

Research Process Overview

Your MLA Style Argumentative Research Paper (8-10 pages, typed and double spaced) will be your major project for the semester; the entire project is worth 25% of your final grade. During the course of the research process, you should find, research, and review **at least 15** total sources, although you are only required to incorporate 10 of them in the final essay. In the final paper, however, you may choose to use more than 10 sources if need be. Keep in mind that it is important that you have enough source information to compile 55-60 notecards. In selecting a topic, think of a subject that involves a current issue or an enduring question—the research paper should involve an opinion, argument, or controversy.

The Process:

1. Look around and consider the issues. Reflect on some possible topics until you find something that piques your interest. Remember: it should be worthy of (and substantive enough) for a discussion in 8-10 total pages. Also keep in mind that your primary purpose is to argue about an issue, whether for or against it.
2. Begin doing some preliminary research to examine the issue a little more thoroughly. Visit the library and elsewhere to find 15 total sources on your topic that you believe could be of value. In “culling out” your sources, **preview** them before actually making your decision as to their validity before choosing them and printing them off. At this point, we will have **Research Paper Conference 1** (2.5% of your grade for the course) to discuss your possible topic and the progress you have made finding sources on that topic. When we meet for this conference, you should have a topic in mind and 15 sources printed off and “in hand.”
3. Narrow down your topic to develop a definite **thesis statement** that includes your opinion on the topic and the argument that you are going to make. In order to do this, you will need to revisit your sources again. Preview them to see how well they can be used to support your argument. If you don’t have enough good sources to support your argument, you may need to do some additional research at this point (or you even may need to change your topic).
4. Create an MLA Style “Working Bibliography” that lists the sources you have found to support your argument. At this point, we will have **Research Paper Conference 2** (5% of your grade for the course), which involves a discussion of your thesis statement and Working Bibliography.
5. Next, closely and actively read all your sources, underlining, highlighting, and annotating them. Evaluate the usefulness of each source individually. Select the information that will be useful to your essay and compile your notecards (55-60 total). Your cards can be either 3 ½” x 5” or 4” x 6”. Remember to list only one idea per card. Each card should contain either a short **summary** of the information found in a certain source, a **paraphrase** of a certain passage found in a source, or a **direct quotation** taken verbatim from that source. For sources with stable pagination (such as print sources or .pdfs), use a “/” to indicate where one page leaves off and another begins. You may write on the front and back of each card, if you desire. Give each card a general heading that briefly indicates the overall “theme” of the subject matter. Each card also should provide complete citation information necessary for in-text citation of the source when you are writing the essay; in the end, your reader should be able to easily and alphabetically cross-reference each in-text citation to your Works Cited page. We will be discussing this more in class.

6. Once you have finished actively reading your sources and compiling your notecards, we will have **Research Paper Conference 3** (5% of your grade for the course) to review your progress and see your completed notecards.
7. After you have finished all of your notecards, synthesize them. Arrange them into clusters, each devoted to one theme, subpoint, or idea. Put any unused cards aside. Then, arrange your notecard clusters into a tentative sequence—in effect, preparing an organizational pattern or structure for your essay.
8. Next, from your organized notecards, put together a Topic Outline, which will give tentative structure to your essay and create direction for all the information you have found. A handout and class discussion of outlining will be forthcoming.
9. At this point, we will have **Research Paper Conference 4**. Bring in your notecards and Topic Outline (5% of your grade for the course) for review and discussion during the conference.
10. Use your notecards and Topic Outline to put together a rough draft of your essay for Peer Editing.
11. After Peer Editing, revise this rough draft and put together a final draft to be submitted for a grade. Submit your Research Paper for a grade, along with your Notecards, Final Topic Outline, and two signed, Peer Edited drafts.
12. **CONFERENCE #5** will be at my discretion. Anyone who receives a “C” or less on the Research Paper **MUST** attend this conference and revise his/her Research Paper. However, everyone will have the option of revising the Research Paper for an improvement in grade if he or she chooses to do so; thus, you may wish to schedule a conference with me even if you are not required to do so in order to discuss any questions about revision that you may have.

Park University Online Library Databases:

-Ebsco

-**GreenFILE** (hosted by EBSCO): articles on environmental issues.

-**JSTOR**: articles from scholarly journals (humanities, social sciences, education, business, science).

-**LexisNexis**: news, business, legal, medical, general reference articles.

-**Student Research Center** (hosted by EBSCO): a great place to find articles on a host of topics.

Guidelines for Selecting, Actively Reading, and Evaluating Sources:

I. Preview the Work

- A. Consider the title of the work and what it might convey about the topic and the author's attitude toward the topic.
- B. Consider the credibility of your source. Does it seem unbiased and fair? **Remember that Wikipedia is not a reliable or credible source for an academic research paper!**
- C. Consider the timeliness of the work. How current and up to date is it?
- D. Skim the piece through once, simply to get a feel for the general movement of its argument or purpose, and to assess the information contained therein.

II. Evaluate the Source More Closely:

Consider the following:

What is the source's main idea?

What is the scope of the material contained therein?

What is the author's purpose? Why did s/he write this work?

How effectively does the author communicate and fulfill his or her purpose? How well is the source written?

What does the article or source say about your topic that is interesting, persuasive, or of possible use? How useful will it ultimately be to your discussion and argument on that topic?

Synthesize the source in relation to what you have found already in your other sources. What new information does the source contribute to your argument? In the final analysis, why does this individual source matter as far as your presentation and discussion of the issue are concerned?

III. Read the Work Actively:

- A. Read the piece again, more closely this time, to understand as much as possible about its meaning.
- B. Underline or highlight those elements of the work that seem important, including statistics, effective arguments, powerful quotations, valuable information, etc.
- C. Make annotative comments or notes in the margins about anything that occurs to you during the reading, including what you agree or disagree with, what you find particularly effective or ineffective, what you find unclear, and what questions come to mind as to the validity of the writer's claims. Try to make some connections between the sources you find by jotting down any associations that occur to you as well.

Probe the information in your sources and consider its value to supporting your thesis. Record significant information from your active reading on the notecards, creating at least one entry per source that is of use to you. The purpose of the notecards is to document who said what and where you have discovered key information. The purpose of the outline is to organize your information so that you can make it lucid. In the end, after spending a significant amount of time compiling your notecards, organizing and synthesizing them, and then creating your outline, you should be able to write the paper fairly easily by simply going from card to card. Always keep in mind that, in the final essay, you also should also move past your sources to your own ideas.

You may also choose to record any field research that you undertake as well; if you write your Interview Essay on the same topic, you may use this expert opinion/information as one of your sources for your research paper. We will be discussing how to cite an interview (either in person or over the telephone) in the process of writing the Interview Essay.