Research Papers: The Steps

Note: The following steps are presented as if writing a research paper were a linear process. It is actually recursive: you may double back quite often. However, thinking of the process as linear is helpful because it keeps you on track and increases your efficiency.

Clarify What to Do

🗁 Choose a topic (and a backup topic)
>Are you interested in the topic?
>Will learning about the topic help you in the course (e.g., final exam)?
>Will learning about the topic help you in future courses?
>Will learning about the topic help you in your career?
>Is your audience interested in the topic? (Ask!)
>Has your professor approved the topic?

🗁 Do exploratory reading to see how your topic is being dealt with in the literature; focus your topic.

🗁 Write a one-paragraph proposal of what you will do, make a working or temporary outline of some sort.

A research proposal paragraph should include four things:
1. The principal purpose of the paper (to explain? to analyze? to argue? to explore?)
2. The intended audience
3. Your voice as the writer (What image of yourself do you want to create: advocate, critic, etc?)
4. A working thesis statement or a research question

Gather Data

🗁 Create a working bibliography or list of resources
🗁 Gather all the resources available to you
🗁 Is there enough information available to you on your topic?

Locate, Examine, Read, and Record Sources

📁 Locate sources
📁 Read quickly to find the best sources
📁 Read and take notes
📁 Optional: Conduct original research (e.g., interviews)

Organize for Writing

📁 Re-evaluate your notes and select those most relevant
📁 Optional: Write the research paper in 30 minutes (a miniature version)
📁 Turn the working thesis into a carefully worded thesis statement
📁 Turn the working outline into a formal outline which grows out of the thesis statement
📁 Gather more information on any sections that are too weak

Write

📁 Write a rough draft
📁 Revise: Make any major changes in areas such as ideas and organization
📁 Edit: Check citations, bibliography, and format, as well as spelling, grammar, and sentence structure

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