



WHAT IS A RESEARCH PAPER?

A research paper is a project specifically designed to allow the student to develop and showcase a very specific set of skills: the rudiments of scholarship.

Human knowledge, as it applies to academic and public discourse, is an empirical construct: the past builds upon itself and creates the future. Aspiring scholars and informed citizens alike need to know how to access this cache of material, understand and interpret it and then, eventually, add to it themselves, either through scholarly writing or participation in the life of their community or nation.

Using books, newspapers, journals, magazines, computerized data bases, personal interviews, and the internet, students gather information about a specific topic and work that material into a paper that synthesizes a mass of information into something fresh, insightful, and readable.

Ultimately, the process is one of learning in the purest sense. Students ought not to approach a research paper with fully-formulated views and then search for quotes and supplementary information to back up their preconceived ideas. Rather, once the student has identified a topic of interest, and some interesting questions relating to that topic, the research itself ought to help develop the student's views, *culminating* in the development of an interesting and hopefully original thesis. Essential to this process is the acquisition of basic library/research skills.

The research assignment will take the following form:

- Students will identify a suitable research **topic**.
- Students will brainstorm **research questions** and submit a short list to the instructor for approval and select one to research.
- Students will complete the Introduction to Library Research/Research Log¹ booklet using the student's research question.

¹ Which booklet the student completes will depend on their previous library experience.

- Students will develop a **tentative thesis** and submit this to the instructor for approval along with a list of at least four research sources already consulted. This is called the **research proposal**.
- Once the thesis is approved, the full research/**writing process** can begin (possibly incorporating the research log in some cases?).