

Research Paper Checklist

___ **Select a Topic:** Pick a subject that interests you and 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 in order to write your paper—choose something that you can enjoy.

___ **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 Generally, any source more than five years old may be outdated and can usually be replaced with more current information.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)

___ **Prepare a Working Outline:** Using information you have gathered during your preliminary reading, divide your paper into subheadings under your thesis. 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.)

___ **Conduct Research & Take Notes:** You may want to use 4" X 6" index cards to organize your research. Each card should have a main heading summarizing an idea and should include only one idea, fact, or quote from a particular source. Make sure you include all the necessary bibliographic information for each source. Consult a writing handbook (such as *The Little Brown Compact Handbook* or *Keys for Writers*) or online resource (like Purdue's Online Writing Lab) for the proper format for your subject area (MLA or APA).

___ **Write a First Draft:** Organize your note cards by their headings and arrange them in a logical manner. Start your paper with an introduction that states your thesis. The body of your paper should develop and add details to support your thesis. The conclusion will summarize your research and restate the thesis.

___ **Attribute Quotes and Other Information:** Avoid plagiarism (presenting another person's words or ideas as if they were your own). 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 one he/she prefers.

___ **Revise, Edit, & Rewrite the First Draft;** 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 for typos and other mistakes.

___ **Hand in Your Completed Paper (ON TIME) and CELEBRATE!**