



Research Essay: Student Guide

WRITING A GOOD RESEARCH PAPER

October 2017

Definition

The research essay is distinguished by its formal style, title page, parenthetical citations, and works cited list. A research essay is an essay in which you incorporate your own thoughts with other people's words and thoughts (*Communications* 40). The research paper is "based on your exploration of the people's ideas, rather than simply an analysis of your own thoughts" (Buckley 77). The purpose of the research paper is not merely to inform or explain, but to present a point of view, by supporting or drawing a conclusion from the information presented. Your purpose is to take a stand on a particular topic and present evidence to support that stand.

A research essay is **NOT** a report. A report merely presents factual information with no argument; it is like a news report. A research essay, on the other hand, expresses the author's opinion, supported by research, by arguing a thesis. A research essay:

- is meant to present research
- is a formal essay based on investigation of other people's ideas
- is **NOT** simply an analysis of your own thoughts
- includes a thesis based on research from a wide variety of sources
- demonstrates that you have accessed, evaluated, and recorded source material in a cohesive way
- evaluates and synthesizes your findings according to your thesis
- does not simply record facts (*On* 15)

Steps in Writing the Research Essay

1. Choose a subject and narrow it into a topic
2. Access resources and do some preliminary research
3. Formulate a thesis (based on your research)
4. Take notes
5. Prepare a working bibliography
6. Create an outline
7. Write a first draft
8. Revise and edit your paper
9. Write your final draft according to MLA specifications
10. Prepare your works cited page

Sources of Information

Print

- Books (Miller and Regina Public Library)

Electronic

- On-line encyclopedia
- Databases (InfoTrac for magazines; Proquest for newspapers)
- Search engines

Other

- Television program, movie
- Personal interview

Evaluating Sources

- Who is the source of information? A person? Organization? Government or other agency?
- Can you confirm that the source is credible?
- Does the date of the source match the level of currency you need for your paper? Is the site updated? Do the links work?
- Can you determine if the source is fact, opinion, or propaganda?

Thesis statement

A thesis statement is a single, declarative sentence which states the main purpose (argument) or central idea of your paper. The thesis makes a point which will be proven in the essay.

- It is **NOT** the title or topic of the paper.
- It is **NOT** a question.
- It often contains sub points.
- It is the conclusion which arises logically out of the research.
- It is part (usually the last sentence) of the introductory paragraph.

Examples of thesis statements:

- *Seniors, over the age of seventy, should be retested for their driver's license because of physical and mental health problems which cause an increase in accidents.*
- *Shakespeare is not the author of the plays attributed to him.*
- *Many of the activities included in the Olympics are not truly sports, and therefore should not be a part of the games.*

Documentation and Plagiarism

All borrowed material **MUST** be acknowledged. This includes direct quotations, paraphrases (including ideas, style, and language), and summaries. Failure to provide the sources for all borrowed ideas and facts constitutes **plagiarism**—a serious academic offence of intentionally or unintentionally presenting another's words or ideas as your own. It is also known as cheating, borrowing, stealing, or copying (*On* 41).

To avoid plagiarism, you must indicate the source of all material you use in your essay. This consists of two parts—parenthetical citations within the body of the essay and a works cited list at the end of the essay.

In-text Citations

MLA recommends in-text citations that refer readers to a list of works cited. A typical in-text citation names the author of the source, often in a signal phrase, and gives a page number in parentheses. At the end of the paper, the list of works cited provides publication information about the source; the list is alphabetized by authors' last names (or by titles for works without in-text authors). There is a direct connection between the in-text citation and the alphabetical listing. See the following examples.

Examples taken from the website: <http://www.hackerhandbooks.com/writersref>

1. AUTHOR NAMED IN A SIGNAL PHRASE Ordinarily, introduce the material being cited with a signal phrase that includes the author's name. In addition to preparing readers for the source, the signal phrase allows you to keep the parenthetical citation brief.

Christine Haughney reports that shortly after Japan made it illegal to use a handheld phone while driving, "accidents caused by using the phones dropped by 75 percent" (8).

The signal phrase — Christine Haughney reports that — names the author; the parenthetical citation gives the page number where the quoted words may be found.

Notice that the period follows the parenthetical citation. When a quotation ends with a question mark or an exclamation point, leave the end punctuation inside the quotation mark and add a period after the parentheses: ". . . ?" (8).

2. AUTHOR NAMED IN PARENTHESES If a signal phrase does not name the author, put the author's last name in parentheses along with the page number. Use no punctuation between the name and the page number.

Most states do not keep adequate records on the number of times cell phones are a factor in accidents; as of December 2000, only ten states were trying to keep such records (Sundeen 2).

3. AUTHOR UNKNOWN Either use the complete title in a signal phrase or use a short form of the title in parentheses. Titles of books are italicized; titles of articles are put in quotation marks.

As of 2001, at least three hundred towns and municipalities had considered legislation regulating use of cell phones while driving ("Lawmakers" 2).

4. PAGE NUMBER UNKNOWN You may omit the page number if a work lacks page numbers, as is the case with many Web sources. Although printouts from Web sites usually show page numbers, printers don't always provide the same page breaks; for this reason, MLA recommends treating such sources as unpaginated. When the pages of a Web source are stable (as in PDF files), however, supply a page number in your in-text citation.

The California Highway Patrol opposes restrictions on the use of phones while driving, claiming that distracted drivers can already be prosecuted (Jacobs).

According to Jacobs, the California Highway Patrol opposes restrictions on the use of phones while driving, claiming that distracted drivers can already be prosecuted.

5. TWO AUTHORS Name the authors in a signal phrase, as in the following example, or include their last names in the parenthetical reference: (Redelmeier and Tibshirani 453).

Redelmeier and Tibshirani found that "the risk of a collision when using a cellular telephone was four times higher than the risk when a cellular telephone was not being used" (453).

6. THREE OR MORE AUTHORS Name all of the authors or include only the first author's name followed by "et al." (Latin for "and others"). Make sure that your citation matches the entry in the list of works cited.

The study was extended for two years, and only after results were reviewed by an independent panel did the researchers publish their findings (Blaine et al. 35).

7. ORGANIZATION AS AUTHOR When the author is a corporation or an organization, name that author either in the signal phrase or in the parenthetical citation.

The American Diabetes Association estimates that the cost of diagnosed diabetes in the United States in 2012 was \$245 billion.

8. AUTHORS WITH THE SAME LAST NAME If your list of works cited includes works by two or more authors with the same last name, include the author's first name in the signal phrase or first initial in the parentheses.

Estimates of the number of accidents caused by distracted drivers vary because little evidence is being collected (D. Smith 7).

9. TWO OR MORE WORKS BY THE SAME AUTHOR If your list of works cited includes two or more titles by the same author, mention the title of the work in the signal phrase or include a short version of the title in the parentheses.

On December 6, 2000, reporter Jamie Stockwell wrote that distracted driver Jason Jones had been charged with "two counts of vehicular manslaughter . . . in the deaths of John and Carole Hall" ("Phone" B1). The next day Stockwell reported the judge's ruling: Jones "was convicted of negligent driving and fined \$500, the maximum penalty allowed" ("Man" B4).

10. ENCYCLOPEDIA OR DICTIONARY ENTRY Unless an encyclopedia or a dictionary has an author (Look for the author's name at the end of the article), it will be alphabetized in the list of works cited under the word or entry that you consulted — not under the title of the reference work itself. Either in your text or in your parenthetical reference, mention the word or the entry. No page number is required, since readers can easily look up the word or entry.

The word crocodile has a surprisingly complex etymology ("Crocodile").

11. SELECTION IN AN ANTHOLOGY Put the name of the author of the work (not the editor of the anthology) in the signal phrase or the parentheses.

In "A Jury of Her Peers," Mrs. Hale describes both a style of quilting and a murder weapon when she utters the last words of the story: "We call it--knot it, Mr. Henderson" (Glaspell 210).

12. WEB SOURCE Your in-text citation for a source from the Web should follow the same guidelines as for other sources. If the source lacks page numbers but has numbered paragraphs, sections, or divisions, use those numbers with the appropriate abbreviation in your in-text citation: "par.," "se4c.," "ch.," "pt.," and so on. Do not add such numbers if the source itself does not use them; simply give the author or title in your in-text citation. In MLA 8, it is highly recommended to include a URL in the citation.

Julian Hawthorne points out profound differences between his father and Ralph Waldo Emerson but concludes that, in their lives and their writing, "together they met the needs of nearly all that is worthy in human nature" (ch. 4).

13. INDIRECT SOURCE (SOURCE QUOTED IN ANOTHER SOURCE) When a writer's or a speaker's quoted words appear in a source written by someone else, begin the parenthetical citation with the abbreviation "qtd. in" .

According to Richard Retting, "As the comforts of home and the efficiency of the office creep into the automobile, it is becoming increasingly attractive as a work space" (qtd.in Kilgannon A23).

14. VERSE PLAYS AND POEMS For verse plays, MLA recommends giving act, scene, and line numbers that can be located in any edition of the work. Use arabic numerals, and separate the numbers with periods.

In Shakespeare's *King Lear*, Gloucester, blinded for suspected treason, learns a profound lesson from his tragic experience: "A man may see how this world goes / with no eyes" (4.2.148-49).

15. SACRED TEXTS When citing a sacred text such as the Bible or the Qur'an, name the edition you are using in your works cited entry. In your parenthetical citation, give the book, chapter, and verse (or their equivalent), separated by periods. Common abbreviations for books of the Bible are acceptable.

Consider the words of Solomon: "If your enemies are hungry, give them food to eat. If they are thirsty, give them water to drink" (*Holy Bible*, Prov. 25.21).

MLA Manuscript Formatting

Font Times New Roman

Title and identification MLA does not require a title page. On the first page of your paper, place your name, your teacher's name, the class, and the date on separate lines against the left margin. Then center your title.

Page Numbers(running head) Put the page number preceded by your last name in the upper right corner of each page, one-half inch below the top edge. Use Arabic numerals (1,2,3 and so on).

Margins, line spacing and paragraph indents Leave margins of one inch on all sides of the page. Left-align the text.

Double-space throughout the paper. Do not add extra space above or below the title of the paper or between paragraphs.

Indent the first line of each paragraph one-half inch from the left margin.

Long Quotations Quoted material of more than four lines is set off from the text. This material is indented an **additional** five spaces or one tab from your left margin. You do not need to use quotation marks because the indented format establishes that it is a direct quote. The block is double spaced and is introduced by a colon. For example:

In his book on the Apollo space shuttle programs, Joseph Trento reports on the final mission on the Apollo program:

The last mission involving the Apollo hardware nearly ended in tragedy for the American crew. After reentry the crew opened a pressure release valve to equalize the command module atmosphere with the earth's atmosphere. But the reaction control rockets failed to shut down and deadly nitrogen tetroxide oxidizer gas entered the cabin's breathing air. The crew survived the incident, but some at Houston wondered if layoff from manned flight hadn't put the crew at risk. (144)

When you quote **poetry** within the text of your essay, indicate the line structure by means of a slash

Helpful material: Print

Buckley, Joanne. *Checkmate: A Writing Reference for Canadians*. Scarborough, ON: Thomson Nelson, 2003. Print.

Hacker, Diana. *A Canadian Writer's Reference*. 2nd ed. Toronto: Nelson Canada, 1996.
Print.

Harris, Muriel and Joan Pilz. *Canadian High-School Writer's Guide*. Don Mills, ON:
Pearson Education Canada, 2004. Print.

Helpful material: Websites

<http://www.dianahacker.com/resdoc/> (how to document)

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/2/11/> (how to document using MLA)

<http://easybib.com> (template for works cited page)