

This Is How to Write an Effective Research-based Term Paper

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<https://www.grammarly.com/blog/how-to-write-a-research-paper>



There are two words that evoke instant anxiety in nearly every academic—research paper. In this article, we'll break down the steps to writing a research paper.

Here's a tip: Although the research paper format is fairly standardized, writing guidelines may vary not only among academic institutions but also among individual professors. Pay attention to any how-to handouts you've received, and don't forget to check your university's writing lab for more resources.

How does a research-based term paper differ from a research proposal?

A research paper is different from a research proposal (also known as a prospectus), although the writing process is similar. Research-based term papers are intended to demonstrate a student's academic knowledge of a subject. A proposal is a persuasive piece meant to convince its audience of the

the value of a research project. Think of a research proposal as a sales pitch for a research project.

A prospectus is a formal proposal of a research project developed to convince a reader (a professor or research committee, or later in life, a project coordinator, funding agency, or the like) that the research can be carried out and will yield worthwhile results.

—[Wichita State University Department of English](#)

Dig into the research process.

Although we'll focus more on the organization and writing of a research-based term paper in this article, the research process is an important first step.

Research will help you in several ways:

- understanding your subject
- formulating ideas for your paper
- developing a thesis statement
- speaking about your topic with authority

Gather resource materials and begin reviewing them. Here are a few good information sources:

- [Google Scholar](#)
- [Online encyclopedias, almanacs, and databases](#)
- Books and periodicals
- Newspapers
- Government publications, guides, and reports

As you read and evaluate the information you discover, take notes. Keep track of your reference materials so you can cite them and build your bibliography later. [The Purdue Online Writing Lab \(OWL\)](#) and other university writing lab websites are excellent resources to help you understand what information you'll need to collect to properly cite references.

Here's a tip: Try storing your notes in a spreadsheet. Create columns for elements you want to include in your paper as well as information necessary for your citations/bibliography. Columns can include headings such as Title, Author, Reference link, Page number, and Quotes.

Here's a tip: Check with your instructor or university writing lab to determine the preferred citation style. Grammarly Premium identifies things that need to be cited and helps you cite them.

For your term-paper style Term Project in PSY 532, you can use any citation style you wish to use (APA, MLA, etc). However, you should use the same style consistently throughout your paper.

Organize before you start writing.

Your research spawned tons of ideas. Great! Now you're ready to begin the process of organizing your presentation . . . *before* you begin writing. Don't skip the organization step—it's critical to your paper's success. Without it, your paper will lack focus and you'll spend much more time in the revision process trying to make sense of your jumbled thoughts.

The Thesis Statement

The thesis statement is a sentence that summarizes the main point of your essay and previews your supporting points. The thesis statement is important because it guides your readers from the beginning of your essay by telling them the main idea and supporting points of your essay.

—[Purdue OWL – Developing a Thesis](#)

Most research-based term papers begin with a thesis statement at the end of an introductory paragraph. Even if it's not a requirement, it's a good idea to write a thesis statement as you begin to organize your research. Writing the thesis statement first is helpful because every argument or point you make in your paper should support this central idea you're putting forward.

Most papers fall into one of three categories: analytical, expository, or argumentative. If you're presenting an analysis of information, then your paper

is analytical. If you're writing to explain information, then your paper is expository. If you're arguing a conclusion, then it's argumentative or persuasive. Your thesis statement should match the type of paper you're writing.

Invest time in writing your thesis statement—it's the main idea of your paper, from which everything else flows. Without a well-thought-out thesis statement, your paper is likely to end up jumbled and with an unclear purpose. [Here's more guidance](#) from Purdue OWL.

The Outline

An outline will help you organize your thoughts before you dig into the writing process. Once you've developed your thesis statement, think about the main points you'll need to present to support that statement. Those main points are your sub-headings. Now, organize your thoughts and information under each sub-heading.

Any information that doesn't fit within the framework of your outline, and doesn't directly support your thesis statement, no matter how interesting, doesn't belong in your research paper. **Keep your focus narrow and avoid the kitchen sink approach. (You know, the one where you throw in every bit of interesting research you uncovered, including the fungal growth in the U-joint of your kitchen sink?)** Everything you learn may be fascinating, but not all of it is going to be relevant to your paper.

Need more help? [Here's an effective outlining strategy.](#)

Writing the Research Paper

The good news is, once you reach this point in the process you're likely to feel energized by all the ideas and thoughts you've uncovered in your research, and you'll have a clear direction because you've taken the time to create a thesis statement and organize your presentation with an outline.

Here are the elements to a research-based term paper:

1 The Introduction

Here's where you present the background and context for the rest of your article. Craft a strong opening sentence that will engage the reader. Just because you're writing an academic research paper doesn't mean you have to be dry and boring.

Explain the purpose of your paper and how you plan to approach the topic. (Is this a factual report? An analysis? A persuasive piece?)

Describe how you've organized your approach to the topic. Conclude the introductory paragraph with your thesis statement.

The introduction is the broad beginning of the paper that answers three important questions:

- What is this?
- Why am I reading it?
- What do you want me to do?
- You should answer these questions by doing the following:
- **Set the context** – Provide general information about the main idea,

explaining the situation so the reader can make sense of the topic and the claims you make and support.

- **State why the main idea is important** – Tell the reader why he or she should care and keep reading. Your goal is to create a compelling, clear, and convincing essay people will want to read and act upon.
- **State your thesis/claim** – Compose a sentence or two stating the position you will support with *logos* (sound reasoning: induction, deduction), *pathos* (balanced emotional appeal), and *ethos* (author credibility).

—[Purdue OWL](#)

MORE INFO: [Starting Your Research Paper: Writing an Introductory Paragraph](#)

2 The Body

Here's where your outline will come in handy. As you're writing, remember that your outline isn't meant to be a prison—it's a guideline to keep you on track. Your paper may evolve, so keep it fluid, but do remember to stay focused on your thesis statement and proving your points. Don't let your sources organize your paper! Organize first and use your sources as they become relevant.

Consider the Rule of Three. Find supporting arguments for each point you make, and present a strong point first, followed by an even stronger one, and finish with your strongest point.

MORE INFO: [Strong Body Paragraphs](#)

3 Conclusion

Now, it's time to wrap it up. Most research papers conclude with a restated thesis statement. Present your thesis again, but reword it. Briefly summarize the points you've made. Take a moment to explain why you believe those points support your case. If your research is inconclusive, take a moment to

point out why you believe this topic bears further research.

MORE INFO: [USC Libraries Research Guides: The Conclusion](#)

Checklist for Revising Your Research Paper Draft

Make sure you allow time to revise and edit after you've completed your first draft. This part of the process is about much more than just fixing typos and adding or subtracting commas. Here's a handy checklist to help you make sure your paper is on point.

Developmental Edit

- Is your thesis statement clear and concise?
- Is your paper well-organized and does it flow from beginning to end with logical transitions?
- Do your ideas follow a logical sequence in each paragraph?
- Have you used concrete details and facts and avoided generalizations?
- Do your arguments support and prove your thesis?
- Have you avoided repetition?
- Are your sources properly cited?
- Have you checked for accidental plagiarism?

Line Edit

- Is your language clear and specific?
- Do your sentences flow smoothly and clearly? (Hint: Read your paper aloud to help you catch syntax problems.)
- [Have you avoided filler words and phrases?](#)
- Have you checked for proper grammar, spelling, and punctuation? (Hint: Grammarly can help!)

Thorough research, thoughtful organization and presentation, and attention to detail in your developmental and final line edit will help you succeed in crafting a winning research paper.