Steps for Writing a Research Paper

The Writing Center handouts listed under “Resources” are available on the Writing Center website or can be picked up at the Writing Center.

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| 1. **Turn your topic into a focused question.** | • Research is a process of seeking answers, so you need to start with a question. Here’s an example:  
  - Topic: *Cuts to higher education*  
  - Question: *How have cuts to higher education affected students?*  
  - You may need to do some quick preliminary research on the web to get a basic understanding of your topic. | • Make sure you understand the assignment  
  • Talk to a Writing Center tutor  
  • Use general references like Wikipedia or Encyclopedia Britannica |
| 2. **Make a preliminary thesis statement and outline.** | • It will help focus your research to begin with a temporary thesis based on your current understanding of the topic.  
  • Determine the type of research paper you are to write: Is it a report paper or thesis paper?  
  - Report papers inform without taking a position, e.g. “Funding cuts over the past 20 years have changed public higher education.”  
  - Thesis papers use research to support a position, e.g., “Public higher education is in a state of crisis due to funding cuts over the past 20 years.” | • Talk to a Writing Center tutor  
  • Use “Prewriting Strategies,” “Developing a Thesis Statement,” and “Structure of an Expository Essay” handouts available on the Writing Center Online Library (OWL) |
| 3. **Find sources and take detailed notes as you read.** | • Use the library and academic search engines to create a list of sources on the topic.  
  • Plan your reading schedule—can you really read all 100 articles and 5 books on the subject? Start with the most relevant sources first.  
  • Consult different types of sources—journal articles, newspapers, books, and electronic sources.  
  • Keep track of all the citation information for each source as you go.  
  • Take thorough notes as you read so you don’t waste time hunting down a fact later. Also be careful when using exact words from a source in your notes—you want to be sure which words are yours and which are those of the author. | • Talk to a reference librarian (in person or in live chat on-line) at SBCC Luria Library  
  • Use “Citation Information” handout from workshop (Writing Center OWL) |
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| 4. Integrate research into your outline. | • You will probably need to revise your preliminary thesis and outline to better match your findings.  
• Use your outline to sort and organize your evidence before you begin writing a draft  
• Double-check that you’ve met all requirements for the assignment | • Talk to a Writing Center tutor  
• Use “Developing a Thesis Statement,” and “Structure of an Expository Essay” handouts (Writing Center OWL) |
| 5. Draft and then revise. | • Try to read your draft as someone unfamiliar with the topic. Ask yourself: Are any questions left unanswered?  
• If yes, then return to your notes and/or do more research to include those answers  
• Insert parenthetical citations with the source page number each time you quote or paraphrase a source | • Talk to a Writing Center tutor  
• Use “Choose and Use Citations” handout (Writing Center OWL) |
| 6. Create a works cited page. | • Make a list of all sources used in your paper, whether you directly quote them or just paraphrase.  
• Format the source list according to citation style required by your instructor—usually MLA or APA. (If you aren’t sure, ask your instructor.)  
• For on-line sources, you will need to include your “date of access” or the day you looked at the site.  
• In order to format correctly, you must know what kind of source you talking about: Is it a journal article, book, magazine, etc? A librarian or writing tutor can help you determine the type of source, if you are unsure. | • Talk to a reference librarian (in person or via live chat on-line) at SBCC Luria Library  
• Talk to a Writing Center tutor  
• Use “MLA Citations” or “APA Citations” handout (Writing Center OWL)  
• Use MLA or APA formatting guides at owl.english.purdue.edu  
• Try an on-line citation tool, such as Noodle or Zotero (available on the library website) |
| 7. Proofread the final draft. | • Read your paper aloud.  
• APA and MLA formatting guidelines include instructions about how to format the title and where to place page numbers—impress your teacher by producing a polished, professional looking paper. | • Talk to a Writing Center tutor  
• Look at paper writing handbooks available in the Writing Center for individual use by students  
• Use “Self-Editing Strategies,” and “A Guide to Clear, Concise Writing” handouts (available on-line at Writing Center OWL) |