

INSTRUCTIONS FOR WRITING A RESEARCH PAPER

ASKING QUESTIONS/GATHERING SOURCES

- Because a research paper is only as good as the questions you ask, before beginning your research, jot down the most important and interesting points you already know about your topic, and, based on that,
Come up with 5-7 focus questions you want to answer in your paper.
- Because a good research paper is only as good as the sources you compile, once you have a sense of the questions you want to ask, **compile at least 6 good sources.** Make sure you can get hold of them in plenty of time.
The minute you find a source, take down all bibliographical information in proper form: Pay close attention to Bibliographical citations in your **MLA Packet.** There are instructions for both hard copy and internet sources.
- You may use tertiary sources (i.e. an encyclopedia article, textbook...) to get you started, either hard copy or on line, **but it does not count as one of your works cited.**
- **Using the Internet**
 - + While you can often find excellent sources on the Internet, too often the sources are “bullets” of information, offering very little in-depth information.
 - + **You are required to use both Internet sources and books:** Focus on academic search engines (university websites/ major periodicals), which can help make your search more efficient. Exhaust the suggested search engines (i.e. e-library, facts on file...) before entering “Googlesmania”- which more often than not is a colossal waste of time.
 - + It would be wise to check in with your teacher about seemingly “outside the box” internet sources.
- **You are required to use at least two Primary Sources**

NOTETAKING:

- + Take notes on **one side of 3X5 notecards**, to help later with sorting, and to **avoid copying/plagiarism (refer to plagiarism handout again).**
- + Take all notes in your own words: Work at this, using brief phrases rather than whole sentences.
- + **Quotes should only be specific to an opinion on an issue, not merely general information, and should be in quotes with the specific p. #.**
- + **WRITE SOURCE # AND PAGE # ON EVERY SINGLE NOTECARD.** Use a # for the source, to save time. In this way you can always go back to a source to read more, or check a fact. Moreover, your numbered sources become your works cited page.

ORGANIZING YOUR RESEARCH:

- + After taking 10-15 notecards:
Review your information.
Develop a working thesis, which you will continue to refine up to your final draft.
Redefine your 5-7 focus questions into sub-questions that are now supporting your working thesis.
Organize your notecards according to your focus questions (A-F).

- + The steps above help you move from superficial, general information into penetrating, ground breaking research. Feel free to change your thesis and any focus questions as needed.

- + After 20-30 notecards: review your information to clarify working thesis and focus questions:
Organize cards in piles according to your focus questions.
Read each card to see if it really answers the question.
Which questions are answered fully by your cards, and which are not?
Does your working thesis still work for your paper? If not, change it!
Now you are ready to finish the research for your paper, reading ONLY for information on focus questions not yet answered.

- + After 30-40 Notecards: Develop a brief outline for your paper:
Thesis should start to solidify
Focus-questions should be put in an intentional order giving structure to your paper
Topic sentences should be written in answer to each focus question, with specific supporting evidence underneath

WRITING YOUR PAPER:

- + Do not copy from your notecards: That is very awkward
- + Read over all the cards connected to each topic sentence, **set them aside**, and write from memory.

WHY CITE SOURCES IN YOUR PAPER:

- + Citing your sources proves to the reader that what you are saying has been well researched, therefore, probably building a sound argument.
- + Citing sources on a controversial topic proves to your reader that you have considered all sides of the conflict.
- + **The use of the ideas as well as more than three words of an author, without quotes and proper citation is illegal, and can get you expelled from any educational institution. Therefore, you must avoid paraphrasing as well as copying directly, without proper citations.**

• **WHAT TO CITE, USING IN-TEXT PARENTHETICALS:**

- + Any information quoted directly from a source.
- + Any ideas or opinions which are clearly those of your source
- + **Any pieces of information you didn't know before you began your research**

• **HOW TO CITE IN-TEXT PARENTHETICALS**

- + If you are using a direct quotation, after the quotation you write the author's last name and the page # in parentheses. If the quotation is longer than 2 lines you change the format to being out of text, by narrowing the margins and making the quotation single space, if it is shorter than 2 lines leave the quotation in the normal format of your double-spaced paragraph.
- + When you are paraphrasing, place the parentheticals in the normal format of your text.
- + **Specific information on how to cite your sources can be found in your MLA packet.**