

# A BRIEF GUIDE TO WRITING A RESEARCH PAPER

## FIND A TOPIC

- check with your professor
- go over class notes
- check journals in the field for article topics
- check chapter titles in books
- Choose a topic you are interested in and know something about, if you have a choice
- Make sure you understand your assignment. Talk to the professor if you need clarification

## EXPLORE YOUR TOPIC

- Brainstorm questions about your topic
- Create a mindmap (diagram or map) of ideas about your topic
- Look for links or connections among questions and ideas
- Try to come up with one or two main questions about your topic to narrow it down

## RESEARCH YOUR TOPIC USING LIBRARY RESOURCES

- Start early! --consult a research librarian if you need help
- DON'T COPY a lot of material from sources; instead, SUMMARIZE it in your own words
- Be sure to write down the bibliographic info for each source and note down pages you used, even when you have been paraphrasing. You need to document EVERY source you use
- Write down your ideas as you research: write to answer "SO WHAT?"
- Stop researching and organize your paper well before the due date

## WRITE A TENTATIVE THESIS STATEMENT

- It could be the answer to the main questions you brainstormed, your point of view, argument, or what you want to say about your topic
- Next, sketch out a map of main points that support your thesis with details or facts from your research

## WRITE YOUR FIRST DRAFT

- Write your paper quickly using freewriting (writing continuously without stopping to edit)
- Don't worry about paragraphing, word choice, grammar, spelling, sentence structure, etc. Just try to get the ideas down on paper, following your map
- If your paper is long, write one section at a time
- It sometimes makes writing easier if you talk to someone about what you want to say before you write. It is often easier to plug in specific facts and ideas from your research after you have explained the main ideas that support your argument/thesis
- Some people prefer to write the intro and conclusion last, being sure to include the thesis in both

## REVISE YOUR DRAFT

- Fix your paper after letting it "rest" overnight or at least a few hours.
- Focus first on content and organization:
  - Make sure ideas are clear, complete and correct.
  - Check to make sure your paper is organized hierarchically
- Finally, check the language:
  - Use spell check
  - print out a hard copy and read your paper out loud to help you find mistakes, omitted words or sentences that don't make sense
  - This is a good time to ask a friend to read your paper and tell you where it's confusing or where there are language errors

## DOCUMENT YOUR REFERENCES

- All quotations and summaries/paraphrases (using your own words) must be documented.
- Also prepare a "References" or "Works Cited" page (bibliography) that lists the publications you refer to in your paper

## PROOFREAD YOUR PAPER BEFORE YOU HAND IT IN

- Check to see if your professor wants a cover page included
- Keep a hard copy of your paper or digital backups just in case