



The Research Paper – Syllabus

Course Description: This course teaches the process of writing a research paper from establishing a topic, developing a thesis, finding sources, and reading/taking notes all the way through the planning and drafting stages to the final project. Students in this research class will write a paper 1500-2000 words long on the topic of their (or their parents') choice.

Class Outline:

I. Researching

Week One: Establish your topic & submit thesis; find sources

Week Two: Read sources and take notes; submit a bibliography

Week Three: Finish reading; organize ideas using topical and sentence outlines

II. Writing

Week Four: Write first third of first draft

Week Five: Write second third of first draft

Week Six: Write final third of first draft

III. Editing

Week Seven: Revise the completed draft

Week Eight: Proofread & submit the final draft



The Research Paper – Grading Information

Assignments 1-7 will be averaged together to receive a weekly assignment grade. The final project presented on Week 8 will receive a separate grade. Both the weekly assignment average and the final project grade will be combined utilizing the weighting seen below:

Course Components	Percentage of Final Grade
Weekly Assignments	40%
Final Paper	60%

Assignments 1-7 will be graded using the following rubric. The final project presented on Week 8 will be graded using our standard grading rubric for *The Growing Writer*.

Exemplary 100%	Strong 99%-90%	Proficient 89%-80%	Developing 79%-70%	Emerging 69%-60%	Beginning 59%-50%	No Attempt 49% and below
Student has followed all assignment directions and has demonstrated exemplary understanding of lesson concepts.	Student has followed most assignment directions and has demonstrated strong understanding of lesson concepts.	Student has followed most assignment directions but has struggled to fully understand lesson concepts.	Student has followed some or most assignment directions but has demonstrated a need for better understanding of lesson concepts.	Student has followed some assignment directions but has demonstrated inadequate understanding of lesson concepts.	Student has followed few assignment directions and has demonstrated poor understanding of lesson concepts.	Student has followed few to no assignment directions and has demonstrated no understanding of lesson concepts.
For drafts of outline, bibliography, and paper, student has submitted a complete assignment and demonstrated excellent effort.	For drafts of outline, bibliography, and paper, student has submitted a mostly complete assignment and demonstrated strong effort.	For drafts of outline, bibliography, and paper, student has submitted a mostly complete assignment and demonstrated proficient effort.	For drafts of outline, bibliography, and paper, student has submitted mediocre written work and demonstrated some lack of effort.	For drafts of outline, bibliography, and paper, student has submitted inadequate written work so that the instructor finds it difficult to provide helpful feedback.	For drafts of outline, bibliography, and paper, student has submitted short and poorly written work so that the instructor is unable to provide helpful feedback.	For drafts of outline, bibliography, and paper, student has submitted nothing.



The Research Paper

Lesson One: Beginning Steps

SAMPLE LESSON

Welcome to *The Research Paper*! You will spend the next eight weeks learning the process of writing a research paper. While it may seem tedious to spend such time on researching, organizing, writing, and editing, it is wise to learn how to write a research paper. Not only will you find this process educational and interesting, but you will also learn valuable skills for many projects.

For this course, you may research any subject that interests you or a subject assigned by your parents.

You will learn how to choose a strong topic, develop a guiding thesis, find sources, take notes, organize and combine important information, and stick to a deadline.

This course is quite a bit different than the rest of the writing courses. Generally, you would read a lesson and have writing exercises to complete weekly. In the case of the research paper, you will find the lessons to be shorter and the assignments to be less about writing and more about *keeping yourself on track*. We will require weekly assignments and progress reports, but you will not always be spending time on weekly writing exercises.

The **requirements for your research paper** are as follows:

- **Length: 1500-2000 words**
- **Sources: At least five sources, with three of those sources being books. The other source/s can be websites, magazines, etc.**

Please read the entire lesson and complete all of the assignments each week. **Remember that assignments are due within one week of receiving them. If you have any questions, concerns, or difficulties with the lessons or assignments, please email your instructor promptly. If you fall behind on assignments, it will be difficult to finish the research paper on time.**

WHAT IS A RESEARCH PAPER? –

Research papers are written pieces, generally longer than typical academic essays. Writing a research paper involves all of the steps for writing an essay plus some additional ones.

(Please note that a middle or high school research paper is defined differently than a research paper in college or career. The goal of a college or professional-level research paper should typically be to present *new*, previously unstated research, to further the knowledge of others about a particular area of study.

On the other hand, the goal of a middle or high school-level research paper is for *you to learn more information about a topic of interest*, whether or not this information is new, previously unstated research.

With this difference in mind, we will employ some similar skills from both types of paper in this class, all of which will be useful to you regardless of your future academic and/or career paths; however, should you choose to attend college, you should expect that there will likely be some new writing concepts to learn if you find yourself writing a research paper.)

Now, let's get back to the basics. To write a research paper, you must first do some research: that is, you must investigate your topic by reading about it in many different sources, including books, magazines, newspapers, and on the Internet. In some cases, you might want to watch videos or even conduct interviews. The information you gather from these sources is then used to write your paper.

Writing a research paper also involves documenting your sources of information in a **bibliography**. This way the reader knows where you got your information and can judge whether the information in your paper is reliable.

Here are the basic steps to follow when writing a research report.

1. Establish your topic and submit your thesis.
2. Look for sources of information.
3. Construct a bibliography.
4. Read your sources and take notes.
5. Organize your ideas.
6. Write a first draft.
7. Revise the first draft.
8. Proofread the final draft.
9. Submit the final paper.

CHOOSING A TOPIC –

The very first thing you must do is establish a topic. For this class, we will not be assigning a topic for your research paper. However, you may be required by your parents to write about a specific topic such as your state or a particular historical event. **Check with your parents about their requirements before you get started.**

If your parents are not giving you a required topic, you may choose any subject that interests you. Still, this choice can be challenging. Here are some guidelines for establishing a topic.

1. First, **try to pick a topic that is fun and interesting.** If your topic genuinely interests you, chances are you will enjoy spending time working on this project, rather than finding this project to be a chore.
2. Finding a topic can be difficult. **Give yourself plenty of time to read and think about what you would like to learn more about.** Trying to answer questions you have about a particular subject may lead you to a good idea for your paper.
 - What subject(s) are you interested in?
 - What interests you most about a particular subject?
 - Is there anything you wonder about or are puzzled about in regard to that subject?
 - Are there specific things you would like to learn more about in relation to that subject?

3. Once you have a topic, you may need to narrow it down to something more manageable. For example, you might decide to write a paper about Ancient Egypt. However, since Ancient Egypt is a big topic, and you only have a limited number of time and words, you will have to focus on something more specific having to do with that topic.
 - Too general: Ancient Egypt
 - Revised: The building of the pyramids of Ancient Egypt
4. On the other hand, you may need to expand your topic. In the past, we have had students choose to research about small local communities, religious persecution in small countries, or small components of the lives of historical figures. While these can be interesting topics, the struggle is often in finding enough sources or enough information on which to write a minimum of 1500 words. Make sure your topic is neither too broad nor too narrow.
5. One method for coming up with a more specific focus is called **brainstorming** (or **freewriting**). Brainstorming is a useful way to let ideas you did not know you had come to the surface. Sit down with a pencil and paper or at your computer. Write whatever comes into your head about your topic. Keep writing for a short but specific amount of time, perhaps three to five minutes. Do not stop to change what you have written or to correct spelling or grammar errors. After a few minutes, read through what you have written. You will probably throw out most of it, but some of what you have written may give you an idea that can be developed. Do some more brainstorming and see what else you can come up with.

DEVELOPING A THESIS –

Once you have decided upon a topic, it is important to also develop a thesis statement. Essentially, when we are creating a thesis, we are narrowing the topic down to a **very specific statement of purpose or opinion**. The thesis is built from our core ideas and beliefs. The reality is, because we all have individual worldviews, experiences, and ideas, everyone's thesis should be slightly different.

In basic terms, there are two types of thesis statements: **expository** and **persuasive**. The expository thesis presents the subject to the reader, **without providing an argument or opinion**. **The expository thesis should be factual.**

Expository Thesis Statements:

- Students can become more effective writers by employing three strategies.
- Wolves are often pictured in fairy tales as ferocious animals, but they are very social and unique animals who do not deserve their scary reputation.
- George Washington was an excellent leader, a man of courage, perseverance, and desire to help our country succeed.
- The rewarding process of photographing a lunar eclipse requires careful preparation and sound equipment.

Persuasive Thesis Statements:

- Although many of us love taking hot showers, taking cold showers is actually the better choice because of the countless health benefits associated with cool temperatures.
- A longer school day does not guarantee that students will be productive in classes, reminding us that young people must find learning meaningful.
- Free public transportation should be implemented as a key step in reducing unemployment rates.
- Our family should get a dog because of the opportunity it will provide us children for learning responsibility.

HOW TO CREATE AN EXPOSITORY THESIS –

We will focus now only on the expository thesis, as that is what you will use for this class. Follow these steps to developing an expository thesis:

1. **Identify the topic.**
2. **Make a statement of fact.** Remember, an expository thesis is always factual. “Dogs are popular pets because they are loyal, useful, and excellent companions” = fact. With this statement, I am merely explaining three key reasons why dogs are popular pets. On the other hand, if I say, “Dogs are better than cats because they are loyal, useful, and excellent companies,” I have now made an opinion-based claim, which is persuasive, not expository. With this statement, I am challenging the reader to see these three reasons as proof for liking dogs better than cats, when in fact, cats have their own traits which make them wonderful pets as well. An expository thesis should focus on explaining, not proving a point.

NOTE: This is also a good place to discuss personal fact vs. personal opinion. A statement such as “My favorite holiday is Christmas” is considered *personal fact*. It may not be a scientific fact or a world-wide fact, but it is a fact of who YOU ARE. With this statement, you are not trying to prove why Christmas is the best holiday, nor are you trying to convince others to like Christmas as well. You are merely explaining why Christmas is your favorite holiday. Personal facts are acceptable for use when writing expository thesis statements. On the other hand, personal opinion is reserved strictly for persuasive writing. For example, if you write that “Christmas is the best holiday,” you are now stating a *personal opinion* and making a *claim*, suggesting that Christmas is better than any other holiday. Personal opinion is not acceptable for use when writing expository thesis statements.

3. **If useful, qualify the topic.** For expository thesis statements, a common and simple qualifying word is *because*. “Spring is my favorite season because I love planting the garden with my mom, visiting the local Lilac Festival, and celebrating all of the birthdays in my immediate family.”
4. **Write just a sentence, not a paragraph.** A lot of students get confused with this one. A thesis is not a group of sentences, not a paragraph, and not the complete introduction. A thesis should be one sentence.

STRONG VS. WEAK –

There is really quite a lot to get into when it comes to writing strong, compelling thesis statements, but there are two key errors we will focus on right now. These are the errors we see most frequently in the early stages of essay writing.

ERROR 1: Your thesis is too general.

- “I like herbal tea.”
- “I am going to write about George Washington.”
- “This paper will cover three reasons why good sleep habits are important.”

What makes your essay important to read is a thesis that is interesting and compelling, a statement that contains not just the subject but some ideas or information about it.

Strong:

- “Because of its medicinal qualities and ability to improve focus, herbal tea is often my drink of choice.”
- “George Washington was an excellent leader, a man of courage, perseverance, and desire to help our country succeed.”
- “Many people view sleep as an inconvenience, but plenty of quality sleep on a regular basis is necessary for our bodies to heal and stay healthy.”

ERROR 2: Factual, but overly obvious:

- “Exercise is good for you.”
- “Education is important.”
- “Traveling the world is exciting.”

While it is fine to use factual statements when writing expository, narrative, and descriptive essays, they still must contain some interest. Your audience doesn't want to read another essay about the basic facts about the importance of exercise or education. They want you to inform them of something they perhaps do not already know or fully understand.

Strong:

- “Exercise doesn't mean you have to join a gym, register for a marathon, or start lifting weights; moving your body is always the goal, and there are several really fun ways to accomplish this!”
- “As education has always been considered a crucial part of any society, there are several major educational methods promoted today.”
- “Traveling the world has given me the opportunity to grow in empathy for people of many different cultures.”

FINAL THESIS NOTES –

One method of thesis writing is often taught and used for writing five-paragraph essays or reports. This type of thesis identifies the topic and the three main ideas that will be covered within the essay.

- Example: “Dogs are loyal, useful, and excellent companions.”

This method is really straightforward and easy to use. However, please know that you can also write thesis statements without listing main ideas; a thesis statement can be more open-ended while still being specific, as you might see in many of the examples above.

We encourage you to try writing a variety of interesting thesis statements, because eventually you will need more room for explaining and expanding on your ideas once you are writing more than five paragraphs.

Writing a thesis is not a method. While it should clearly identify the subject of the paper and provide direction for the contents of the paper, it should still be interesting.

LOOK FOR SOURCES & INFORMATION –

Now that you have established a topic and developed a thesis, you will begin to research your subject. This week and next, you must find and read sources to support your topic. Take a trip to the library, check out the family bookshelf, look for internet sources, or read magazines.

Remember that you must have at least five sources, three of which must be books, for your research paper.

You can use as many sources as you would like, so if you want to read seven or ten or fifteen books on your topic, feel free to do so. Try to choose your sources wisely, however. The more thorough information given in a book, the better the book. For example, if you plan to research George Washington, you may not get much information out of your little sister's chapter book. In this case, you would be better off going to the library and getting some full-length historical novels or non-fiction books to help your research. Just remember that the more information pertaining to your subject that you have, the easier it will be to write about the topic.

As you are reading, **you will need to take notes**. Grab a notebook or take notes on your computer. Record any and all information you think will be important when writing. Take down important facts, dates, names, and quotations (as well as the people who said them).

NOTE-TAKING 101 –

1. Use a notebook to keep track of the things you are learning while reading and researching.
2. Use one or two pages for each source.

3. At the top of the page, write the source information.
 - Book: write the title and the author.
 - Website: write the web address.
 - Magazine/Newspaper: include the name of the magazine along with the title, author, and publication date of the article.
 - Video: write the title of the video and where you viewed it (YouTube, Disney +, DVD, etc.)
4. Then, write notes on the page for that source. If you take notes from your first book, make sure you write those on the notebook page for the book, not on a notebook page for a video.
5. Do not have notes from three different books, videos, or websites all on one page. This is confusing!
6. Do not write notes on a loose piece of paper; it will probably get lost. Write in a notebook or binder.
7. Write down any interesting and important facts about the topic as well as anything you have learned. Always look for specific names, dates, and places.

USE YOUR OWN WORDS –

Finally, when taking notes, remember that you must **use your own words**. You may not copy sentences directly from a book, unless you plan to use them as a quotation. Copying sentences word for word and using them as your own is a form of **plagiarism**. In addition, **using artificial intelligence to aid in your research or the writing process is also considered plagiarism**. Both are unacceptable throughout the construction of your research paper. To be a respectable and trustworthy **researcher and writer, you must present sentences and ideas in your own words**.

We have included more about plagiarism in a document attached with this week's lesson.

Assignment 1: Establish a **topic** and develop a guiding **thesis**. Then, locate the correct number and type of **sources** required for this project (minimum of five sources, at least three of which must be books). Begin reading your sources!

Submit **answers** (in complete, grammatically-correct sentences) to the following questions:

1. What topic did you decide upon?
2. How easy/difficult was it for you to choose a topic for your research paper?
3. What made you choose the topic that you did?
4. What is your thesis statement for this project?
5. Please submit a list of all of the sources you have compiled. Include title and author of the source. If the source is online, please include the URL as well. (You do not need to submit a perfectly formatted bibliography [we will cover this next week!], but we do need enough information this week to be able to locate each one of your sources.)