



Writing Research Papers

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Research papers are often required of students in higher education.



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Many students share a common idea about the task of writing a research paper:

- Choose a topic



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Many students share a common idea about the task of writing a research paper:

- Choose a topic
- Do research on the topic



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Many students share a common idea about the task of writing a research paper:

- Choose a topic
- Do research on the topic
- Write an essay based on your research



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Yet the comments from the professor may be disappointing:

"No research question"

"Too general" or "Not sufficiently narrow"

"Improper use of sources"

"Much of this material appears to be plagiarized"

"Inadequate bibliography"

"No journal articles"



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Topic Selection

Most topics you start with are too broad to be useful research papers.



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Topic Selection

If you leave a topic broad, it will be superficial.

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Consider this illustration:



If your topic is narrow, you can deal with it in depth. If your topic is broad, you will deal with it only in a shallow way.

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Thus you want to avoid a broad survey in a research paper.



Instead, focus on a narrow topic so you can deal with it in depth.

A decorative graphic consisting of a thin yellow circle on the left side. A thick black bracket is positioned on the left side of the circle, and a thick yellow bracket is on the right side. A horizontal olive-green bar spans across the middle of the circle, containing the title and subtitle.

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For example, instead of writing a history of the development of industrialization in Korea...

Narrow the topic to: "The effect of the Asian financial crisis of the late 1990s on automobile manufacturing in Korea."



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The Research Question

A research essay is intended to allow you to answer a question or controversy related to the topic you are studying.



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How can a student develop a proper research question?

- **Narrow your topic.**
- **Use reference sources or portions of books to discover aspects of the topic that are controversial or need investigation.**



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How can a student develop a proper research question?

- **Develop a few possible research questions based on what you find in reference sources. These should be one sentence questions that are simple and clear.**
- **Choose one of these questions to be the research question for your essay.**



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Every research essay should have only one research question. You do not want to have an essay that states, "The following paper will examine _____ and will also _____ and will also _____."



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Example:

Broad Topic: "The history of industrial development in Korea."

Narrow Topic: "The history of the automobile industry in Korea during the Asian Financial Crisis of the late 1990s."

Research Question: "Did the Asian Financial Crisis of the late 1990s bring harm to the automobile industry in Korea or did it bring benefit?"

A decorative graphic consisting of a thin yellow circle on the left side. A thick black bracket is positioned on the left, and a thick yellow bracket is on the right, both framing a horizontal olive-green bar. The bar contains the title and subtitle text.

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Example:

Broad Topic: "Constantine" (Roman emperor of the 300s AD)

Narrow Topic: "The Conversion of Constantine."

Research Question: "Was the conversion of Constantine real?"



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Example:

Broad Topic: "Euthanasia" (helping very ill people to end their lives)

Narrow Topic: "Euthanasia in the Netherlands."

Research Question: "What evidence is there, if any, from the Netherlands that legalizing euthanasia causes a society to value human life less?"



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Structure of a Research Paper

A research paper has the following parts:

Introduction – Provides background information about the issue you are dealing with and allows you to state a research question or thesis.



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Structure of a Research Paper

A research paper has the following parts:

The Body – The main discussion of the issue, broken down into parts to help the reader understand your line of thought.



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Structure of a Research Paper

A research paper has the following parts:

The Conclusion – Summarizes your research and answers your research question.



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Examples of Structure:

"Did the Asian Financial Crisis of the late 1990s bring harm or benefit to the automobile industry in Korea?"

- I. Introduction
- II. Initial Effect on the Automobile Industry
- III. Later Effect on the Automobile Industry
- IV. Was the Effect Positive or Negative?
- V. Conclusion



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"Was the religious conversion of Constantine real?"

I. Introduction

II. Arguments that the conversion was real

III. Arguments that the conversion was not real

IV. Conclusion



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"What evidence is there, if any, from the Netherlands euthanasia experience that legalizing euthanasia causes a society to value human life less?"

I. Introduction

II. The Laws that Control Euthanasia in the Netherlands

III. Actual use of Euthanasia Laws in the Netherlands

IV. Is there evidence that Doctors are going beyond the Controls of the Euthanasia Laws?

V. Conclusion



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Should you Use the Words of Others or Your Own Words?

Some students get confused about what a professor wants. You are to do research, but if you simply copy information the books and articles, you are committing plagiarism.

If you use only your own ideas, then you are not doing research that uses other people's writing.



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The professor does want you to read the books and articles of other people. The research essay is supposed to make use of that research to present your own analysis and arguments.

But how can a student use the work of others if he/she is not allowed to quote their work?



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You *are* allowed to quote from the things you have read, but there are definite rules for doing this:



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The quotations should be short (usually 5 lines or less) and few. My own suggestion is to have no more than one short quotation per page of your essay.

Quotations must have quotation marks (" ") around them or be put in an indented block (for longer quotations) to make it clear that they are quotations.



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All quotations must have a note (footnote, endnote, or short note) attached to them so that it's very clear what source you are quoting. Every item quoted must also be in your bibliography.

You cannot just quote long paragraphs without using quotation marks and then adding a citation, footnote or endnote indicating what source you used.



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Most of your work is to be in your own words. This means:



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Most of your work is to be in your own words. This means:

That you show you have understood what you are reading by interpreting it in your own words.

That you are not just paraphrasing. Paraphrasing involves rewriting each sentence of something you have read, changing the wording a little bit. This is not enough to make the material "your own words."



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Most of your work is to be in your own words. This means:

That you show that you can interpret what the writer is saying without needing to use many of the writer's words.



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To avoid plagiarism, do not try to rewrite an author's sentences in your own words. You will almost always use too many of that author's words.

Instead, read the author's words and interpret what they mean. Then write down your interpretation.



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The professor is mainly interested in seeing how well YOU have understood the material. Professors do not want you simply to repeat what you've read but to interpret what you've read, expressing your own understanding in your own words.



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But what if other writers have already expressed their thoughts in better ways than you could ever use? Why not just copy their words?

Because that would be plagiarism.



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What is Plagiarism?



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What is Plagiarism?

Plagiarism is using another writer's words or unique ideas as if they were your own. The professor believes those are your own words or ideas, because you have not shown that they came from someone else.



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What is Plagiarism?

This means that plagiarism is fraud – pretending that the words or ideas in your research paper are yours, when they actually came from someone else.



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Types of plagiarism

Quoting from a book or article or web site without using quotation marks and a note to tell the reader who wrote the quoted material.



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Types of plagiarism

Presenting an idea as if you were the one who thought of it, when you actually got that idea from a book or article or web site (the exception is when that idea is part of common knowledge found in many pieces of writing).



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Why is plagiarism so serious a problem?

The main reason why academic institutions punish plagiarism so strictly is that it is *dishonesty*, the telling of a lie.



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How would a professor find out that I plagiarized material?

Professors usually first see that some of the writing in a paper is in a different style from the student's other writing, which is usually a sign that the student is using words from another author.



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How would a professor find out that I plagiarized material?

With the number of electronic searching tools we have today, professors can quite easily identify work taken from web sites, articles and even some books.



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What, then, is the best way to use research from other authors?



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What, then, is the best way to use research from other authors?

Quote only when something an author has said really explains well what you are trying to say. Quotations should be short, and there should be few of them.



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Final Words

The goal of the research essay is *not* to gather information and report on it. Research essays are assigned so that you can study a certain topic, develop a research question, and answer it using the materials you have studied *plus* your own analysis.



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The professor wants to see that you are thinking through an issue, not simply explaining or quoting what you have read.



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The information you discover in your research is thus only the foundation, the first part, of the task. What is more important is your ability to *use* that information to advance the world's knowledge.



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For more information on writing research papers, see the appendix to:

William Badke, *Research Strategies: Finding your Way through the Information Fog*, 5th ed. (Lincoln, NE: iUniverse.com, 2014),

and the web site related to this PowerPoint:

http://www.acts.twu.ca/lbr/research_essays.htm