

Research Paper Notetaking and Writing Guidelines

These guidelines summarize rather than substitute for a handbook on writing research papers. Please refer to such a handbook for more detailed information and for models of student papers. The examples here use parenthetical in-text documentation in the Modern Language Association (MLA) style. You should find out from your instructor whether MLA style is acceptable; if not, consult a handbook for variations such as footnotes, endnotes, APA style, or specialized medical or scientific documentation.

Notetaking

I. Notes: An effective notetaking system will save you time later in this project.

A. Remember to document each source as you work. Make a 3-by-5-inch bibliography card for each source you

consult. Record authors, editors, titles, complete publishing information, dates and other significant details in appropriate form.

Book: Jones, Jane. Theories of Research. New York: Random House, 1975.

Newspaper or magazine: Jones, Jane. "Modern Research Methods." New York Times 14 Jan. 1983: D12-

13.

Journal: Jones, Jane. "Research for Advanced Scholarship." Journal of Scholarly Research 17 (Spring 1975):

132-147.

B. Write information notes on larger cards (4-by-6 or 5-by-8 inches).

1. Key each note card to the corresponding bibliography card by writing the author's last name and the number of the page from which you are taking information.
2. Give each card a heading to reflect the content of the note, for example, "motivation"

Motivation Jones 34

C. Write information notes in the shortest useful form, one idea per card.

1. **Summarize** lengthy passages by writing only the most important information and the essential details.
2. **Paraphrase** technical or complex passages by restating in your own vocabulary in nontechnical terms.

Retain

the tone and intent of the original.

3. **Quote** the exact words of an author if they are well said, impossible to summarize or paraphrase, or strong reinforcement of your point through the writer's authority. You may wish to quote some passages while

you

take notes and then paraphrase them later when you write your paper.

- a. Always place quotation marks around the exact words of another.
- b. Be sure to copy all punctuation and spelling exactly as they appear in the original version.
- c. Use ellipsis points... to signal omissions and brackets [] to signal interpolations.

Outlining

II. Outline : As soon as possible during your research and notetaking, write an outline to organize your ideas and your source material. An informal outline may use any numbering system that you feel comfortable with (or no numbers at all). A formal outline has additional specific requirements.

- A. Write your thesis statement at the top of the page, being sure the thesis states your limited topic and your precise viewpoint.
- B. If you are writing a formal outline, prepare either a sentence outline or a topic outline without mixing styles.
- C. List major subdivisions in support of your thesis.
- D. Under each major heading, itemize specific supporting points, examples, and areas of development.
- E. Continue to show subordinate levels of support.
- F. Ensure that no categories overlap, that nothing important has been left out, and that all information is arranged in logical order.
- G. Unless directed otherwise, do not use the term *introduction*, *body*, and *conclusion* as outlining headings since all essays have these features; instead, include in your outline the key points of your beginning and ending.
- H. If you are writing a formal outline, follow these criteria.
 1. Topic outlines must have no independent (main) clauses and must use parallel grammatical structure within every section and within every subsection.
 2. Sentence outlines must have grammatically complete sentences for every entry.
 3. Formal outlines must use the lettering and numbering system illustrated in this handout, with Roman numerals for the first level, capital letters for the second level, Arabic numerals for the third level, and lower case letters for the fourth level.

Drafting, Editing and Revising

III. Your first draft is an opportunity to discover what you want to say and how you want to say it. Try not to be concerned about mechanics at this stage; instead, concentrate on clear and complete development of your ideas. Note that typically, a first draft is really a discovery draft and that your finished paper will be very different from this draft.

- A. Using your outline as a guide for organization and development, write your first draft on one side of the paper, double spacing and numbering pages as you work.
 1. Write an *introduction* of one or more paragraphs.
 - a. Begin with an interesting opening.
 - b. Define important terms and present relevant background information.
 - c. Clarify the significance of the topic.
 - d. End the introduction with a clear statement of the controlling idea for the paper, a *thesis statement* that serves as the focus for your discussion.
 - e. If appropriate, include a summary of the major points you intend to develop.
 2. Write the *body* of support—the heart of your paper—consisting of as many paragraphs as necessary to explain and support your thesis.

- a. State your points as topic sentences for your central paragraphs. Remember that every paragraph must have a clear, relevant topic sentence that states that controlling idea of the paragraph and that relates the paragraph's content to your thesis.
- b. Support all your points with sufficient examples, statistics, and expert opinions from your own experience and observations and from your research. Remember that a variety of sources and a variety of examples produce the most effective support. Never rely too heavily on a single source.
- c. Introduce clearly all paraphrases, summaries, quotations, and combinations from the sources, usually by naming the source. This introduction must be keyed to the beginning of the entry on your bibliography card and page. In parentheses at the end of each citation write the page number or, if sources have no pagination, a date or other appropriate signal.

Jane Jones reports that computer data make modern research easier than past research (37). However, Newsweek claims that the fun has disappeared from library research ("Library Fun"). One expert on scholarship, Chris Smith, doubts that Jones's research is valid: "She didn't do enough research before writing her article about research methods" (53). Many students agree with Jones. Looking through printed indexes such as Reader's Guide can take hours while searching a computer database for magazine articles is likely to take half as long or less.

- d. Explain clearly the meaning and importance of all source material so that your readers understand how the research supports your thesis; in fact, restate your thesis periodically for reinforcement. It is essential that you relate all source material clearly to the point it supports. Source information cannot speak for itself.
3. Write a *conclusion* of one or more paragraphs to summarize your major findings, to draw significant conclusions about the research, to comment on significance or solutions, and to reinforce your thesis.
- B. Evaluate your draft carefully for content and style. If you are using a word processor, print a draft to read on the paper rather than rely completely on the screen for editing. Revise and improve between the lines and in the margins. You can use the questions below for a checklist.
1. Are all points clearly expressed in complete sentences and are all of them relevant to your thesis?
 2. Have you avoided first person (I, we) and second person (you) pronouns?
 3. Have you used consistent, appropriate verb tenses? Use present tense to introduce sources except for logical deviations: Napoleon's cook invented chicken marengo, reports Howard Cook (73).
 4. Have you used active voice verbs for directness and conciseness? Note the difference between active (Brown discusses the problem) and passive (The problem is discussed by Brown).
 5. Have you correctly documented with appropriate introductions and parenthetical in-text citations all source material—summaries, paraphrases, and quotations?
 6. Have you provided enough authoritative support from a variety of sources, clearly explaining the meaning and importance of each?
 7. Have you used appropriate transitions and reminders of your points to provide coherence between paragraphs and within paragraphs?
- C. Continue drafting and revising until you are comfortable with the content, the development, and the expressions of the ideas and information.
- D. After the content is fully edited, evaluate your draft carefully for grammatical and mechanical accuracy, including correct documentation of sources, and make all necessary corrections.

Preparing the Manuscript for Typing

- IV. Prepare a revised draft to serve as a guide for your final paper. Use correct margins and spacing.
- A. Evaluate this version the same way you evaluated your first draft, and make revisions as necessary.
 - B. If you are required to use footnotes or endnotes, eliminate the parenthetical documentation of page numbers from our draft. Assign to each use of a source a reference number, beginning with the first mention of an outside source and continuing consecutively to the end of the paper.
 - 1. On a separate page draft your endnotes, using the conventions presented in a current handbook.
 - 2. For footnotes, use the special guidelines for spacing from a current handbook.
 - C. On a separate paper, draft your final bibliography, listing references in alphabetical order according to the format in a recent handbook of research paper conventions.
 - 1. If you list only the works mentioned within the paper, head the bibliography page Works Cited (humanities and social sciences) or References (psychology and sciences).
 - 2. If you list both the works mentioned with your paper and additional works consulted but not mentioned in your paper, head this page Selected Bibliography or Selective Bibliography.

Final Paper

- V. Using an acceptable format, prepare your final paper. Type the paper even if the professor accepts handwritten work. Work prepared on a word processor should look as if it were typed on a good-quality typewriter. Use a fresh ribbon or cartridge and high-grade white bond paper. Even erasable papers come in high-quality versions.
- A. Provide a title page, outline page, abstract, and table of contents only if required.
 - B. Observe all conventions for presentation: margins, page numbers, spacing, indentations.
 - C. Pay special attention to spacing guidelines if you use footnotes.
- VI. Proofread your finished copy with care. Remember that you, not the typist, are responsible for the final paper.
- A. Read once to double-check clarity of meaning and effectiveness of expression.
 - B. Read at least once slowly to locate any remaining grammatical, mechanical, punctuation, or spelling errors (remember that typing errors will be considered spelling errors).
 - C. Minor corrections may be handwritten neatly in ink. If corrections are extensive or messy, retype the page.
- VII. Staple the paper once in the upper left corner unless your teacher prefers a clip or binder.