**Research Paper Process**



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**How do I begin to assemble the information for a research paper?**

1. Annotate the research: write notes in margins and/or on note cards or post-its
2. Condense these notes onto note cards or onto word documents; be sure to list the source for each note card
3. Look for themes that occur across sources. These themes could be groupings of time related information, or of concepts, or of recurring ideas/points
4. Identify a few major categories
5. Group the information by those categories, listing a source and possibly page #, or using the post-its/note cards (this can be done in a mapping process)
6. Ask yourself, what does this all seem to say? Why is it important? The answer to that will help you form a thesis statement.

**How do I structure the paper?**

1. Match the structure to the thesis/argument

Example: If your thesis/argument focuses on problems and solutions, use a structure that moves from an analysis of the problem to a presentation of the solutions and their possible effects.

Example: If your thesis/argument focuses on the need to examine probably causes of a situation or problem, use a cause and effect structure. This could move through all causes to their effect, or it could show how each cause leads to an effect that then becomes the cause for yet another effect and ultimately results in the problem or situation.

Example: If it includes a study you have conducted, follow the scientific method appropriate to that field, usually something like this: Into with hypothesis, need for the study, literature review, methods, presentation of the data, analysis of the data, findings/recommendations, conclusion.

Note: learn more about various structures in the *Research Structure* handout

1. Use a logical order. Select an order/ pattern that makes sense with the points you present I each paragraph or section (learn more about this in the Research Structure handout). Some examples:
   * Least significant to most significant
   * Relatively known or expected support to the more surprising or unknown support
   * Chronological
   * Following a Process, i.e. sequential
2. Convert your grouped information into an organized outline or cluster/web or begin to free write so as to see what you have and where you might still have gaps.
3. Try beginning with the body rather than the intro.
4. Be sure that each paragraph provides a link in the chain of your reasoning and/or development of a piece of your support for your argument/thesis. This includes (but is not limited to) the following:
   * Offer a something that supports the argument of your thesis and explain what you mean.
   * Show evidence/support (facts, quotes, examples, data).
   * Analyze that evidence
   * Show more evidence and analyze that evidence too. Connect it to the other pieces.
   * Synthesize by helping the reader see how this support relates to the overarching argument or to preceding paragraphs or to paragraphs that will follow thereafter.
5. Cite as you write (never put off adding in the citation information for after the writing…you will lose track of what is sourced info and what is yours). Cite all summarized, paraphrased, or quoted information.
6. Connect the dots: look for places where the reasoning jumps from one thing to the next. Ask yourself, “How did my thoughts go from here to there?” and then show the thoughts that were in your head but never made it onto the page.

**What then?**

A draft is not a finished product; indeed, a draft sometimes just shows you what you still need to do.

1. If you began with the body, ask yourself, “What does the reader already need to know in order to understand this?” The missing information/knowledge would be the substance of your “background” section. The background section is usually after intro, but sometimes combined with intro. It provides information that is a basis for the remainder of the paper and might include historical information, or definitions (technical terms or explanations), or a problem, or a setting or context.
2. After writing the background, ask yourself, “What would help bring my reader to the ideas presented in this research paper?” or “What thoughts, ideas, feelings, problems led me to this research?” Your answer might help you to create an intro that helps the reader transition from his/her own world view to the perspectives of your paper.
3. Re-read the body looking for the flow of ideas and for missing pieces. Constantly ask yourself, “What did I mean by that?” If this question can’t be answered by the words on the page, you need to develop the ideas.
4. Write a conclusion that helps the reader see how the most important points all add up to the argument you have made, AND helps the reader clearly understand why this all matters.
5. Re-read for content and revise as needed.
6. Print out your draft in order to edit for grammar and punctuation. When editing for grammar and punctuation, only look at those issues.
7. Edit for citation format and mechanics in one sweep that is separate from your content revision and your grammar edit.