

Drafting Your Paper

How you draft your paper depends on the genre of research paper you were assigned. Your teacher might ask for an informative research paper, an analytical research paper, an argumentative research paper, or a hybrid of these genres. Your purpose—whether to inform, persuade, or analyze—will affect your tone in your paper. As a student writer, you need to be actively thinking about these concepts as you develop your research paper. Not using the proper voice (informative vs. persuasive) and not considering the appropriate purpose will not only result in you losing out on points but also losing out on the educational objective of the assignment.

As you write, you will also need to think about how your sources work together with your ideas and thesis so that you can synthesize your sources. The following section recommends that you take notes as you research, and as you research, you will also want to take notes of where your sources cover similar or opposing ideas. You can make sense of those ideas in your paper insofar as they relate to your thesis.

Starting Your Rough Draft

At last, you are ready to begin writing the rough draft of your research paper. The textbook *Successful Writing* points out that although putting your thinking and research into words is exciting, it can also be challenging. In this section, you will learn strategies for handling the more challenging aspects of writing a research paper, such as integrating material from your sources, citing information correctly, and avoiding any misuse of your sources.

The Structure of a Research Paper

Research papers generally follow the same basic structure: an introduction that presents the writer's thesis, a body section that develops the thesis with supporting points and evidence, and a conclusion that revisits the thesis and provides additional insights or suggestions for further research.

Your writing voice will come across most strongly in your introduction and conclusion, as you work to attract your readers' interest and establish your thesis. These sections usually do not cite sources at length, since they focus on the big picture, not specific details. In contrast, the body of your paper will cite sources extensively. As you present your ideas, you will support your points with details from your research.

Writing Your Introduction

There are several approaches to writing an introduction, each of which fulfills the same goals. The introduction should grab the readers' attention, provide background information, and present the writer's thesis. Many writers like to begin with one of the following catchy openers:

- A surprising fact
- A thought-provoking question
- An attention-getting quote
- A brief anecdote that illustrates a larger concept
- A connection between your topic and your readers experiences

The next few sentences place the opening in context by presenting background information. From there, the writer builds toward a thesis, which is traditionally placed at the end of the introduction. Think of your thesis as a signpost that lets readers know what direction the paper is headed.

Writing Your Conclusion

In your introduction, you tell readers where they are headed. In your conclusion, you recap where they have been. For this reason, some writers prefer to write their conclusions soon after they have written their introduction. However, this method may not work for all writers. Other writers prefer to write their conclusion at the end of the paper, after writing the body paragraphs. No process is absolutely right or absolutely wrong; find the one that best suits you.

No matter when you compose the conclusion, it should sum up your main ideas and revisit your thesis. The conclusion should not simply echo the introduction or rely on bland summary statements, such as “In this paper, I have demonstrated that....” In fact, avoid repeating your thesis verbatim from the introduction. Restate it in different words that reflect the new perspective gained through your research. That helps keep your ideas fresh for your readers. An effective writer might conclude a paper by asking a new question the research inspired, revisiting an anecdote presented earlier, or reminding readers of how the topic relates to their lives.

Using Source Material in Your Paper

One of the challenges of writing a research paper is successfully integrating your ideas with material from your sources. Your paper must explain what you think, or it will read like a disconnected string of facts and quotations. However, you also need to support your ideas with research, or they will seem insubstantial. How do you strike the right balance?

You have already taken a step in the right direction by writing your introduction. The introduction and conclusion function like the frame around a picture. They define and limit your topic and place your research in context.

In the body paragraphs of your paper, you will need to integrate ideas carefully at the paragraph level and at the sentence level. You will use topic sentences in your paragraphs to make sure readers understand the significance of any facts, details, or quotations you cite. You will also include sentences that transition between ideas from your research, either within a paragraph or between paragraphs. At the sentence level, you will need to think carefully about how you introduce paraphrased and quoted material.

Earlier you learned about summarizing, paraphrasing, and quoting when taking notes. In the next few sections, you will learn how to use these techniques in the body of your paper to weave in source material to support your ideas.

Summarizing Sources

When you **summarize** material from a source, you zero in on the main points and restate them concisely in your own words. This technique is appropriate when only the major ideas are relevant to your paper or when you need to simplify complex information into a few key points for your readers.

Be sure to review the source material as you summarize it. Identify the main idea and restate it as concisely as you can—preferably in one sentence. Depending on your purpose, you may also add another sentence or two condensing any important details or examples. Check your summary to make sure it is accurate and complete.

A summary restates ideas in your own words—but for specialized or clinical terms, you may need to use terms that appear in the original source.

Paraphrasing Sources

When you paraphrase material from a source, restate the information from an entire sentence or passage in your own words, using your own original sentence structure. A paraphrased source differs from a summarized source in that you focus on restating the ideas, not condensing them.

Again, it is important to check your paraphrase against the source material to make sure it is both accurate and original. Inexperienced writers sometimes use the thesaurus method of paraphrasing—that is, they simply rewrite the source material, replacing most of the words with synonyms. This constitutes a misuse of sources, and copying sentence structure, or syntax, is also a form of academic dishonesty. A true paraphrase restates ideas using the writer's own language and style.

Quoting Sources Directly

Most of the time, you will summarize or paraphrase source material instead of quoting directly. Doing so shows that you understand your research well enough to write about it confidently in your own words. However, direct quotes can be powerful when used sparingly and with purpose.

Quoting directly can sometimes help you make a point in a colorful way. If an author's words are especially vivid, memorable, or well phrased, quoting them may help hold your reader's interest. Direct quotations from an interviewee or an eyewitness may help you personalize an issue for readers. And when you analyze primary sources, such as a historical speech or a work of literature, quoting extensively is often necessary to illustrate your points. These are valid reasons to use quotations.

Less experienced writers, however, sometimes overuse direct quotations in a research paper because it seems easier than paraphrasing. At best, this reduces the effectiveness of the quotations. At worst, it results in a paper that seems haphazardly pasted together from outside sources. Use quotations sparingly for greater impact.

When you do choose to quote directly from a source, follow these guidelines:

- Make sure you have transcribed the original statement accurately.
- Represent the author's ideas honestly. Quote enough of the original text to reflect the author's point accurately.
- Never use a stand-alone quotation. Always integrate the quoted material into your own sentence by creating a signal phrase.
- Use ellipses (...) if you need to omit a word or phrase. Use brackets [] if you need to replace a word or phrase.

- Make sure any omissions or changed words do not alter the meaning of the original text. Omit or replace words only when absolutely necessary to shorten the text or to make it grammatically correct within your sentence.
- Write away from the quote. Create an original sentence following the quote that introduces the connection you are making between your argument and the quoted material.
- Include correctly formatted citations that follow the assigned style guide.

Documenting Sources Material

Throughout the writing process, be scrupulous about documenting information taken from sources. The purpose of doing so is twofold: (1) to give credit to other writers or researchers for their ideas, and (2) to allow your reader to follow up and learn more about the topic if desired. You will cite sources within the body of your paper and at the end of the paper in your Works Cited list.

Citing Sources in the Body of Your Paper

In-text citations document your sources within the body of your paper. These include vital pieces of information: with APA, the author's name and the year the source material was published; with MLA, the author's name and the page number where the reader can locate the quote. When quoting a print source, the citation should also include the page number where the quoted material originally appears. The page number will follow the year in the in-text citation. Page numbers are necessary when content has been directly quoted, and when content has been paraphrased at great length. When in doubt, ask a teacher or tutor for help, and if you must err, do it on the side of over-citing rather than under-citing. The consequences for the former are less substantial than for the latter.

Within a paragraph, this information may appear as part of your introduction to the material or as a parenthetical citation at the end of a sentence. Here is an example of a summary written in MLA format.

Summary in MLA

Aaron Leibowitz found that low-carbohydrate diets often helped subjects with Type II diabetes maintain a healthy weight and control blood-sugar levels (25).

The introduction to the source material includes the author's full name (if appearing for the first time) and the page number (if applicable) in parentheses comes at the end of the sentence before the period.

Summary

Low-carbohydrate diets often help subjects with Type II diabetes maintain a healthy weight and control blood-sugar levels (Leibowitz 25).

The parenthetical citation at the end of the sentence includes the author's last name and the page number (if applicable). The period at the end of the sentence comes after the parentheses.

Using Primary and Secondary Research

As you write your draft, be mindful of how you are using primary and secondary source material to support your points. Recall that primary sources present firsthand information. Secondary sources are one step removed from primary sources. They present a writer's analysis or interpretation of primary

source materials. How you balance primary and secondary source material in your paper will depend on the topic and assignment.

Using Primary and Secondary Research

Some types of research papers must use primary sources extensively to achieve their purpose. Any paper that analyzes a primary text or presents the writer's own experimental research falls in this category. Here are a few examples:

- A paper for a literature course analyzing several poems by Emily Dickinson.
- A paper for a political science course comparing televised speeches delivered by two presidential candidates.
- A paper for a communication course discussing gender biases in television commercials.
- A paper for a business administration course that discusses the result of a survey the writer conducted with local businesses to gather information about their work-from-home and flextime policies.
- A paper for an elementary education course that discusses the result of an experiment the writer conducted to compare the effectiveness of two different methods of mathematical instruction.

For these types of papers, primary research is the main focus. If you are writing about a work (including non-print works, such as a movie or a painting), it is crucial to gather information and ideas from the original work, rather than relying solely on others' interpretations. And, of course, if you take the time to design and conduct your own field research, such as a survey, a series of interviews, or an experiment, you will want to discuss it in detail. For example, the interviews may provide interesting responses that you want to share with your reader.

Using Secondary Sources Effectively

For some assignments, it makes sense to rely more on secondary sources than primary sources. If you are not analyzing a text or conducting your own field research, you will need to use secondary sources extensively.

As much as possible, use secondary sources that are closely linked to primary research, such as a journal article presenting the results of the authors' scientific study or a book that cites interviews and case studies. These sources are more reliable and add more value to your paper than sources that are further removed from primary research. For instance, a popular magazine article on junk-food addiction might be several steps removed from the original scientific study on which it is loosely based. As a result, the article may distort, sensationalize, or misinterpret the scientists' findings.

Even if your paper is largely based on primary sources, you may use secondary sources to develop your ideas. For instance, an analysis of Alfred Hitchcock's films would focus on the films themselves as a primary source but might also cite commentary from critics. A paper that presents an original experiment would include some discussion of similar, prior research in the field.

Tip

Some sources could be considered primary or secondary sources, depending on the writer's purpose for using them. For instance, if a writer's purpose is to inform readers about how the No Child Left Behind legislation has affected elementary education, a *Time* magazine article on the subject would be a secondary source. However, suppose the writer's purpose is to analyze how the news media has portrayed the effects of the No Child Left Behind legislation. In that case, articles about the legislation in news magazines like *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *US News & World Report* would be primary sources. They provide firsthand examples of the media coverage the writer is analyzing.

What is Plagiarism and How to Avoid It

Your research paper presents your thinking about a topic, supported and developed by other people's ideas and information, so it is crucial to always distinguish between the two—as you conduct research, as you plan your paper, and as you write. Failure to do so can lead to plagiarism.

Intentional and Accidental Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the act of misrepresenting someone else's work as your own.

Miami Dade College Policy - Addressing Academic Dishonesty

<https://www.mdc.edu/procedures/Chapter4/4035.pdf>

Sometimes a writer plagiarizes work on purpose—for instance, by purchasing an essay from a website and submitting it as original course work. In other cases, a writer may commit accidental plagiarism due to carelessness, haste, or misunderstanding. To avoid unintentional plagiarism, follow these guidelines:

- Understand what types of information must be cited.
- Understand what constitutes fair use of a source.
- Keep source materials and notes carefully organized.
- Follow guidelines for summarizing, paraphrasing, and quoting sources.

When to Cite

Any idea or fact taken from an outside source must be cited, in both the body of your paper and the references list. The only exceptions are facts or general statements that are common knowledge. Common-knowledge facts or general statements are commonly supported by and found in multiple sources. For example, a writer would not need to cite the statement that most breads, pastas, and cereals are high in carbohydrates; this is well known and well documented. However, if a writer explained in detail the differences among the chemical structures of carbohydrates, proteins, and fats, a citation would be necessary. When in doubt, cite.

Fair Use

In recent years, issues related to the fair use of sources have been prevalent in popular culture. Recording artists, for example, may disagree about the extent to which one has the right to sample

another's music. For academic purposes, however, the guidelines for fair use are reasonably straightforward.

Writers may quote from or paraphrase material from previously published works without formally obtaining the copyright holder's permission. **Fair use** means that the writer legitimately uses brief excerpts from source material to support and develop his or her own ideas. For instance, a columnist may excerpt a few sentences from a novel when writing a book review. However, quoting or paraphrasing another's work at excessive length, to the extent that large sections of the writing are unoriginal, is not fair use.

Working with Sources Carefully

Disorganization and carelessness sometimes lead to plagiarism. For instance, a writer may be unable to provide a complete, accurate citation if he didn't record bibliographical information. A writer may cut and paste a passage from a website into her paper and later forget where the material came from (**Tip:** Google your passage to find the source again!). A writer who procrastinates may rush through a draft, which easily leads to sloppy paraphrasing and inaccurate quotations. Any of these actions can create the appearance of plagiarism and lead to negative consequences.

Carefully organizing your time and notes is the best guard against these forms of plagiarism. Maintain a detailed working bibliography and thorough notes throughout the research process. Check original sources again to clear up any uncertainties. Allow plenty of time for writing your draft so there is no temptation to cut corners.

Academic Integrity

The concepts and strategies discussed in this section connect to a larger issue—academic integrity. You maintain your integrity as a member of an academic community by representing your work and others' work honestly and by using other people's work only in legitimately accepted ways. It is a point of honor taken seriously in every academic discipline and career field.

Academic integrity violations have serious educational and professional consequences. Even when cheating and plagiarism go undetected, they still result in a student's failure to learn necessary research and writing skills. Students who are found guilty of academic integrity violations face consequences ranging from a failing grade to expulsion from the college or university. Employees may be fired for plagiarism and do irreparable damage to their professional reputation. In short, it is never worth the risk.

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