

# Instructions for Writing the Research Paper

The criteria used to assess the research paper is posted on Moodle. Keep in mind that I will be paying especially close attention to the following areas: 1) organization and development of the topic; 2) unity and coherence of the discussion; 3) cogency and persuasiveness of the argument; 4) clarity of expression. These are the steps you should follow in bringing your research paper to fruition. Keep in mind that none of these steps should be done at the last minute.

**PLAN:** Set a timeline and decide how many weeks/days to spend reading, to spend writing, to spend revising, etc. \*Allow for more time than you think you will need!

**SELECT A TOPIC:** Take your time, but not too much time! I will ask you to commit to a topic, in writing, by **October 9**. Once you have submitted your description, you will only be allowed to change it with permission of the professor.

**READ, EXPLORE, AND UNDERSTAND:** Allow yourself an ample amount of time to explore your topic. The sooner you get started, the more time you'll have. This is often the most gratifying part of the experience, but there are certain traps into which students typically fall. Perhaps the most common is procrastination. Let's imagine that you have given yourself six weeks to research your topic. With such a large amount of time, it will seem like the things you have to do by tomorrow or next week are much more pressing. They are not. By the time six weeks have gone by, you will need to have accumulated a substantial amount of evidence from a variety of scholarly sources in order to be able to formulate a compelling thesis, support it with evidence, and draw logical and compelling conclusions. With only a limited body of evidence, your paper will suffer. Although you are only required to use three scholarly sources in the actual paper, you need to cast a wide net for these sources (you shouldn't just go with the first three that you find), and, using more sources could be advantageous. Another common trap is reading without having an adequate system to document what you have read. Develop a system for taking and managing notes that includes copying useful quotations and writing down their page number.

**DEVELOP A WORKING THESIS:** After you have informed yourself about your topic, taking into account as many perspectives as possible, you should begin to formulate a thesis. Before drafting a thesis statement, explore your own thoughts by doing a series of timed writings. Once you believe you have formulated a clear and original position, sit down at your computer and begin drafting your (tentative) thesis statement.

**WRITE:** Once you have a working thesis statement, begin to think about how you plan to organize and present the evidence in the way that best supports your thesis. Keep in mind that it is necessary to summarize and document competing claims and to assess them impartially. You risk compromising the credibility of your stance by expressing your personal judgments. Because your

objective is to lead your reader to see an issue in a particular way, you should present your evidence in a way that will lead a rational individual to appreciate and see the validity of your conclusions. Thus, let the evidence speak for you and save your reflective commentary for the conclusion. Even though the conclusion is the appropriate place to express your opinion, you should do so sparingly and always with objectivity. Write this paper imagining that you are a lawyer who is laying out a case to be considered by a jury.

**REVISE:** Papers should never be submitted for a final grade before they undergo thorough and rigorous revisions. Completing an extended paper entails seeing it through numerous stages and should not be done hurriedly. The amount of time you put into it shows, and even if you have the strongest evidence in the world, the paper will only be as persuasive as it is well written.

**SEEK FEEDBACK:** Once you have an introduction, body and conclusion (in other words a rough draft), it is time to solicit feedback from someone who you trust to read and critique your work intelligently. Your reader should not fix any problems in the paper, but rather help you to identify areas and issues that need further attention. This is also when you should seek informal feedback from your professor or the TA, who may be willing to read it in its entirety or, if not, at least segments that you have identified as needing attention.

**POLISH:** Once you have received some feedback, set the paper aside for a couple of days and return to it at a time when you are well rested and can look at it with fresh eyes. Print it and read through it slowly, penciling in any necessary corrections along the way.

**SUBMIT:** Always make sure that you turn in your papers on time.