Research: Perform initial research to learn about your chosen topic.
- **Brainstorm**: List all the ideas that you want to include in your paper.
- Organize: Group related ideas together.
- Order: Arrange material in subsections from general to specific or from abstract to concrete.
- Label: Create main and sub headings.

Outline Tips

- **Begin early!** A strong, detailed outline is a crucial step of the writing process.
- Refer to your outline often. A strong outline provides a consistent backbone during the writing process.
- Be as specific as possible. This will be your guide throughout the entire writing process.

Outline Tips

- Avoid having too many subheadings. This may indicate that you can further narrow the topic of your paper.
- Don't be afraid to change your outline.
 Further research may provide additional information or counterpoints.
- Allow yourself enough time to make changes. Attempting a complete overhaul of your paper the night before it's due is both frustrating and often futile.

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