

Research Paper Checklist

___ **Select a Topic:** Be sure that you understand your prompt or assignment guidelines as you consider which topic to research. Pick a subject that interests you and one that you can research with resources available to you. Avoid topics that are too broad or too narrow. You will have to complete a fair amount of reading on this subject to write your paper—so choose something that you can enjoy. *(Consult with a professor, the research librarians, and/or a member of the Writing Center staff in the early planning stages of a research project.)*

___ **Survey the Topic & State a Preliminary Thesis:** Get an overview of your topic by reading background articles in general works such as encyclopedias or in popular press journals such as *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Rolling Stone*, etc. The internet is also an excellent starting point for preliminary research. This preliminary research will help you identify significant aspects of your topic and will serve as an introduction to later research. It will also help you narrow the topic and formulate a thesis or central theme.

___ **Prepare a Preliminary Bibliography:** Begin compiling a list of possible sources for your research. You may want to consult with a research librarian regarding possible sources for your paper. It is important to determine whether the sources are reliable and up-to-date. Generally, any source more than five years old may be outdated and can usually be replaced with more current information. Approach all possible sources with a critical attitude. In particular, be alert to the source of information from websites. *(See other handouts for Annotated Bibliographies and Evaluating World Wide Web Sources)*

___ **Conduct Research & Take Notes:** You must read your sources and take notes as you do so. Avoid just highlighting your sources; take the time to write important details down and stay organized. Anything you write down that is word for word from the source should be written down in quotes, so you remember that it is not your wording. You may want to create a note-taking document on your laptop, set up a section of a notebook, or use 4" x 6" index cards to organize your research. Make sure you include all the necessary bibliographic information for each source. *Take note of which citation style is required for your project (APA, MLA, Chicago) and keep your citations in that style as you take notes; this will make your drafting process easier.*

___ **Prepare a Working Outline:** Using information you have gathered, identify the main ideas you will cover in your paper in support of your thesis. Determine which points belong in which order in the paper and create an outline of your main sections or paragraphs. You can make this a brief outline or a detailed outline—experiment with what works best for you. This outline will help you organize your paper later. *(This may also be a good time to discuss your paper with tutors at the Writing Center.)*

___ **Write a First Draft:** You may want to avoid writing the introduction of the paper until you have written the body of the paper. The body of your paper should develop and add details to support your thesis. The conclusion will summarize your research and restate the thesis. When the paper is finalized, your introduction should capture the reader's attention with a hook,

frame the topic and its significance, present the thesis or main idea, and preview the points of the paper. *(Bring your draft to the Writing Center for feedback!)*

____ **Attribute Quotes and Other Information; Use Your Own Voice and Ideas:** Avoid plagiarism (presenting another person's words or ideas as if they were your own) or accepting tone and grammar suggestions without reviewing them carefully. You must document all direct quotes, paraphrases of other people's ideas or speech, and any other information that you get from an outside source. If the assignment does not specify a documentation style, ask your instructor which style is preferred.

____ **Revise, Edit, & Rewrite the First Draft:** Focus on revision first and attend to Higher Order Concerns (HOCs) such as organization, development, clarity, source incorporation, and cohesiveness. Save editing for Lower Order Concerns (LOCS) for the final step and review your completed draft for proper grammar, punctuation, diction, and formatting. Don't be afraid to rewrite sections of your paper that may need better wording, transitions, or analysis/explanation. Don't be afraid to cut tangled sentences, unnecessary wording/repetition, or slang/cliches.

____ **Final Checks & Submission:** Read your paper out loud. Each paragraph should be coherent, precise, and free of grammatical errors. Check the accuracy of your facts and quotes against your sources. Select an interesting title based on your paper's thesis. Make sure your paper is formatted correctly (double spaced, one-inch margins) and proofread it one last time for typos and other mistakes. Hand in your completed paper (on time) and CELEBRATE!