

Advanced Research Methods

Research advice for upper division undergraduates and graduates in the social sciences and humanities.

What Is
Research?

Library Research

Writing a
Research
Proposal

Writing the
Research Paper

Before Writing
the Paper

Methods,
Thesis and
Hypothesis

Clarity,
Precision and
Academic
Expression

Writing the
Research
Paper

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Paper

Typical
Problems

A Few
Suggestions

Avoid
Plagiarism

Presenting the
Research Paper

Before Writing the Paper

1. Find a topic.

- A. Try to find a subject that really interests you.
- B. While you explore the topic, narrow or broaden your target and focus on something that gives the most promising results.
- C. Don't choose a huge subject if you have to write a 3 page long paper, and broaden your topic sufficiently if you have to submit at least 25 pages.
- D. Consult your class instructor (and your classmates) about the topic.

2. Explore the topic.

- A. Find primary and secondary sources in the library.
- B. Read and critically analyse them.
- C. Take notes.
- D. Compile surveys, collect data, gather materials for quantitative analysis (if these are good methods to investigate the topic more deeply).
- E. Come up with new ideas about the topic. Try to formulate your ideas in a few sentences.
- F. Write a short outline of your future paper.
 - a. Review your notes and other materials and enrich the outline.
 - b. Try to estimate how long the individual parts will be.
- G. It is helpful if you can speak about your plan to a few friends (brainstorming) or to your professor.
 - a. Do others understand what you want to say?
 - b. Do they accept it as new knowledge or relevant and important for a paper?
 - c. Do they agree that your thoughts will result in a successful paper?



Methods, Thesis and Hypothesis

Methods

- Qualitative: gives answers on questions (how, why, when, who, what, etc.) by investigating an issue
- Quantitative: requires data and the analysis of data as well

Thesis

- the essence, the point of the research paper in one or two sentences.

Hypothesis

- a statement that can be proved or disproved.

Clarity, Precision and Academic Expression

Clarity

- Be specific.
- Avoid ambiguity.
- Use predominantly the active voice, not the passive.
- Deal with one issue in one paragraph.

Precision

- Be accurate.
- Double-check your data, references, citations and statements.

Academic Expression

- Don't use familiar style or colloquial/slang expressions.
- Write in full sentences.
- Check the meaning of the words if you don't know exactly what they mean.
- Avoid metaphors.

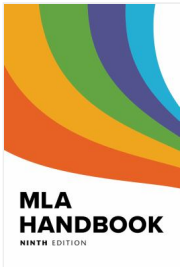
Writing the Research Paper

1. Write a detailed outline.
 - A. Almost the rough content of every paragraph.
 - B. The order of the various topics in your paper.
2. On the basis of the outline, start writing a part by planning the content, and then write it down.
3. Put a visible mark (which you will later delete) where you need to quote a source, and write in the citation when you finish writing that part or a bigger part.
4. When you are ready with a longer part, read it loud for yourself or somebody else.
 - A. Does the text make sense?
 - B. Could you explain what you wanted?
 - C. Did you write good sentences?
 - D. Is there something missing?
5. Check the spelling.
6. Complete the citations, bring them in standard format.

Format Your Paper

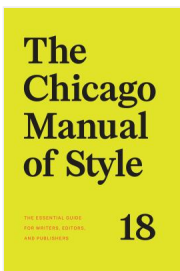
Use the guidelines that your instructor requires (MLA, Chicago, APA, Turabian, etc.).

- Adjust margins, spacing, paragraph indentation, place of page numbers, etc.
- Standardize the bibliography or footnotes according to the guidelines.



MLA Handbook, 9th ed., 2021 by The Modern Language Association of America 

Call Number: REF LB 3259 M52 2021

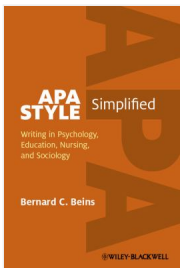


The Chicago Manual of Style, 18th Edition. by The University of Chicago Press Editorial Staff 

Date: 2024

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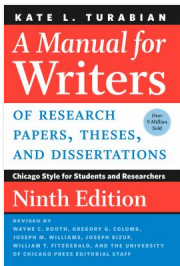
Also available online.



APA Style Simplified by Bernard C. Beins 

Call Number: BF76.7 .B422a 2012

Date: 2012



A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations, 9th ed., 2018, by Kate L. Turabian; Joseph Bizup (Revised by); Wayne C. Booth (Revised by); Gregory G. Colomb (Revised by); William T. FitzGerald (Revised by); University of Chicago Press Editorial Staff (Revised by); Joseph M. Williams (Revised by)

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- **EndNote and EndNote Basic**
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Typical Problems

(Based on *English Composition 2* from Illinois Valley Community College):

- Weak organization
- Poor support and development of ideas
- Weak use of secondary sources
- Excessive errors
- Stylistic weakness

A Few Suggestions

When collecting materials, selecting research topic, and writing the paper:

- Be systematic and organized (e.g. keep your bibliography neat and organized; write your notes in a neat way, so that you can find them later on).
- Use your critical thinking ability when you read.
- Write down your thoughts (so that you can reconstruct them later).
- Stop when you have a *really good idea* and think about whether you could enlarge it to a whole research paper. If yes, take much longer notes.
- When you write down a quotation or summarize somebody else's thoughts in your notes or in the paper, cite the source (i.e. write down the author, title, publication place, year, page number).
- If you quote or summarize a thought from the internet, cite the internet source.
- Write an outline that is detailed enough to remind you about the content.
- Write in full sentences.
- Read your paper for yourself or, preferably, somebody else.
- When you finish writing, check the spelling;
- Use the citation form (MLA, Chicago, or other) that your instructor requires and use it everywhere.

Avoid Plagiarism

Plagiarism: somebody else's words or ideas presented without citation by an author

- Cite your source *every time* when you quote a part of somebody's work.
- Cite your source *every time* when you summarize a thought from somebody's work.
- Cite your source *every time* when you use a source (quote or summarize) from the Internet.

Consult the **Citing Sources** research guide for further details.