

Research: Gather and Evaluate Information

Gathering information from approved sources is part of the pre-writing stage. Research should be complete and organized before writing a paper. The topic should be instructor-approved and narrowed down to fit the length requirement. Education is too broad a topic, but choosing a part can make a focused paper. Ex: High schools in Texas are offering a dual credit plan for seniors to earn college credit while still in high school. This plan includes (this is where the research helps form the information to include in the body of the paper).

Brainstorm: choose a topic and start looking up sources to help narrow it down. Create an outline of ideas for the support of the topic. Next, write down as many answers to these questions BEFORE researching:

Questions	Your Answer
What are some areas of the topic?	
Who needs this information?	
Is there unique vocabulary that needs to be explained?	
Who (people, organizations) or what (journals, databases) might have information about topic?	
What key words can create paragraphs for the outline?	

These questions will form the basis for areas to research.

Research:

Preliminary Research:

This stage requires gathering information found in journal and newspaper articles, autobiographies, handbooks, online sources, and other generalized or specialized reference works. The goal is to focus a topic and narrow it down while learning more about it. A specific topic will help create a specific thesis statement during the writing process. The thesis statement is the foundation for a paper.

Not all of these sources may be academic and scholarly, but they can be useful to gather information and help direct the search for support to add to the preliminary outline.

General Research:

General research involves scanning books, journals, magazines, and websites for information to fill in the outline. The goal now is to better understand the topic and develop a working thesis and find specific support for the purpose of the paper (thesis).

Again, all of the sources may not be needed. It is a writer's job to decide whether or not the source is appropriate for the topic, audience, and purpose and fits with the assigned topic.

Specialized Research:

During specialized research, only scholarly articles from academic journals, databases, government documents/collections, and approved online indexes should be included. If appropriate, interviews can add up-to-date information from experts on the topic. Again, this will depend on the instructions for the assignment.

Starting the Paper:

It is time to type in an outline and start filling in information from the scholarly, academic sources. Quotes and paraphrases must be cited in the paper, so it is important to record where the words came from—save the source page or make a copy for later use on the Works Cited or Reference page. This outline becomes the “skeleton” of the paper and will be helpful in deciding where certain information should be placed within the paper.

Resources Available: Instructors, librarians, and the Tutoring Center stand ready to help.