WRITING CENTER

Guidelines to Writing a Research Paper

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INTRODUCTION

When an instructor assigns a research paper, they are asking you to go beyond what has been learned in class to expand your knowledge or to update the information with more current literature. Make sure to clarify the purpose of the assignment with your instructor.

- If your purpose is to explain, you will be writing an **informative** or **expository** paper, and will be concerned with presenting facts accurately and completely.
- If your purpose is to defend one side of an issue or take a stand on one, you will be writing **persuasively** or **argumentatively**.

Every discipline has its own stylistic guidelines and documentation rules. Find out from your instructor which stylistic guidelines and documentation rules you should use. You can go to the Writing Center (or visit the Writing Center website) for information sheets covering the specific documentation guidelines for your assignment.

The following style sheets are available:
- Modern Language Association (MLA)
- American Psychological Association (APA)
- Chicago Style

The Writing Center can provide other style sheets as needed.

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PLAGIARISM

Misrepresenting another's work as your own is a serious offense and can result in failure for an assignment or even dismissal from class. Refer to the college's website for the Student Code of Conduct.

Plagiarism has become a major concern to instructors. While technology has made the retrieval of information easy, it has, at the same time, made cheating more commonplace. Students would be wise to remember that the technology available to them is also used by their instructors. Synthesizing gathered information and documenting the information correctly is crucial to the researched paper.

You must cite someone else's:	You do not have to cite your own:
• words that you quote • words that you summarize • words that you paraphrase or reword • idea (interpretation, opinion, conclusion) • data graph • photograph • drawing • table of information • experiment • example • unique concept • apt phrase • expression of common knowledge • solution to a problem • speech • video source (film, TV program) • the structure or sequencing of facts, ideas, or arguments	• words • idea (interpretation, opinion, conclusion) • data • graph • photograph • drawing • table of information • experiment • example • unique concept • apt phrase • expression of common knowledge • solution to a problem

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PARTS OF A RESEARCH PAPER

The research paper should include the following parts:

1. A title page with the paper's title, your name, the course, the instructor, and the date, centered in the middle of the paper, or according to your instructor's specifications
2. The outline in parallel form (all sentences, phrases, or words)
3. The paper
4. The works cited or bibliography in the correct documentation style
5. The appendix (if any)

STEPS TO WRITING A RESEARCH PAPER

I. **Choose a topic.** What strongly interests you? What do you know already about the topic? What would you like to know?

II. **Focus your topic.** Use strategies such as clustering, listing, freewriting, or brainstorming with a friend to help you think about your topic's possibilities. List some possible keywords that you can use for your research, then access the internet and type various combinations.

Questions you might ask to help with this process:
- Will you be able to find any sources on your topic?
- Is there a variety of resources, not just one kind?
- Is the topic manageable?
- Will the topic lead to an objective assessment of the sources and defensible conclusions?
- Does the topic suit the assignment in length, time, and subject?

III. **List some questions you will need to answer to focus your idea**. Questions such as who, what, when, where, why, and how will help you get started.

IV. **Develop a research strategy.** This is your plan or procedure for finding and evaluating sources. The reference librarians at the **JCCC Billington Library** are an excellent resource to aid and guide you with your search and teach you to efficiently search for sources and through databases.

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PRIMARY RESEARCH AND SECONDARY RESEARCH

Primary sources are original resources, such as authentic records and materials, field research, eyewitness accounts, and reviewed scholarly articles. Some examples of primary sources include the Declaration of Independence, letters written by Eleanor Roosevelt, and interviews from 9/11 first responders.

Secondary sources are reviews of primary sources; they are not original works. Primary sources should be used whenever possible. Some examples of secondary sources included textbooks, biographies, and commentaries.

INTERNET RESEARCH AND EVALUATING WEBSITES

The keywords you listed during the prewriting and discovery steps of the research process will get you started when you access the Internet or electronic databases. The more focused your wording is, the more specific your resources will be. Use bookmarks to mark your "good" sites so that you may return to them. Keep track of the words and phrases you use.

Anyone with a computer can pull up a web page, so you must evaluate your sources. There are few restrictions and even fewer established guidelines as to what an author can or cannot put on a web page. Researchers need to investigate and critically assess the author's intentions, credibility, bias, and the reliability of the information presented.

Listed below are questions to assist you in your evaluation of websites:

- Who is the author or producer?
- What is the authority or expertise of the individual or group that created this site?
- With what organization is the author of the website affiliated?
- What is the bias of the author, producer, or organization?
- What is the primary purpose of the site (e.g., advertising, information, politics)?
- Is a date of publication provided? When was the website last revised?
- Is a bibliography of print or web resources included? (This may provide more resources for you to pursue in your research.)

LIBRARY RESEARCH

Most libraries, including the JCCC Billington Library, provide digital access to online catalogs, databases for journals, and other resources. Ask for help if you are not sure of the technology. Again, you will use the key words listed above for your search. It is important to use current and reliable resources.

FIELD RESEARCH

Often labeled as primary research, field research provides first-hand information, such as conducting an interview, sending out a survey, holding a focus group, including your personal observations, or using other original data or information.

If you are conducting an interview or holding a focus group, schedule an appointment with the interviewee or group, write down your questions beforehand, take notes during the appointment or ask to record the session, and if using quotes, be sure to get approval from all those you quote. Following the session, ask all involved if they would like to see the finished document. Be sure to send a written thank-you note.

If you are conducting a survey, get feedback from peers, instructors, or the Writing Center before sending it out to make sure your questions are clear and logical.

SYNTHESIZING INFORMATION

Regardless of the type of information you gather, you must take notes. As you initially skim the source, decide if the information is related to your topic. If it is, then make sure you have the necessary bibliographic information for the documentation style that you will be using.

Next, read the article carefully. If you have printed or photocopied the article, you might want to highlight or underline text which clearly meets the criteria for your paper. As you take notes, eliminate unnecessary information, and stick to major information that applies to your topic.

Whether directly quoting, summarizing, paraphrasing, or rewording information from an outside source, make sure all information used is acknowledged with in-text citations and that the source is included in the Works Cited, Bibliography, or References page.