

Ten Steps to a Good Research Paper

To write a good research paper, you must be specific about your topic, know what you want to say, and say it effectively. Following these ten steps will help you write a good research paper.

Step 1. Choose Your Topic. When choosing a topic, choose one in which you are interested, and for which there is enough information. If your topic is too broad, you will have difficulty completing your paper. "The Effects of Pollution" is too broad because there are so many effects of pollution. "The Effects of Pollution on Geese in the Northeast Section of Duluth, Minnesota" is too narrow. You are not likely to find much information that is this specific. "The Effects of Pollution in Yosemite National Park" is just about right as a topic.

Step 2. Locate Information. Use information from a variety of reference sources. These sources include encyclopedias, almanacs, scholarly journals, [books](#), magazines, and newspapers. Find these sources in print form, on CD-ROMS, and on the Internet.

Step 3. Prepare Bibliography Cards. Prepare bibliography cards to document the sources of information you use when writing your paper. Your library will have style manuals to illustrate how to prepare bibliography cards for various sources of information.

Step 4. Prepare Note Cards. Use note cards to record notes from each source you use when writing your paper. Number your note cards to keep track of them.

Step 5. Prepare an Outline. Write an outline for your paper by organizing your notes from the note cards into topics, subtopics, details, and sub details. Use an organization such as:

- I.(topic)
 - A.(subtopic)
 - 1.(detail)
 - a.(subdetail)

Step 6. Write A Rough Draft. Use your note cards and outline to write a rough draft of your paper. As you write your draft, use numbered footnotes to credit sources from which you take quotations or major ideas.

Step 7. Revise Your Rough Draft. Make any changes needed to be sure your ideas are clearly expressed and your [writing](#) has accurate spelling and [grammar](#).

Step 8. Prepare Your Bibliography. At the end of your paper, provide a list of all the sources you used together information for the paper. Your bibliography cards will provide this information. List your sources in alphabetical order by the first word on each of your bibliography cards.

Step 9. Prepare a Title Page and Table of Contents. The title page is the first page of the paper. It should include the title of your paper, your name, and the date on which the paper is due. The table of contents is the second page. It should list the main topics, important subtopics, and the page on which each is introduced in your paper.

Step 10. Final Checklist. Before handing in your paper, be sure you can answer "Yes" to each of the following questions.

- Did I include a title page?
- Did I include a table of contents?
- Did I number all pages correctly?
- Did I provide footnotes for quotations and major sources of information?
- Did I include a bibliography?
- Did I keep a second copy for my files?

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