



Library/Learning Resources Center
Writing a Research Paper: A Very Brief Guide

Writing a research paper is a good opportunity to learn more about a topic of particular interest to you. The basic idea is to find information on a topic (from books, newspapers, magazines, journals, recordings, electronic information sources, etc.), and then write your thoughts on the topic, using documented sources to support what you say.

The format of a research paper depends on the academic discipline you are writing for. Some common formats are MLA (Modern Language Association) for papers in the humanities, APA (American Psychological Association) for psychology/nursing papers, and the CBE (Council of Biology Editors) for biology papers. Your instructor can tell you which format you are expected to use.

Whatever format you use, however, most research papers share these common features:

- A. **A thesis statement.** This single sentence tells the reader the point you want to make about your subject. It should be limited enough for you to be able to develop your ideas in detail. A paper's thesis sentence is often located at the end of the introductory paragraph or section.
- B. **A discussion of your thesis in depth and in an organized fashion.** A good research paper contains the writer's ideas supported by outside sources, not just a string of quotations from books and articles. You should use the experts' words and ideas to support your own ideas about the topic.
- C. **A bibliography or list of works cited.** This provides your reader with a list of information sources that you consulted during your research.
- D. **Proper documentation of sources.** You must avoid *plagiarizing* (using another person's words or ideas as if they were your own) by properly citing (acknowledging) the source of your information.
- E. **A neat, professional appearance.** A research paper should be printed on standard size paper using adequate margins, double spacing, and correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling. It may also include a title page, an outline or table of contents, and appendices, if necessary.

MLA Internal Documentation and Works Cited Page

MLA format uses in-text citations and a Works Cited page at the end of the paper to provide proper documentation of your sources. In the text of your paper, you must document all direct quotations, paraphrases, statistics, and ideas that you have borrowed from another source.

Parenthetical (In-text) Citations

In-text citations should be used whether quoting or paraphrasing. In-text citations should be placed at the end of sentence after any quotation marks, in parentheses, before the final punctuation mark. If you don't mention the name of the material's author or source, you must include this information in parenthetical citation. Type the first word of the Works Cited entry for your source, and include the page number(s) in which you found the information. This could be the author's last name or the first word(s) of the article. Follow the first word of the bibliographical citation with the page number(s) on which the information can be found. If you mention the author's name or the source information in your text, you need only list the page numbers in parentheses.

Examples:

Author's name in sentence: Simpson states, "D'oh" (1-3).	Author's name not in sentence: (Simpson 1-3).
More than three authors: (Simpson et al. 1-3).	No author: ("Story" 1-3).

Works Cited Page

In 2008, MLA updated its guidelines significantly. The updates stress the flexibility of the guidelines and the need to improvise when dealing with new and changing forms of media.

The Works Cited page, alphabetized by author's last name, should appear at the end of your essay. It provides the information necessary for a reader to locate and retrieve any sources you cite in the essay. Each source you cite in the essay must appear in your Works Cited list.

Arrangement and Format of Entries

Authors' names are inverted (last name first); if a work has more than one author, invert only the first author's name, follow it with a comma, then continue listing the rest of the authors. If you have cited more than one work by a particular author, order them alphabetically by title, and use three hyphens in place of the author's name for every entry after the first. If no author is given for a particular work, alphabetize by the title of the piece (if the title begins with an article, such as "A," "An," or "The," alphabetized by the second word).

The first line of each entry in your list should be flush left. Subsequent lines should be indented one-half inch (5 spaces or a tab). This is known as a "hanging indent." All references should be double-spaced with no extra spaces between the entries.

Capitalize the first word in the title of the work and all important words (articles—"a," "the," etc, prepositions—"in," "for," etc, and conjunctions—"and," "but," etc, should not be capitalized unless as the first word). Italicize titles of books, journals, magazines, newspapers, and films.

Indicate the publication medium with a marker such as Print, Web, or other form (DVD or TV, for example).

Works Cited Page (Format and examples)

Basic format for a book:

Author(s). *Title of Book*. Place of Publication: Publisher, Year of Publication. Print.

Example:

Tannen, Deborah. *You're Wearing That? Understanding Mothers and Daughters in Conversation*. New York: Ballantine-Random, 2006. Print.

A book with more than one author:

Lane, Barry, Bruce Ballenger and Ann Dumaesq. *Discovering the Writer Within*. 2nd ed. Shoreham: Discover Writing Press, 2008. Print.

(If there are four or more authors, list only the first author followed by a comma and the phrase "et al.")

An anthology or collection:

Crane, R.S., ed. *Critics and Criticism: Ancient and Modern*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1952. Print.

An essay in an anthology or collection:

Jones, Robert F. "Welcome to Muskie Country." *The Ultimate Fishing Book*. Eds. Lee Eisenberg and DeCourcy Taylor. Boston: Houghton, 1981. 122-34. Print.

Basic format for an article in a periodical (such as a magazine or newspaper):

Author(s). "Title of article." *Title of Magazine/Newspaper* day Month year: pages. Print.

(When citing the date, list day before month; use a three-letter abbreviation of the month (e.g. Jan., Mar., Aug.). If there is more than one edition available for that date (as in an early and late edition of a newspaper), identify the edition following the date (i.e. 17 May 1987, late ed.)

Example:

Paumgarten, Nick. "The Death of Kings." *New Yorker* 18 May 2009: 40-57. Print.

Basic format for an article in a scholarly journal (need volume & issue):

Author(s). "Title of scholarly article." *Title of Journal* Volume.Issue (Year): pages. Print.

Example:

Dewitty, Vernell P., et al. "Workforce Conflict: What's the problem?" *Nursing Management* 40.5 (2009): 31-37. Print.

Basic format for a webpage:

Author(s). "Title of Document." *Name of homepage*. Publisher Name (if none, write N.p.), Date Published (if none, write n.d.) Web. Date of access. <URL>.

Example:

Stolley, Karl. "MLA Formatting and Style Guide." *The OWL at Purdue*. Purdue University Writing Lab. 10 May 2009. Web. 10 July 2009. <<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/557/01/>>.

Basic format for an article in an online periodical:

Author(s). "Title of Document." *Website Name*. Website Publisher, Date of publication. Web. Date of access. <URL>.

Example:

Cohen, Elizabeth. "Five Ways to Avoid Germs While Traveling." *CNN.com*. Cable News Network, 27 Nov. 2008. Web. 12 Jan. 2009. <<http://www.cnn.com/2008/HEALTH/11/27/ep.avoid.germs.traveling/index.html>>.

Basic format for articles in a library electronic database (such as FirstSearch or ProQuest—also ask for the library database online example MLA citation sheet – goldenrod paper):

General Format:

Author(s). "Article Title." *Magazine/Newspaper Title*. **day Month year: page(s)**. *Database Name*. *Database Publisher*. Web. Bay College Library. Date accessed.

Example:

McKibben, Bill. "Waste Not Want Not." *Mother Jones*. May/June 2009: 48-51. *WilsonSelectPlus*. *FirstSearch*. Web. Bay College Library. 19 May 2009.

Scholarly Format:

Author(s). "Article Title." *Magazine/Newspaper Title*. **Volume #.Issue # (Publication Date):** page(s). *Database Name*. *Database Publisher*. Web. Bay College Library. Date accessed.

Example:

Vance, Erik. "Energy: High Hopes." *Nature*. 460.7255 (2009): 564-566. *Sciences Module*. *ProQuest*. Web. Bay College Library. 10 June 2009.

An interview that you conducted

Name of the person interviewed. Kind of interview. (Personal, Telephone, etc), and the date.

Example:

Diamonti, Nancy. Personal Interview. 20 May 2009.

An interview from a television or radio program

Name of the person interviewed. Interviewer's name may be added if known and pertinent. *Name of television/radio program*. Network(s), Location. Date viewed. Television.

Example:

Wiesel, Elie. Interview by Ted Koppel. *Nightline*. ABC. WABC, New York. 18 Apr. 2002. Television.

A television or radio broadcast

"Title of episode or segment". *Title of the program or series*. Name of the Network (if any). Call letters and city of the local station (if any). Broadcast date day Month year. Medium of reception (e.g. Radio, Television).

Example:

"Phantom of Corleone." *Sixty Minutes*. CBS. WJMN, Escanaba. 10 Dec. 2006. Television.

The TRiO Writing Center can provide additional assistance — for more information go to: <http://www.baycollege.edu/?writing>

OWL can also provide additional assistance and more citation examples. <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>

Link to Bay College Library Webpage: <http://lrc.baycollege.edu/>

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