

Research Writing

1. What is the difference between writing a research paper in high school and writing a research paper in college?

In many ways, the way you wrote your research paper in high school is similar to how you will write the paper for your college courses. You will still use many of the same research techniques you learned (including methods for finding research in the library or online), you can still rely on some similar organizational techniques, and part of writing the research paper in will involve showing teachers what you have learned about your topic.

The differences in writing a college level research paper tend to fall into three areas. First, you will be asked to work with a more focused area of research than in high school. While you may have relied on websites, newspapers, and magazines for your high school research paper, a college level research paper will ask you to focus on more specialized sources, like scholarly journals and books; this is an area in which the Carlson Library librarians can assist you. Second, a college level research paper requires more synthesis of sources. In other words, rather than just reporting back on what the sources says, you need to find a pattern within the sources, locating how the sources link together to form a particular perspective on the topic. Finally, and most significantly, college research papers will ask you to input more analysis than you did in high school. You may have been told in high school to never say “I” in a research paper, and that the paper needed to be objective without your opinion. For college level research, introducing your perspective on the topic is important. One of the goals of the research paper is to move beyond just collecting and reporting on research; you need to take a stand on the research and support your opinion with information from your sources. Because of the level of analysis often asked for, some teachers have taken to renaming the research paper in a college classroom, calling it a research essay or a research project instead.

2. What kinds of sources are used in college level research essays/projects?

The types of sources you will want to focus on fall into three types:

- a. Text/Library-based sources: This can include more common sources like books, magazines, and newspapers. But, as mentioned above, your college classes will ask you to extend beyond these more common sources and also learn to use scholarly journals, government documents, archival material, and audio-visual sources in your essays/projects. In addition, note that many libraries are moving print materials into online formats, so many of these sources may be as PDF files or hypertext documents.
- b. Online sources: Again, there are some common sources like websites and online newspapers, but consider also more scholarly sources (like online journals and specialized magazines) along with newer sources like investigative blogs and online discussion forums. Recognize that anyone can post to the web, so take extra time to establish the credibility of online sources.

- c. Primary research: this includes research collected directly by the researcher. While there are many methods for conducting primary research, the three most common are interviews (face-to-face, email, and group), surveys or questionnaires, and observations. There is a list of possible online sources at the end of this document to help you understand these three sources; your studio group instructor can also help you in this area.
- d. In addition to the three types listed, there are two other areas that should be discussed at this time:
 - a. Wikipedia: Usually, an instructor will stipulate when and how sources from Wikipedia can be used, but here is a good rule of thumb. Wikipedia is a great place to start with a topic, especially if you are unaware of it, and the site can offer you many new places to go as you do your research. But, many teachers still view Wikipedia as an unreliable source, so I'd advise against using it as a source in your research essay/project.
 - b. Credibility of a source: As mentioned, it is also important to establish the credibility of your sources, especially when working with online sources. The following site provides a C.R.A.P. test that can be useful in evaluating sources:
http://www.landmark.edu/Library/course_guides/C.R.A.P.htm

3. Which genres work best for a research paper?

While any genre can involve research on some level (even memoir writers often have to conduct interviews or look through archival material when producing their text), there are some genres that tend to allow for more work with sources. These include:

- a. Proposals: This genre often researches a problem, identifying the causes and effects of the problem on a particular community or group of individuals, then proposes a solution or series of solutions that could possibly solve or alleviate the problem.
- b. Reports: This genre is similar to the proposal in that it often researches a problem or particular topic, reporting back information on the causes and effects. A report usually does not include a solution section, instead hypothesizing what the problem/topic will look like in the future.
- c. Commentaries: This genre, most often seen in magazines and newspapers, provides an argument on a particular topic, using research to support the author's perspective on the topic, and concludes with a call to action for readers to consider.
- d. Literature Reviews: This genre provides a synthesis of research that has been done on a particular topic and then identifies the trends or different perspectives that have shown up in the research. It can be a stand-alone document or may be an early section in a larger research essay/project.

Take time to look at different genres as you consider which one to use for your research essay/project. Your studio instructor may also be able to help guide you during this time.

4. What about plagiarism?

As noted on your syllabus, plagiarism is using, without consent or acknowledgement, the words or ideas from another individual or sources. The act is treated seriously and can lead to failure for an assignment or a class up to suspension or dismissal from a university. So, understanding how to avoid plagiarism is an important step in writing a research paper.

First, understand how to incorporate another author's ideas or words into your paper. If you take information from another source and you can't find that information in any other source, you need to make sure to cite it using either MLA or APA documentation (see the end of this document for information on how to cite sources). You also need to make sure you include either a Works Cited or References page at the end of your essay/project.

In addition to citing the source, be aware of three ways you can incorporate the material into your essay/project:

- a. Quotation: This involves taking information from another source and incorporating it word for word into your text. Quotation marks should be placed around this information and it should include an in-text citation at the end.
- b. Paraphrase: Similar to quotation, you can use paraphrase when you take information from another source, but you choose to rewrite it in your own words. This is usually done if you want to more clearly explain the author's ideas or if you are working with a piece of text that is too long to quote. You don't need to put quotation marks around the information, but you do still need to cite it.
- c. Summary: When working with a larger section of text or writing about ideas from multiple sources, you may choose to summarize that information. Summary is basically a longer paraphrase and the same rules apply (no quotation marks, but an in-text citation is needed).

5. Okay, how do I get started?

To begin a research project, you should consider the following questions:

- a. What topic do you want to write on? You can find topics by looking at different sources (such as Wikipedia, newspapers, and websites), exploring your own experiences on and off campus, or researching issues in your major.
- b. What is the purpose for writing the essay/project? Once you have a topic, consider what you want to write about in relation to it and what you hope to gain in the end (more knowledge on the topic? A solution to a problem? Offering your perspective on an issue?)
- c. Who am I writing for? Once you've established your purpose, consider who would be the best audience to hear and act on that purpose. The audience may be an individual,

a group, or a larger community. You may also write for multiple audiences (a primary audience, and then other secondary audiences).

- d. What genre should I use? Depending upon your purpose and audience, you will want to choose a genre that will work best for the purpose and is understandable to your audience. Consider also factors such as language use, tone of voice, types of sources, and feasibility of the solution as you write.

List of online sources to help you in writing a research essay/project

<http://www.utoledo.edu/library> (University of Toledo's website for Carlson Library)

<http://www.utoledo.edu/centers/writingcenter> (University of Toledo's website for the Writing Center, where you can receive assistance from writing tutors on all of the topics discussed in this handout)

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/658/02/> (Purdue University's website on Genre and the Research Paper)

<http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/PlanResearchPaper.html> (University of Wisconsin Writing Center's website on Writing a Research Paper)

<http://www.aresearchguide.com/> (A Research Guide for Students)

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/563/1/> (Purdue University's website on quotation, paraphrase, and summary)

<http://writing.colostate.edu/guides/researchsources/includingsources/quoting/index.cfm> (Colorado State University's website on different types of quotation)

<http://depts.washington.edu/owrc/Handouts/Quoting%20Paraphrasing%20Summarizing.pdf> (PDF on quoting, paraphrasing and summarizing)

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/> (Purdue University's website on MLA Formatting and Style Guide)

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/> (Purdue University's website on APA General Format)

<http://www.lib.umd.edu/guides/primary-sources.html> (Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary Sources)

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/559/1/> (Purdue University's website on Primary Research)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WFf1iiDVO9g> (YouTube video on creating interview questions)

<http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/plagiarism.shtml> (Indiana University's website on recognizing and avoiding plagiarism)

<http://library.duke.edu/research/plagiarism/> (University of Duke's website on Citing Sources and Avoiding Plagiarism)