

15 Steps for Researching a Topic and Writing a Report

Step 1: Narrow the topic.

Step 2: Select sources by skimming.

Step 3: Make a bibliography card for each source selected.

Step 4: Take notes.

Step 5: Organize note cards.

Step 6: Write a first draft outline. DO NOT SKIP THIS!

Step 7: Write a rough draft.

Step 8: Revise the rough draft.

*Repeat step 8 until you are satisfied with
the final product.*

Step 9: Edit the rough draft.

Step 10: Type the final report.

*Step 11: Write and type the final outline making necessary
revisions.*

Step 12: Type the cover page and work cited page.

Step 13: Proofread all final copies.

*Step 14: Put the final report and research work in the
correct order in a report folder.*

Step 15: Turn in note cards along with the report folder.

Step 1: Narrow the topic.

If your topic was assigned by your teacher, it has already been narrowed.

If you are choosing your topic, narrow it by the following example:

- General topic: Woodland Plants
- Narrow: Poisonous Woodland Plants
- Narrow again: Poison Ivy

Step 2: Select sources by skimming.

1. Skimming is reading only the key parts of a source to quickly determine if that source has information that will fit the narrowed topic.
2. The key parts to skim are titles; topic headings in boldface type; first sentences of paragraphs; underlining; captions under pictures; text outlined by boxes, questions, and summaries.
3. The best way to skim a long article is to read the entire first paragraph, the first line of each paragraph in the body, and the entire last paragraph.
4. Consider these things as you skim:
 - Does the information give enough facts about your topic?
 - Is the information interesting enough to use in your report?
 - Is the information presented clearly, and is it easy to understand?

NOTES

NOTES

5. After skimming the source, decide:
 - if the source **can** be used (according to #4). If it can, make a bibliography card (step 3).
 - if the source **cannot** be used (according to #4). If it cannot, look for another source. Do not feel like you must use every source you find.

Step 3: Make a bibliography card for each source selected.

When you decide to use a source for your information, make a bibliography card for that source as follows:

Book

Brown, Sara. North American Plants. New York: Sunset Publishing, 1993.

Source #1

Encyclopedia

Wells, Jason T. "Poison Ivy." Coffman Encyclopedia. 1994 ed.

Source #2

Magazine

Juarez, Ricardo. "The Basics About Poison Ivy." America's Favorite Campsites. May 1994: 68-69.

Source #3

Internet Site

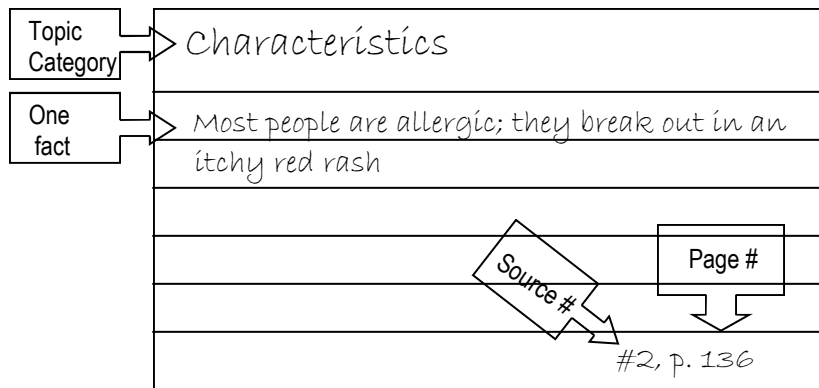
Landsburg, Steven E. "Who Shall Inherit the Earth?" Slate. May 1, 1997. Oct. 1, 1999 <<http://www.slate.com/Economics/97-05-01/Economics.asp>>.

Source #4

Step 4: Take notes.

Before you begin taking notes:

- Make sure you have a bibliography card for each source.
- Make several note cards for each topic category. Write the name of the topic categories at the top right corner of several note cards.
- The notes you take on each note card must support the topic category written on that note card.
- Make a note card for each fact (or very closely related group of facts).



V. TELEVISION, RADIO, AND FILM

Television and Radio:

"Stephen King: Fear, Fame, and Fortune." *Biography. Arts and Entertainment Network.* 22 Nov.2001.

"Dugan's Double Play." *All Things Considered. NPR.* 15 Nov. 2001.

Film or Video Recording:

Boys Don't Cry. Dir. Kimberly Peirce. Twentieth Century Fox, 1999.

DVDs, Laser Discs, and Other Formats:

Boys Don't Cry. Dir. Kimberly Peirce. 1999. DVD. Twentieth Century Fox, 2000.

Articles in Magazines:

Article in a magazine published every week or every two weeks:

Bernstein, Jeremy. "The Dark Continent of Henry Stanley."
New Yorker 31 Dec. 1990: 93-107.

If this article was in a magazine published every month or every two months:

Bernstein, Jeremy. "The Dark Continent of Henry Stanley."
New Yorker Nov.-Dec. 1990: 93-107.

Book Review in a Magazine or Journal:

Ashton, Sherley. Rev. of *Death and Dying*, by David L. Bender and Richard C. Hagen. *Humanist* July-Aug. 1982: 60.

Crutchfield, Will. "Pure Italian." Rev. of *Verdi: A Biography*, by Mary-Jane Phillips-Matz. *New Yorker* 31 Jan. 1994: 76-82.

III. ARTICLES IN REFERENCE BOOKS

Signed articles:

Chiappini, Luciano. "Este, House of." *Encyclopaedia Britannica: Macropaedia*. 1974 ed.

Unsigned Articles (This Example: A Definition):

"Unctuous." Def. 5. *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2nd ed. 1989.

IV. NEWSPAPERS

Brody, Jane. "Heart Attacks: Turmoil Beneath the Calm." *New York Times* 21 June 1983, late ed.: C1.

For good note taking:

- Summarize the information as you put it in your own words.
- Write your notes in phrases, not complete sentences.
- Put only one note on each card.
- Make sure each note taken is important for your reader to know.
- **Do not use the exact words of a writer! (Remember: plagiarism is illegal, but it is a common mistake of beginning writers. To put information in your own words means to change the vocabulary used and the format of the sentence, NOT to change the order of words or to change one or two words in the sentence. To do so would still be plagiarism!)**
- At the bottom of every card, write the source number and the page number you have used for the information on that card.
- Introduction note card: Find interesting general information, definitions, or questions that are helpful in understanding your topic, or give extra information that makes for an interesting introduction.
- Conclusion note card: Try to find several summarizing facts that support your introductory comments.

Step 5: Organize your note cards.

Sort your note cards according to the categories at the top of each card.

1. Arrange the categories in the order that you want to present them in your report.
2. Arrange the note cards within each category in a logical order for your report.
3. Number all your note cards in the upper right-hand corner to prevent them from getting out of order. Put the bibliography cards at the end.

Put all cards in a ziplock bag to be handed in with your final report.

Step 6: Write a first draft topic outline.

The purpose of your first draft outline is to transfer your notes from note cards to correct outline form. Read the example of a topic outline on the next page.

1. **Title.** Write your outline title on the top line of your paper. It should be the same or similar to your narrowed topic. You may change your title later if you decide on a better one.
2. **Main topics.**
 - Word each main topic in the best way to give the reader an idea of the information that is covered in the subtopics listed under it.
 - Put all main topics in parallel form. (Do they all start with a noun? Do they all start with a verb? Are they all questions?)

II. PERIODICALS

Periodicals are published regularly at fixed intervals. You will become familiar with the following types of periodicals: scholarly journals, magazines, and newspapers.

Most scholarly journals are paginated (pages are numbered) continuously throughout an annual volume. If the first issue of a year ends on page 50, the first page of next issue will be 51.

Basic Format for Periodicals:

Author's name, reversed for alphabetizing. "Title of the article in quotation marks with a period inside the closing quotation mark." *Name of the Periodical* no period at end Volume Number (Year): start page-end page. (*Or start page+ if the pages of the article are not printed consecutively. See example for Ryan, Maureen below.)

When you cite journals that paginate each issue separately, you need to include the issue number. After author's name, title of article, and title of periodical include: Volume Number.Issue Number (Year):Start page-end page. (See example for Ryan, Maureen below.)

Article in a Scholarly Journal paginated continuously:

Meyers, Jeffrey. "Bogie in Africa." *American Scholar* 66 (1997): 237- 250.

Article in a Scholarly Journal that paginates each issue separately:

The example below is not printed on consecutive pages. Since you can't list its page range, use a "+" sign to indicate that the article begins on page 77 (in this example) and continues, although not on consecutive pages.

Ryan, Maureen. "Barbara Kingsolver's Lowfat Fiction." *Journal of American Culture* 18.4 (1995): 77+.

A Multivolume Work:

If using two or more volumes of a multivolume work, cite the total number of volumes:

Churchill, Winston S. *A History of the English-Speaking Peoples*. 4 vols. New York: Dodd, 1956-58.

Separately titled volume in a multivolume work with a general title and one author:

Churchill, Winston S. *The Age of Revolution*. New York: Dodd, 1957. Vol. 3 of *A History of the English-Speaking Peoples*. 4 vols. 1956-58.

A Work in an Anthology:

Garcia Marquez, Gabriel. "A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings," *Leaf Storm, and Other Stories*. Trans. Gregory Rabassa. New York: Harper, 1972. 105-112.

If you quoted from Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, printed in the *Norton Anthology of English Literature* (7th ed.), and you referred only to volume 2 of the Norton Anthology of English Literature (7th ed.) in your paper, your works cited entry would be:

Conrad, Joseph. "Heart of Darkness." *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. Gen. ed. M.H. Abrams Assoc. ed. Stephen Greenblatt. 7th ed. Vol. 2. New York: Norton, 2000. 1958-2017. Gates 185-222.

3. Subtopics.

- In topic form, write the main idea of the supporting details.
- If the supporting details have sub-points, use the correct format to list those.
- Make sure you have a "2" for every "1" and a "B" for every "A."

Title	
I.	Introduction
A.	First point
B.	Second point
II.	First topic
A.	First point
B.	Second point
1.	Detail about second point
2.	Detail about second point
a.	Detail about sub-point 2.
b.	Detail about sub-point 2.
III.	Second topic
A.	First point
B.	Second point
IV.	Continue with topics
V.	Conclusion
A.	First point
B.	Second point
C.	Third point

Note: You may have as many points as you need under each letter or number, but you may not have only one sub-point.

Step 7: Write a rough draft.

Your outline is the visual “map” of your report. Be sure to **follow the order of your outline**. If you decide to include another topic or eliminate a topic, stop and reorganize the outline.

Use a pencil and **skip every other line** (double space) on your notebook paper. (You may also type the rough draft, double spaced.)

Your report will be similar in form to a five-paragraph essay, although you will have more than five paragraphs. You will have an introductory paragraph, a body of several paragraphs, and a concluding paragraph.

Introduction. Look at your outline and write at least three sentences for the introductory paragraph. The first sentence is a topic sentence that tells what your report is about. The next sentences give some information about your topic, and hopefully includes a “hook” to interest your reader and make them want to continue reading your report.

Body. Find the first main topic on your outline (Roman numeral II). Write a topic sentence that states your first point and tells what the second paragraph will be about. Remember to indent. Then look at your note cards and the subtopics and details on your outline; write complete sentences that support the main idea of this paragraph. Be sure to write the subtopic sentences and detail sentences in the order of your outline (or change your outline if you change the order.)

Repeat this procedure for each paragraph in the body of your report.

Conclusion. Look at your outline to write a concluding paragraph. Write one or two sentences that include summarizing facts that support statements in your introduction. Write a final sentence for your report based on conclusions you have drawn from your research.

No Author Given:

No author given (in this example, the work should appear in the alphabetical Works Cited list under “Handbook”).

A Handbook of Korea. 4th ed. Seoul: Korean Overseas Information Service, Ministry of Culture and Information, 1982.

An Edition:

When citing editions students often wonder, “Which comes first...the author or the editor?” The answer depends on how you’ve used the edition in your paper. If you refer mostly to the text of the edition in your paper, you should begin with the author of the book.

Conrad, Joseph. *Heart of Darkness: A Case Study in Contemporary Criticism.* Ed. Ross C. Murfin. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989.

If you refer mostly to the work of the editor in your paper (for example the introduction or notes), begin your entry with the editor's name.

Murfin, Ross C., ed. *Heart of Darkness: A Case Study in Contemporary Criticism.* By Joseph Conrad. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989.

An Edition Other Than the First:

If there is no edition number or name (ex. “expanded edition” or “revised edition”) on the book's title page, it is probably a first edition. Unless your Works Cited list entries specifically state what edition a book is, readers assume that books are first editions.

A Handbook of Korea. 4th ed. Seoul: Korean Overseas Information Service, Ministry of Culture and Information, 1982.

Below are samples of different kinds of entries in the Works Cited list in MLA format.

I. BOOKS

By a single author:

McConnell, Frank. *Storytelling and Mythmaking: Images From Film and Literature*. New York: Oxford UP, 1979.

Edel, Leon. *Henry James, the Master: 1901-1916*. Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1972.

By two or three authors:

Mortimer, Kenneth P. and T.R. McConnell. *Sharing Authority Effectively: Participation, Interaction, and Discretion*. New York: Oxford UP, 1956.

If there are more than three authors, name only the first and add "et al." which means "and others" (example: Walter Edens, et al., eds.) or you may give all names in full in the order in which they appear on the title page.

More than one work by the same author:

When citing two or more books by the same authors, give the name(s) in the first entry. In subsequent entries, type three hyphens (which represent the name(s)) followed by a period and the title.

McConnell, Frank . *The Spoken Seen: Film and the Romantic Imagination*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1975.

---. *Storytelling and Mythmaking: Images from Film and Literature*. New York: Oxford UP, 1979.

Step 8: Revise the rough draft.

Revision is a **very important** part of writing—don't skip it! This is the step that takes your report from a "C" paper to an "A" paper. Make changes until you are proud of the results.

Guidelines for revising:

- Does your paper have an introduction, body, and conclusion?
- Does each paragraph have a topic sentence?
- Does each sentence support the topic sentence of that paragraph?
- Do your main topics and supporting sentences follow the order of your outline?
- Are your sentences varied to avoid monotony?
- Is your language concise, descriptive, and factual?
- Have you read your report orally to see how it sounds? Does it flow well?

Reread the introductory and concluding paragraphs. Your introduction should pose the question or problem to be studied, why it is worth looking into, and what the writer believes will be the outcome (hypothesis). Your conclusion should answer your question or problem based on research and evidence that either affirms or rejects your hypothesis. Make any necessary changes. Complete any illustrations or maps you are including in your report.

After you are happy with the content of your report, edit for mechanical errors. After you have edited your final draft, have someone else with good grammar skills edit for you as well. On the next page is a list of some of the things you need to watch for.

Step 9: Edit the rough draft.

After you are happy with the content of your report, now edit for mechanical errors. After you have edited your final draft, have someone else with good grammar skills edit for you as well. Following is a list of some of the things you need to watch for:

- Is your report double spaced?
- Have you used the correct margins and font (if specified by your teacher)?
- Is the first line of each paragraph indented?
- Have you capitalized and punctuated your sentences correctly?
- Have you checked for sentence fragments and run-on sentences?
- Have you spelled each word correctly?

Step 10: Type the final report.

After your final draft is revised and edited, type the final report making the corrections needed.

Works Cited List

The list of works cited appears at the end of the paper and is an alphabetical list (by author's or editor's last name) of all the sources that are cited within the text of the paper.

If the work has no author or editor, then include it in the alphabetical list by the first key word in the title.

A bibliographic entry in the works cited list has three main divisions, each followed by a period: The author's or editor's name reversed for alphabetizing. *The title*. The publishing data, consisting of place of publication: publisher, and date.

Barrett, Andrea. *Servants of the Map*. New York: Norton and Company, 2002.

Your Works Cited list should begin on a new page after the last page of text of your paper, and the title, **Works Cited**, should be centered at the top of the page. The first line of each entry should not be indented but subsequent lines should. Use double spacing throughout the list.

8. When the work cited is part of a larger anthology, your parenthetical citation should include the name of the author of the work rather than the editor of the anthology.

Examples #1-- #8 above relate to paraphrased information from outside sources. Use quotation marks before and after a direct quote—information that you copy word-for-word from a source. Place the end quotation mark before the information in parentheses.

"As someone educated in journalism and law, I was trained to respond to the facts, wherever they lead" (Strobel 267).

Step 11: Write and type the final outline making necessary revisions.

Check your draft outline to see if there are any revisions needed after writing and editing the rough draft of your report. Be sure your paper is in the same order as your outline. Make any necessary changes and type the final outline in **proper topic outline format**. (See step 6.)

Step 12: Type the cover page and works cited page.

Make a **title page** using the example below (or as instructed by your teacher).

Using your bibliography cards, type a works cited page for those sources that you used in your paper (as shown on the next page). Do not include any sources that you did not use. List them in alphabetical order of the author's last name.

*Source for In-text Citations: http://www.wc.engl.virginia.edu/wiki/index.php/Citations_in_the_text

Title of Paper
By
(Your Name)

Teacher's Name
Date
Period
Class

Works Cited

Brown, Sara. North American Plants. New York: Sunset Publishing, 1993.

Juarez Ricardo. "The Basics About Poison Ivy." American Favorite Campsites, May 1994: 68-69.

Wells, Jason T. "Poison Ivy." Coffman Encyclopedia. 1994 ed.

(Book) Author's last name / comma / space / author's first name / period / space / title of the book (either underlined or in italics) / period / space / publisher's city / colon / space / name of publisher / comma / space / year published / period

(Encyclopedia) Author's last name / comma / space / author's first name / period / space / opening quote / title of article / period / close quote / space / title of encyclopedia (underlined) / period / space / year of edition / period

(Magazine) Author's last name / comma / space / author's first name / period / space / open quote / title of article / period / close quote / space / title of magazine / 1 space / month of issue / space / year of issue / colon / space / page numbers of article / period

(Internet site) Author's last name / comma / space / author's first name / period / space / document title / period / space / date of Internet publication / period / space / date of access / space / <URL address> / period

NOTE: If any of the data is not available from your source, skip that part of the entry, and go to the next piece of data that is available. (i.e. if no author name is available for an Internet source, go to "document title" and proceed from there)

5. When there are more than three authors or editors, the in-text citation should include the first author's last name and either mention "the coauthors" or "coeditors" in the text or follow it with "et al." (Do not type the quotation marks shown here.) in the parenthetical reference.

6. When the work has no author, then the in-text citation should include the title in the text and the page number in parentheses or a shortened form of the title and the page number in the parentheses:

The introduction of Chinese writing had a significant impact on the development and preservation of ancient Korean mythology (Handbook 282).

According to the *Handbook of Korea*, Chinese writing played a significant role in the development and preservation of ancient Korean mythology (282).

7. When the work you cite quotes another author, the parenthetical citation should include the abbreviation "qtd. in," before the author's name and page number. Note, however, that the preference is to use original sources if possible.

Henry James held Balzac in "great esteem" (qtd. in Edel 242).

2. When the Works Cited page contains more than one work by an author you are citing, the in-text citation should either mention the work in the text or include the title (if brief) or a shortened version of the title within the parenthetical reference:

In *Storytelling and Mythmaking*, McConnell sees interesting similarities between Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible* and Virgil's *Aeneid* (78).

McConnell sees interesting similarities between Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible* and Virgil's *Aeneid* (Storytelling 78).

3. When the Works Cited page includes different authors with the same last name, the in-text citation should include either the author's complete name in the text or the author's first initial along with the last name and the page number in the parenthetical reference:

According to Brian McConnell, Gandhi's teachings have had no significant impact on the development of modern India (268).

Some historians argue that Gandhi's teachings have not had a significant impact on the development of modern India (B. McConnell 268).

4. When there are two or three authors or editors, the in-text citation should include each last name:

Collective bargaining has increased the faculty's role in campus decision-making (Mortimer and McConnell 103).

Mortimer and McConnell believe that collective bargaining has helped faculty gain power in the campus decision-making process (103).

Step 13: Proofread all final copies.

Yes, you have already proofread and edited once. **DO IT AGAIN** for your final copies! Spell check does not catch everything, and you could see something this time that you didn't see before. The best way to proof is to let your report sit for a few days (which means you cannot procrastinate until the last minute). Then pick it up again and read it afresh.

Step 14: Put the final report and research work in the correct order in a report folder.

Put your work in a report folder in the following order:

1. Title Page (typed)
2. Final report (typed)
3. Illustrations or maps
4. Works Cited page (typed)
5. Final outline (typed)
6. Rough draft (written in pencil or typed)
7. First draft outline (written in pencil or typed)
8. Any additional drafts you have printed

Put all your note cards in order in a ziplock bag and turn them in with your paper.

Step 15: Turn in note cards along with the report folder.

Congratulations! You made it—well done!



Plagiarism
It's Illegal

Revised July 2009

MLA In-Text Citations

All High School students will cite sources within the paper. In-text citations, also called *parenthetical documentation*, replace footnotes or endnotes. Students will include a Works Cited page at the end of the paper.

Papers without in-text citations and/or Works Cited page will not be graded. No exceptions!

Use the following format for In-Text Citations:

Identify the author's last name and the page number in parentheses at the end of a sentence. The author must refer to a source that is listed in the Works Cited page at the end of the paper.

Don't put a comma or "p." between the author and page number. The period comes after the parentheses: (Shakespeare 15).

1. When the Works Cited Page contains only one work by an author you are citing, the in-text citation should include only the author's last name and the page number:

*Some critics see *Planet of the Apes* as prophetic of the destruction that racial prejudice can cause (McConnell 68).*

Note: If you mention the author's name in your sentence, you do not need to include it in the parenthetical reference.

*McConnell sees *Planet of the Apes* as prophetic of the destruction that racial prejudice can cause (68).*