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