Writing Research Papers: A Step-by-Step Procedure

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For more information about writing research papers, see our overview page on this subject at http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/index.html. For extensive documentation covering all aspects of the research process in detail, see our new handbook-style workshop on research papers at http://owl.english.purdue.edu/workshops/hypertext/ResearchW/index.html.

The Preliminaries
___ 1. Choose a topic
___ 2. Begin preliminary reading
___ 3. Restrict the subject
___ 4. Develop a preliminary thesis statement

Gathering Data
___ 1. Compile the working bibliography
___ 2. Prepare the bibliography on cards in correct form (3" x 5" cards)
___ 3. Begin extensive work in the library reference room; be sure to check:
    ___ a. general bibliographies
    ___ b. trade bibliographies
    ___ c. indexes (books and collections, literature in periodicals, newspaper indexes, pamphlet indexes)
    ___ d. library electronic catalogue

Taking Notes
___ 1. Develop a preliminary outline
___ 2. Evaluate your source material; which is primary material and which is secondary material?
___ 3. Begin note-taking on cards (4" x 6" cards)
___ 4. Avoid plagiarism

Writing the Paper
___ 1. Develop the final outline; test your outline
___ 2. Prepare to write:
    ___ a. put your note cards in the order that your outline is in
    ___ b. consider your (real and imagined) readers and how their expectations may affect your tone and style
___ 3. Write the rough draft
___ 4. Check your documentation carefully
___ 5. Revise and rewrite
___ 6. Check the format of the text, citations, notes, and bibliography (most instructors recommend MLA at http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r_mla.html or APA format at http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r_apa.html)
___ 7. Proofread

Most of this format is based on the process described by James D. Lester in Writing Research Papers: A Complete Guide, 2nd ed.

The following information must remain intact on every handout printed for distribution.

This page is located at http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/print/research/r_resstep.html

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