

Writers:

Douglas Grudzina and Boris Kolba

Senior Editor:

Paul Moliken

Cover and Text Design:

Maria J. Mendoza

Layout and Production:

Jerry Clark



PRESTWICK HOUSE, INC.

"Everything for the English Classroom!"

P.O. Box 658

Clayton • Delaware 19938

Tel: 1.888.932.4593

Fax: 1.888.718.9333

Web: www.prestwickhouse.com

© 2008 Copyrighted by Prestwick House, Inc.

All rights reserved. No portion may be
reproduced without permission in writing from
the publisher.

Printed in the United States of America.

ISBN: 978-1-60389-013-7

Writing an **A⁺** Research Paper

A Roadmap for Beginning and Experienced Writers



By Douglas Grudzina
& Boris Kolba



PRESTWICK HOUSE, INC.

"Everything for the English Classroom!"



Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	HOW IS THIS BOOK DIFFERENT FROM ALL OTHER BOOKS?	7
CHAPTER 1	COMING TO TERMS.....	9
	1. What is a research paper?.....	10
	2. What is research?.....	16
	3. What is a thesis?	19
	4. What <i>isn't</i> a research paper?	22
	5. What earns a research paper an A+?	25
CHAPTER 2	SEARCHERS, START YOUR ENGINES.....	27
	6. What is a good topic for a research paper?	28
	7. How do I start thinking about a thesis?	34
	8. What are the steps of the research process?.....	40
CHAPTER 3	THE HUNT IS ON	43
	9. What are sources?.....	43
	10. What are “relevant” and “credible” sources?	60
	11. Where can I find the sources I need?	88
	12. What kinds of sources do I <i>not</i> need?	100
	13. How do I keep track of the sources I’ve found?	109
	14. What is a preliminary outline, and when should I draft mine? .	122
	15. How much time will I need for my research?	133
CHAPTER 4	IN THE THICK OF IT	139
	16. What do I do with all of these sources?.....	139
	17. How do I take notes on my sources?	140
	18. How do I keep my research organized?	152
	19. How do I protect myself from charges of plagiarism?—1	159
	20. How do I begin refining my thesis and outline?	169

<i>CHAPTER 5</i>	SEEING THE FOREST <i>AND</i> THE TREES	173
	21. How do I know when I've done enough research?.....	173
	22. How do I get ready to write?.....	174
	23. How do I protect myself from charges of plagiarism?—2.....	176
<i>CHAPTER 6</i>	WRITING YOUR RESEARCH PAPER	183
	24. What am I aiming for?	183
	25. How should I use my sources in my paper?	184
	26. How do I continue to protect myself from charges of plagiarism?..	187
	27. How much time will I need to write my paper?.....	187
	28. What does a good first draft look like?.....	188
<i>CHAPTER 7</i>	THE HOME STRETCH	195
	29. What am I aiming for now?.....	195
	30. Why, when, and how do I cite my sources?.....	196
	31. How do I make absolutely certain I am protected against charges of plagiarism?.....	208
	32. How do I edit my research paper?.....	209
	33. What does a good completed research paper look like?.....	217
	34. How can I fix any careless errors that could lower my grade? ..	225
<i>CHAPTER 8</i>	EXTRAS	227
	35. What other documentation formats are acceptable?	227

HOW IS THIS BOOK DIFFERENT FROM ALL OTHER BOOKS?

To be assigned a research paper is probably one of the most stressful events in the life of a high school student, but it does not need to be, because, as this book will show you, a research paper is really nothing more than a well-written essay that contains information from sources other than your own mind.

The mystique of the research paper lies essentially in the time allowed a student to write one and in the arcane system of citation, documentation, and attribution that make a research paper *look like* a research paper. Stripped of its trappings, however, the research assignment is not terribly different from any other writing assignment. In fact, it should be a pleasant time for you to learn more about something that really interests you and then show off your knowledge to your teacher.

Most other research paper guides and handbooks perpetuate the “cult of the difficult task” by focusing on the form and format and dividing the task into smaller chores, each of which is made to look insurmountable in its own way. Those research guides provide a few models and then leave you stranded just as you are about to begin your own paper in earnest.

This book won’t.

Writing an A+ Research Paper will stay with you from the first day of school to the day you turn in your final draft. More than that even, this book will provide you with companionship as you embark on this rite of passage. As you work on your research project, you will meet Ella and Rob, who also have been assigned research papers. Ella will be your model, and you will actually be asked to help Rob. Then, you’ll have the opportunity to apply what you’ve learned and practiced to your own research assignment. Your teacher might also ask you to help some other students, Eva, Ian, and Nikki, as they navigate the waters of the research pool.

Follow the steps in this book. Look at what your five companions have done. Practice with the included exercises, and most of all...enjoy. Your confidence will build as your understanding of the process increases. In addition, you'll probably find yourself enjoying the search, since the veil of the *unknown* and *unknowable* has been lifted.

The assignment of a research paper will no longer be a moment of dread, but an opportunity to explore.

One important thing you need to know is that, in this book's samples and exercises, we've made up just about all of the sources and most of the facts. It is, therefore, in your best interest *not to cite any of the sources or information in this book if you ever do a research paper on any of the topics developed here.*

You should do your own research anyway. That's what this book is about.

Okay...let's begin.

COMING TO TERMS

It is the first day of the school year. You're catching up with old friends, meeting some new ones, and starting brand new classes. Each teacher tells you a bit about the work you will be doing in the year ahead. All of your classes sound interesting, and some even sound like they could be fun. Then, one of your teachers announces that over the months ahead, you will be writing a **research paper**.

If you're like many students, those words stop you in your tracks.

You've probably done some form of research before, at least an encyclopedia report on the Pilgrims in the fourth grade, and you almost certainly will be doing research in the future, in virtually every academic class you take through high school and college and graduate school—if you choose to go that far. Research is unavoidable. Still, the fact remains that **most students simply do not understand the purpose of the research paper assignment and, therefore, how to fulfill that purpose**.

This book will help you solve that problem. In the chapters ahead, we'll cover every aspect of researching and writing your research paper. We'll also follow the progress of several students writing their research papers, from choosing a topic, through doing the research and developing a thesis, to outlining, drafting and revising the final paper. You'll even get to help some of these students with their papers and practice everything you're learning. Then, you'll apply it to your own research assignment.

In this chapter, we'll start at the logical beginning, with the definition of what a research paper actually is.

1. What is a research paper?

As we said, the phrase “research paper” is probably not new to you—and neither are similar phrases like “research report” and “research project.” But do all of those phrases mean the same thing? If not, how are they different?

Take a few minutes and write a few sentences explaining what you believe a research paper is. If you find it helpful to explain the research paper by comparing it to a “report” or a “project,” go ahead.

Your explanation might read something like this: “A research paper is a paper that uses quotations from sources...and has a bibliography or something like that.” If you offered an explanation anything like this, you are not completely wrong, but you certainly do not yet have a clear enough understanding to write that A+ paper. Let’s begin with a short and sweet definition of what it is your teacher wants you to write:

A research paper is a thesis-driven essay that uses relevant, credible sources to support its ideas and arguments.

Now, let’s examine each part of the definition.

- > **A thesis-driven essay:** An *essay* is a relatively short piece of writing (compared to, say, a dissertation or a book) that *gives the author’s point of view on a subject*.

A *thesis* is the main idea or argument of an essay.

No doubt, you’ve heard both of these terms before, but it’s important to remember just what they mean. An essay does more than just explain what its subject is; it tells what you, as the author, think about the subject. A *thesis-driven essay*, therefore, focuses on its thesis. The entire essay presents, develops, and supports that main idea or argument.

📖 For more on your thesis, turn to “**What is a thesis?**” on pages 19–21.

- > **Relevant, credible sources:** A *source* is anything or anyone that gives you information and ideas. Finding and studying sources is the *research* part of writing a research paper. Sources can include books, encyclopedias, newspapers, magazines, websites, and interviews with knowledgeable people. Before you write your research paper, your sources will tell you what you need to know about your topic; and in the paper itself, they will support your ideas, giving weight to your point of view. Does that sound like a lot to expect from your sources? It is a lot, which is why your sources must be *relevant* and *credible*. A source is *relevant* if it presents information that will be useful to you. A source is *credible* if it is trustworthy, and if the information in it is accurate and up-to-date.

📖 For more on sources, turn to “**What Are ‘Relevant’ and ‘Credible’ Sources?**” on pages 60–87.

- > **Support its ideas and arguments:** This is the kind of phrase most students ignore. You’ve been told many, many times to “support your ideas and arguments” so it’s easy to treat this part of the definition as mere filler, but it is *very* important. This phrase tells you something crucial about the relationship between your thesis and your research. In a research paper, your thesis is the most important element. Your sources are there *only to support your thesis*. Never forget this! You can have the best sources in the world, but without a strong thesis, you do *not* have a research paper! By the same token, you can have the most brilliant thesis ever developed, but if you do not have concrete information from valid sources, you do not have a research paper.

Let’s pause now and look at a few students and some work they’ve been doing. Read the descriptions of their projects and then decide whether each project meets our definition of a research paper—and why.

EXERCISE ONE:

DETERMINING WHAT A RESEARCH PAPER IS

Complete the following explanation

Rob, to whom you were introduced earlier, is learning about the American Civil War in his social studies class. Outside of class, he’s read two books written by well-known historians about the battle of Gettysburg. He’s also read three articles that his teacher has recommended on the same subject. Then, he writes a paper that explains the main points of each of the books and articles he’s read.

This paper IS NOT a research paper because . . .

We are going to follow Rob and Ella as they follow the process and write the research paper their teacher is assigning today. (Your teacher may also want you to work with their classmates Eva, Ian, and Nikki.) Let’s look at the assignment they are given on the first day of classes of the spring semester:

ROB AND ELLA’S RESEARCH PAPER ASSIGNMENT

Write a research paper on an important issue in early United States history.
Choose one of the following topics:

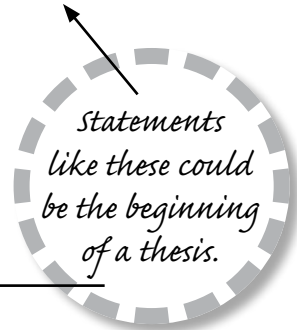
- Colonial New England
- Colonial Jamestown
- Slavery in the Colonies
- The Revolutionary War
- The Constitutional Convention
- Westward Expansion

These are very, very broad topics. No matter which one you choose, you’ll need to make your topic more manageable.

📖 For more on narrowing a topic, see pages 28–33.

Focus on one aspect of your topic. You may focus on a single problem, what caused that problem, and how it was solved (or not solved). For example, if you chose the Constitutional Convention, you could focus on **the question of slavery and how it was addressed in the Constitution.**

You could also focus on one event, what led to it, and its long-term effects. For example, if you chose the topic of Westward Expansion, you could focus on the Louisiana Purchase, including **what led up to it and how it affected America's growth and development.**



📖 For more on coming up with a preliminary thesis, see pages 19–21.

REQUIREMENTS

- 6–10 typed pages, double-spaced, front of page only

- At least 5 sources
 - What kinds of sources will you need? Where will you find them?
 - Does five seem like a lot?

📖 For more on sources, see Chapter 3.

- MLA-style citations and Works Cited Page
 - What does this mean? MLA style is one of the special formal requirements for research papers.

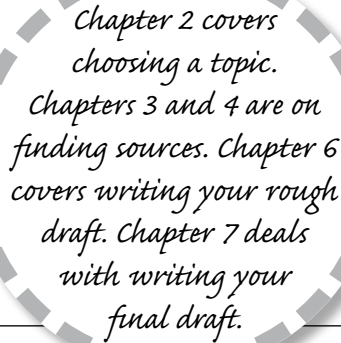
📖 For more on citations and Works Cited Pages, see pages 196–201.

NOTE: Plagiarism will result in an automatic failing grade!

A failing grade for plagiarism? That's serious! We'll talk about plagiarism and how you can avoid it throughout the book. For now, all you need to know is that *every time you use information from a source, you must give that source appropriate credit, or you are committing plagiarism.*

DEADLINES:

- Monday, April 14th
Topic
- Monday, May 5th
Preliminary list of sources
- Tuesday, May 27th
Rough draft
- Friday, June 10th
Final draft



Chapter 2 covers choosing a topic. Chapters 3 and 4 are on finding sources. Chapter 6 covers writing your rough draft. Chapter 7 deals with writing your final draft.

EXERCISE TWO:

REVIEWING IMPORTANT DEFINITIONS

Write a brief definition for each of the following terms.

Thesis

Source

Relevant and credible

Plagiarism

2. What is research?

It almost goes without saying that research is an essential part of a “research paper.” It’s what distinguishes a research paper from any other kind of essay. You can eloquently express your opinion on a topic, but without research, your opinion is all you have. You have a right to your opinion, but that right does not obligate anyone to agree with you. Research, however, greatly increases the likelihood that your reader will agree with your thesis. At the very least, research provides you with the support and details that establish your thesis as valid and make your reader consider your point, even if he or she does not agree with it completely.

But what exactly is research?

The dictionary defines *research* as “investigating or studying a topic closely and thoroughly.” You probably do research more often than you realize. Have you ever searched the Internet for information about a new game console you want to buy? That’s research. Have you ever read two or three reviews of a movie you might want to see? That’s research, too.

Basically, **research is the act of learning about a topic independently, using sources of information beyond classroom materials.**

What does this tell you? Here are a few important points to remember:

- > **Research is a way to learn about a topic.** Research is more than just collecting quotations for your paper. It’s one of the best ways you can learn. The more information you take in, the more you will know about your topic. In fact, when you do research, you become an “expert” on your topic!
- 📖 For more on learning from your sources, turn to “**What do I do with all of these sources?**” on page 139.
- > **Research is something you do outside the classroom.** You’ve probably already learned at least a little about your topic in class. When you do research, however, you move beyond the classroom—into the library, onto the Internet, and even into the

community. In that way, you learn more about your topic than you can in class alone.

📖 For more on where to do research, turn to “**Where can I find the sources I need?**” on pages 88–99.

- > **Research is something you do independently.** Your teacher might provide some help by recommending a source or suggesting where you should look. You, however, will do the bulk of your research—finding information and learning from it—on your own.

The process of research can actually be divided into two basic stages. **Stage one** is *gathering information about your topic*. You sit at your computer, punching keywords into search engines. You hunt through online and print magazines for articles about your topic. Maybe you travel to the library, looking for additional print sources, especially books. You might even track down an expert on your topic whom you can interview, either in person, on the telephone, or via e-mail or electronic chat. Any of these can be **sources** for your research paper.

📖 For more on types of sources, turn to “**What are sources?**” on pages 43–59.

Gathering ample sources is obviously crucial—and remember that, at some point, you will have to evaluate those sources for relevance and credibility—but it’s not the whole story. **Stage two** of research is *learning from the information you’ve gathered*. Remember, research is a way to learn about a topic. You’ll likely find more than enough potential sources on any topic you choose to write about, but having the sources and taking random information from each will not result in your learning very much or being able to put together a very useful research paper. Part of our definition of research, then, is that it has to be **organized**. The search itself has to be organized, and the end product—the paper—has to be organized.

When you know what you want to learn from your sources, and you give some earnest thought to what you’d like to teach your reader, you’ll be able to make the most of your research.

The best research papers do not merely discuss the information, they also discuss the sources, explaining how the thesis developed and where the paper-writer's ideas came from.

- 📖 For more on learning from your research, turn to “**What do I do with all of these sources?**” on page 139.