The Research Process

What is Research?
“Research is to see what everybody else has seen, and to think what nobody else has thought.”
Albert Szent-Gyorgyi

“Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose.” Zora Neale Hurston

Understanding the Assignment
Before you start, you should consider the assignment you’ve been given. What is the general topic? How long do you have to complete the assignment? Is there a minimum number of sources that you must use? Is there a minimum number of types of sources that you must use? What is the format of the final product? All of these questions will help guide your research.

Choosing a Topic
There will be times when your teacher allows you to select your research topic. It is important to select a topic that is appropriate for the requirements and time frame of the assignment. Choosing a topic that is too broad can make it difficult to complete the assignment on time, while choosing a topic that is too narrow can make it challenging to find enough information to finish your project. You should start by brainstorming for a few broad subjects that are of interest to you, and then start to narrow your focus by looking at the information that is available on those topics.

Some things to consider while you are selecting a topic:
- Is this topic interesting? Find a topic that will keep you engaged throughout the project.
- Is there enough time to complete the project using your chosen topic?
- Is there enough valid information about the topic, and can it be easily accessed?
- Does the topic need approval from the teacher? Can you change your topic if there is a problem with it?

Where to Begin
Once you have selected a topic, you will need to begin your initial research. There are some questions you can ask to help you narrow your options.
- What kind of information am I looking for? Facts, opinions, data, reflections?
- What are some sources that might be helpful for the type of information that I need? Sources such as books, magazines, newspapers, web sites, videos and interviews all offer different types of information.
- How much information do I need?
- How long do I have to find my information?
- Is there anyone who can help me locate the information I need?
- What tools can I use to help me locate information?
Evaluating Sources

In some cases, there may be an overwhelming amount of information available about your topic. Not all of the information is valuable or even accurate. How can you tell if the information you are looking at is actually helpful? Here are some things to consider as you try to locate sources.

- Is the person or group responsible for the work clearly named? Is there any information about that person or group available?
- What type of source are you looking at? Remember that printed resources such as books, journals, and newspapers pass through a publishing process that typically includes some level of fact-checking and editing. Many web sites do not.
- Can you tell if the information is fact, opinion, or propaganda? Does the author show any bias?
- Does the author provide information about the sources of their facts?
- How old is the source? Does the age of the information matter for your topic?
- Can you find another source that corroborates the facts in your source?
- Remember that you should never limit yourself to one source. While a source may contain valuable information, it rarely contains ALL of the information you need. Looking at a variety of sources will provide you with a more complete set of facts.
- Does the source provide an index, table of contents, or other list of the information it contains? These tools will make it easier for you to quickly locate the information you need.

Once you have located and evaluated your sources, you’re ready to start the rest of your research. It is always a good idea to create a calendar for the project that includes your deadlines. This will help you manage your time and meet those deadlines without stress. The following sections of this guide will provide details about the next steps of your project, including creating works cited, note taking, writing, and formatting for your final paper.
Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the use of another person’s ideas, thoughts, or words without giving him or her credit for the work. Think of it as stealing intellectual property. Plagiarism is something that you need to be careful to avoid while writing your paper.

Some examples of plagiarism include:
- Turning in someone else’s paper with your name on it (this includes buying a paper online, using a free paper you found online, using a paper written by someone else)
- Cutting and pasting information from several sources to make up your paper
- Using the words or ideas you found in another source without giving credit to the source through in-text citations and/or a bibliography
- Not putting a quotation in quotation marks
- Not giving the correct information about the source of a quotation
- Copying such a large amount of ideas or words from another source that it makes up the majority of your work
- Paraphrasing someone’s wording or argument without giving him or her credit

You can avoid plagiarism through careful note-taking and the use of a works cited. Your notes should make it clear when something is a quotation, a paraphrase, or your own idea, and should always include information about the source of the information. When you are writing, be sure to use quotation marks around direct quotes, and use in-text citations for both quotations and paraphrased ideas.

Some other issues arise with copyrighted material that you might use for a project, including music and pictures. The rules about the “fair use” of these types of materials can be very confusing because they are flexible depending on the situation. You need to consider how you are using the material, why you are using it, the amount you are using, and the effect. Two questions to ask before using copyrighted material are:
- Did I repurpose the original material to create something different?
- Does my creation add value to the original material?

If you answer yes to either of those questions, you should be able to use the copyrighted material. Be sure that you provide a works cited for the original material.

For more information about fair use and copyright, visit the Media Education Lab at Temple University.
Creating Your Works Cited Cards

One of the most important concepts to understand when researching is that the materials you find are created by other people and that you are obligated to give those creators credit for their work. If you don’t give them proper credit, you will be guilty of plagiarism, or the stealing of someone’s words or ideas, which can have serious consequences. You need to create a works cited for every source you use, regardless of whether you will be using quotes from the source or putting the information you found into your own words. For this reason, the first step of the research process is recording each of your source’s works cited information.

First, you must decide what type of source you are using. Is it a book with one author, a reference book, a journal article, or a web page? There are specific formats for each type of source. Once you have determined the type of source, look it up on the MLA chart in this manual. Ask your librarian or teacher for help if you are unsure of what format to use or if the format you need is not listed in the manual.

Then, on a works cited card similar to the one below, copy your source’s information in the exact order and with the exact punctuation as the MLA chart indicates. The first line should begin at the margin, but every line after that should be indented. Blank works cited cards can be found in this manual.

Finally, provide your source with a “source code.” A source code can be a symbol, number, letter, or color. Whatever you choose, be sure it is something simple that you can duplicate many times, as you will be placing this code next to each note you take from this source. It will prevent you from having to rewrite each source’s works cited information every time you take a note. It is much easier and faster to use source codes.

Example

Works Cited Formats

Books with one author:

Last Name, First name. *Title.* City of Publication: Publisher, Year. Publication Medium.


Books with Two Authors:

Last name, First name, and First name Last name. *Title.* City of Publication: Publisher, Year. Publication Medium.


General Encyclopedia / Dictionary Articles:

Last name, First name. “Article Title.” *Reference Book Title.* Edition. Date. Publication Medium.


Reference Book Articles

Last name, First name. “Article Title.” *Reference Book Title.*


World Wide Web Pages (nonperiodical):

Last name, First name. “Title of web page.” Title of Web Site (if different from web page). Version or edition used. Publisher or sponsor of site. Date of publication. Publication medium. Date visited.

***If no publisher/sponsor, use N.p. If no date of publication, use n.d. You no longer need to include the URL, but you should keep it in your records anyway.


A Work on the Web That Also Appears in Print (example: work on Google Books)

Last Name, First name. Title. City of Publication: Publisher,Year. Title of the Database or Web Site. Publication Medium. Date of Access.


Online Journal Articles:

Last name, First name. “Title of Article.” Title of Magazine Volume Number. Issue Number (Date of Publication): Page numbers. Title of Database. Publication medium. Date of access.

Online Video Clip:

Last name, First Name. “Title of Clip.” Title of Database or Web site. Date of Publication. Medium of publication. Date of Access.

***For the author of an online video, do not use the name of the person who posted the video unless you are sure they are the creator.

Using a Web Site to Create Your Bibliographies

There are several web sites that will allow you to generate your works cited list online, including Easybib.com, Bibme.org, and Citationmachine.net. Below you will find instructions for using Easybib.com to create your bibliographies and export them for use in your project.

To begin, make sure that the style at the top of the page is set to MLA. Then click the start button to begin. Choose the type of source that you are citing. Be sure to be as exact as possible when choosing your type of source. If you select the incorrect source, your bibliography will not appear in the correct format.

If you are citing a book, Easybib gives you the ability to automatically generate the citation by entering the book’s title or ISBN. You can typically find the ISBN on the back of the title page or above the book’s barcode on the back cover. If you choose to use this method, you will be shown a list of possible matches for your book. Be sure to select the one that most closely matches the book you are using, as some of the publication information will vary between the books listed. Once you have chosen the correct book, click the SELECT button to see the form for the citation.

You will need to use all of your standard bibliography-writing skills in order to complete the bibliography online. Fill in as much of the information requested as you can find in the boxes. Should you not be able to find some of the information, skip it for the time being and ask a teacher for help. Once you have completed as much of the form as possible, click the create citation button. You will then be taken to a page that shows your finalized bibliography. As you add more bibliographies, they will be added to the list in alphabetical order. You then have several options to export the information for your project.

**Copy & paste**
You can use this button to go to a page where you can copy the finalized bibliographies and paste them into your project.

**E-mail list**
This button will allow you to send the list to your home email address.

**Public URL**
Clicking this button will allow you to post a link to the list on another website, such as Moodle.

**Save as Word Doc**
This button will allow you to export the list as a Word document and save it. If you choose this option, click the link to download the file and then select the SAVE option on the pop-up box. You should save the document to your shares folder if you are working at school.

Once you have exported your work, you should refer to this manual to ensure that you are formatting your Works Cited page correctly.
Notetaking

Once you have found a source that contains useful information and have written a works cited card for it, you will need to take notes. Keep in mind that it is always better to err on the side of taking too many notes than on the side of taking too few. A little extra effort with note-taking will make writing your paper much easier.

To take notes, first you must look at your subtopics. Write each of your sub-topics at the top of its own subtopic sheet. On each sheet, you will only write facts that pertain to that subtopic. This will make organization much easier when it is time to start writing your paper.

Follow the steps below to take notes on your subtopic sheets.

- Read a chunk before writing down important facts.
- Think about what you read.
- Match important facts to your subtopics.
- Make note of the source of your information on the card.
- Write down the page number on which you found the fact.
- Write the fact using your own short phrases and words
- If you must copy a phrase or sentence straight from your source, remember to use quotation marks. “More embarrassing, the defenses that the general had claimed were so formidable were nothing more than logs painted to look like cannons.”
- If you copy a quote, you should also use your own words to explain the quote in your notes.

Example:

Subtopic: War Orders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pages  <strong>94</strong>____</th>
<th>Source code</th>
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</thead>
</table>

Note:
- General War Order #1 issued Jan 27 1862
  - Lincoln orders McClellan to move into Virginia & seize Manassas by Feb. 22
- McClellan writes 22 page response objecting
  - says Confederate position too strong, his men not ready, situation is too dangerous
Creating an Outline

An outline can assist you in staying organized during the research process, and can help you create a logical and well thought-out final paper. While you may choose different methods of organizing your information within the outline (chronological, cause and effect, etc.), the format for an outline does not change.

I. Paragraph Topic

   A. Main support for I.
      1. Detail support for A.
         a. Support for 1.
            (1) Support for a.
               (a) Support for (1)
               (b) Support for (1)
            (2) Support for a.
         b. Support for 1.
      2. Detail support for A.

   B. Main support for I.

II. Paragraph Topic

If your outline has a I, it must have a II. If it has an A, it must have a B. If it has a 1, it must have a 2, and so on.
The Writing Process

Once you are finished with your note taking, it is time to begin the writing process. Before you begin writing, it is a good idea to organize your sub-topic sheets. Physically put the sub-topic sheets in the correct order. This will make it easier for you to stay organized during the writing process.

Follow your teacher’s guidelines for the writing process. Each paper you write should include the following parts:

1) **Introduction:** The introductory paragraph of your paper tells the reader not only what your topic is, but also what major sub-topics you will be writing about. It is a very important paragraph because it gives your paper a focus. This is the area of the paper where you will include your thesis statement.

2) **Body Paragraphs:** How many body paragraphs you have depends upon how much information you find for each of your subtopics. Each subtopic gets at least one paragraph of its own. If you find lots of information, each subtopic may be divided into two or more paragraphs.

3) **Conclusion:** The conclusion paragraph of your paper should sum up your information. It takes everything you’ve presented and explains why that information is important.

A few other terms to know:

**Thesis:** A thesis statement is one sentence that expresses your topic and the point of view you will be taking in your paper. It should be the guide for your research.

Example: The public’s perception of the reputation and role of nurses was greatly changed by their work in the hospitals and on the battlefields during the Civil War.

**Draft:** A draft is a version of your paper. Every time you make revisions and corrections, the new copy is a new draft. Some writers write several drafts, others only go through one or two before reaching their final draft.

**Revision:** When you revise your paper, you are making bigger changes, such as to the order of words, phrases, sentences, or paragraphs. Sometimes certain sentences just sound better or fit better someplace else. Revision also means making additions to your paper or cutting parts out. You may find that you need to go back to the note-taking stage to fill out certain areas of your writing.

**Editing:** When you edit your paper, you are making minor changes, such as for grammar, punctuation, and spelling. Editing takes place as you go, but it is also a very important final step before you complete and turn in your paper.
Be sure that you are following your teacher’s instructions for any piece you write. As you are working, you can refer to the PSSA rubric for informational writing to ensure that you are meeting high standards for focus, content, organization, style and conventions.
# PSSA Domain Rubric for Writing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain Descriptions</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Style</th>
<th>Conventions</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>PL 1 Minimal evidence of a topic</strong></td>
<td>Minimal evidence of a topic</td>
<td>Superficial and/or minimal content</td>
<td>Minimal control of intent arrangement</td>
<td>Minimal variety in word choice and minimal control of sentence structures</td>
<td>Minimal control of grammar, mechanics, spelling, usage and sentence formation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PL 2 No apparent point but evidence of a specific topic</strong></td>
<td>No apparent point but evidence of a specific topic</td>
<td>Limited content with inadequate elaboration or explanation</td>
<td>Confused or inconsistent arrangement of content with or without attempts at transition</td>
<td>Limited word choice and control of sentence structures that inhibit voice and tone</td>
<td>Limited control of grammar, mechanics, spelling, usage and sentence formation</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>PL 3 Apparent point made about a single topic with sufficient awareness of task (mode)</strong></td>
<td>Apparent point made about a single topic with sufficient awareness of task (mode)</td>
<td>Sufficiently developed content with adequate elaboration or explanation</td>
<td>Functional arrangement of content that sustains a logical order with some evidence of transitions</td>
<td>Generic use of a variety of words and sentence structures that may or may not create writer's voice and tone appropriate to audience</td>
<td>Sufficient control of grammar, mechanics, spelling, usage and sentence formation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PL 4 Sharp, distinct controlling point made about a single topic with evident awareness of task</strong></td>
<td>Sharp, distinct controlling point made about a single topic with evident awareness of task</td>
<td>Substantial, specific, and/or illustrative content demonstrating strong development and sophisticated ideas</td>
<td>Sophisticated arrangement of content with evident and/or subtle transitions</td>
<td>Precise, illustrative use of a variety of words and sentence structures to create consistent writer's voice and tone</td>
<td>Evident control of grammar, mechanics, spelling, usage and sentence formation</td>
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**Domain Scoring Points and Descriptions**

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<td>4</td>
<td>Sharp, distinct controlling point made about a single topic with evident awareness of task (mode)</td>
<td>Substantial, specific, and/or illustrative content demonstrating strong development and sophisticated ideas</td>
<td>Sophisticated arrangement of content with evident and/or subtle transitions</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Apparent point made about a single topic with sufficient awareness of task (mode)</td>
<td>Sufficiently developed content with adequate elaboration or explanation</td>
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<td>Generic use of a variety of words and sentence structures that may or may not create writer's voice and tone appropriate to audience</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Minimal evidence of a topic</td>
<td>Superficial and/or minimal content</td>
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<td>Minimal variety in word choice and minimal control of sentence structures</td>
<td>Minimal control of grammar, mechanics, spelling, usage and sentence formation</td>
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Parenthetical Citations

While providing a works cited list with your paper helps you acknowledge your sources and avoid plagiarism, there are times when you need to provide more information than a works cited list can give. You can do this through parenthetical citations. A parenthetical citation gives your reader more details about the source of your information. Whenever you use another author’s words, facts, or idea, you should include the author’s name and the page number on which the information was located in parentheses at the end of the sentence.

Example:
“Opponents also argued that caring for wounded soldiers was inappropriate for ladies” (Zeinert 42).

This example indicates that the quote comes from page 42 of a book by Zeinert. The reader can then refer to the works cited page to learn that the book in question is:


Rules to follow:

- Direct quotes should be enclosed in quotation marks as long as they are fewer than four lines long.
- If your quote is more than four lines long, you should start the quote on a new line, indent one inch from the left margin, and type it double-spaced without quotation marks.
  - Despite the overwhelming need for medical staff, neither army wanted to allow women to participate as nurses:
    - Officials doubted that women could endure the rigors and horrors that they would face. Nurses would be subjected to long hours, difficult working conditions, the smell of festering wounds, and the sight of bleeding stumps where arms or legs had once been. (Zeinert 41)
- Unique facts or ideas need citations even if you put them into your own words.
- If you use the author’s name in the text of the sentence, you only need to include the page numbers in the parentheses.
  - According to Zeinert, the opponents of hiring female nurses could not ignore the fact that the only way to remedy the shortage of nurses was to hire women (43).
• If the source used does not have an author, use either the full title (if brief) or a shortened title along with a page number, paragraph, section or reference number (if available).
  o Civil war nurses were “seeking convention and direct involvement in the national struggle rather than the domestic support roles to which social minimum career opportunity had traditionally confined the majority of their sex” (“Civil War Nurses”).

• If you have two works by the same author, include the title (in full if brief, otherwise shortened) in the citation.
  o (Zeinert, Courageous 44).
Formatting Your Paper

You should always check with your teacher before formatting your paper. She or he may have specific guidelines for how your paper should be formatted, and you should always follow those. If you are not given any specific requirements, you should follow the guidelines below.

The Basics

- Use 8 ½ x 11 paper
- Select a font that is easy to read, such as Times New Roman
- Use 12 point font
- Double space the entire paper
- Leave margins of one inch at the top, bottom, and sides of the paper
- Indent the first word of a paragraph ½ inch from the left margin
- Indent long quotations (over four lines) one inch from the left margin (see the section on parenthetical citations for more information)

Heading and Titles

Your research paper should not have a separate title page. You should create a heading (not a header) one inch from the top of the first page with the following information:

- Your name
- Your teacher’s name
- The name of the class
- The date

This information should line up at the left margin. You should then center the title of your paper below the heading. Do not italicize, underline, or bold your title, and do not put it in quotation marks or all capital letters. Do not use a period at the end of the title.

Page Numbers

You should create a header at the top right of your paper, ½ inch from the top of the page, with your last name and the page number. Page numbers should be consecutive through the paper. Your page number should be just a number with no abbreviation for the word page before it.

Works Cited Page

Your works cited page should have the title Works Cited centered at the top of the page 1 inch from the top margin. Bibliographies should be listed alphabetically by the first word (typically the author’s last name). If you have two or more books by the same author, list the first bibliography in full. For any other books by the same author, replace the author’s name with “---.” The second lines of your bibliographies should be indented an extra half inch from the margin.

See the next page for examples of how your first page and works cited pages should look.
Throughout his tenure as president, Abraham Lincoln used his power to create general war orders to provoke a variety of responses from his troops and generals. The impact of these orders ranged from...

Works Cited


### Sub-Topic Sheet

**Sub-Topic:** ___________________________________

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