

## STEPS TO A BETTER TERM PAPER

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1. Define the **problem** the paper is to solve, the need it will attempt to meet. Why is this study needed? What justifies your time researching and writing it, and your readers' time reading it?

2. Write the **purpose** statement (how you will attempt to solve the problem or meet the need). Until you have a **clear, sharply-defined** purpose statement you have no basis for selecting your material. When you read something, how do you know whether it should go into your paper? You can tell only by asking, "Does this item advance my purpose?" If it does, you will save it; if not, you will pass it up. For this reason steps one and two are absolutely essential **before** you go any further. It is wise to get the professor's approval of your problem and purpose statement; you can save yourself a lot of backtracking and wasted time. When both you and the professor are satisfied with the problem and purpose statements, you can complete the initial **introduction** by adding a methodology statement.

3. The **methodology** statement is simply a description of how you will proceed to carry out your purpose. It may mention what kinds of sources you will use and how you will use them. **The problem, purpose, and methodology statements, with any other information necessary to support them, make up the introduction to your paper.** These elements provide direction for your research, but it is expected that you will review and possibly revise them after the rest of the paper is finished.

4. At the beginning, the **bibliography** represents the "mine" where you hope to find your gold or precious stones—a list of books, periodicals, or primary sources in which you expect to find material which will assist your purpose. At the end, the bibliography contains all the sources referred to in footnotes, plus any others which were genuinely helpful in developing the topic. The bibliography shows the researcher who comes after you where you got your material. It shows where to begin for checking your conclusions or for studying further into some phase of the topic. Perhaps the most important **key to originality in research** is to use the references in your secondary sources to discover primary sources; then **build your research mostly on the primary sources.** For samples of correct footnote and bibliography style, see Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 185-213; *Andrews University Standards for Written Work*, 9<sup>th</sup> ed. (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 1999), 52-56.

5. **Notes.** As you read the sources you have gathered together, you begin recording everything which fits into your purpose. To save time, make photocopies of extensive passages.

a. There are two cardinal rules in making notes.

(1) **Always write the reference at the top** of the card or sheet of paper. If you leave it till the bottom, sooner or later you will forget to write your source. It's frustrating when you have accumulated 100 cards or pages of notes, arranged them in an outline, begun writing, and then you discover that your prize quotation, the one that just puts the "frosting on the cake," is the one you got so excited about that you forgot to record the source. "Let's see, I was sitting in the Seminary Reference Room, and I had about 13 periodicals on my left. It seems like it had a red cover—or was it yellow?" Save yourself that heartbreak—or hours of time trying to track it down again: **before** you write the note, write the reference. If you photocopy, be sure to record **complete** bibliographic information before you put the original away.

(2) It matters little what size paper you use, from index cards to full sheets, but **never write on both sides of the sheet.** In the next step, outlining, you must be able to cut apart the individual ideas contained in your notes. If you inadvertently make the mistake of writing on both sides of the sheet, photocopy one side and thus separate the two sides into separate sheets which can be cut and sorted.

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b. There are at least four main **types of notes**:

- (1) **Direct quotation**, repeating the author's exact words.
- (2) **Paraphrase**, putting the author's idea in your own words.
- (3) **Combination of quotation and paraphrase** is very effective. You paraphrase the author's main idea, but include in the paraphrase a single word or small group of words in quotation marks.  
Example: In his speech on Sept. 11, 1990, the President called for a "new world order" based on "American leadership."  
The paraphrase greatly shortens the reference, while the short quotation preserves the pith and punch of the speaker's exact words.
- (4) Your own **interpretation**, reaction to, or deduction about the information you are gathering.  
"The president's words call to mind Revelation 13:11-14 where the United States is portrayed as having the power to either persuade or coerce the whole world into carrying out its wishes."

As you collect notes of all these types, the individual notes become the bricks from which you will build your paper. Fact, Fact, Interpretation, Deduction.

6. The **outline** is a tentative sketch of the pattern you see emerging from your gathering of notes. You may have begun the outline when you wrote the purpose statement. But as you read, the outline develops, until by the time you have completed reading your main sources, you will have a much more detailed outline.

When you have finished reading the main sources, **sort your notes into the main headings and subheadings** of your outline. If you are running out of time before you finish reading the main sources, your topic is too broad for the time you have; cut it down to a narrower area. Instead of writing on "The Book of Revelation," try limiting the topic to "The meaning of the words 'spake as a dragon' in Revelation 13:11."

When you have sorted your notes according to the headings of your outline, notice whether you have enough information to substantiate every heading and subheading of the outline. Do you see any heading which seems logically essential, but for which you have little or no information? A heading with insufficient notes is a hole in the outline. The remedy is to do further research specifically in search of the missing information. With the help of a reference librarian, or someone who is a specialist in the field of your study, you can probably find what you need to fill the holes in your outline. Finally, take **each subheading** of the outline and arrange its notes in a logical order. Put a paper clip on them.

7. Sit down and **write**. Let the thoughts flow and support them with the notes you have gathered. **If you take your notes on a computer**, the principles are the same. The notes, outline, sorting, and first draft can be all done on keyboard. Some may find that their writing is more fluent and efficient if done first in longhand. In that case, one can print the notes, cut and sort them, handwrite the new material, transitions, and connections, and then return to the computer for the second draft, pasting in the notes and references that were already done on computer.

8. The **conclusion** chapter gathers up all the findings of the paper and shows how they fulfill the expectation raised by the purpose statement in the introduction. You have now finished the rough draft.

9. At this point you may **revise the introduction** to fit more closely with the conclusions you reached.

10. **Rewrite, rewrite, rewrite**, over and over, as many times as you have time for. Before the days of computers, Ernest Hemingway reportedly retyped every word of the entire manuscript of *The Old Man and the Sea* some 85 times, until every sentence, every word was perfect. If he could put that much work into a novel done merely for entertainment, surely you can do at least a couple of rewrites on a piece that is intended to help save souls from eternal death. Your editing will be more effective if you let the manuscript "cool" for two or three days between sessions. Proofread it carefully and double-check all footnote and bibliography references.

11. **Print** your final draft on a laser or other high quality printer. The paper you have put so much work into deserves to look nice. "You never get a second chance to make a first impression."