Writing a Research Paper

What is a Research Paper?

A research paper is a paper that presents findings based on a combination of critical thinking and source evaluation to demonstrate a particular idea or point. Although the length will vary, it is important to keep the paper focused on the topic. It is important to note that research papers include an introduction, key arguments, and a conclusion.

What are the Main Types of Research Papers?

1. **Argumentative/Persuasive:** This type of paper requires the student to make an argument by taking a stand on an issue and persuading the reader to agree with his/her point of view. It includes an introduction that sets up the topic for the reader and clearly states the writer’s stance on the issue presented; this stance is known as the *thesis statement*.

2. **Analytical:** This paper requires the student to summarize his/her findings in his/her own words without choosing a stance or forming an opinion on the particular topic. After gathering research, the student can determine which thesis would best suit their findings.

Steps to Help You Write a Research Paper

1. **Choose a topic**
   - It is important to follow the instructor’s directions for choosing a topic; however, if a topic is not assigned, choose one that interests you.
   - It should be broad enough to interest the reader and narrow enough to not be overwhelming.

2. **Begin Searching for Sources**
   - Start by going to the library and reading books and articles on your topic. If you find a useful book or article, check the bibliography because it could lead to other interesting sources.
   - Another important tip is to keep a list of the sources you like; this will help you later on when you are writing your bibliography.

3. **Read Sources and Take Notes**
   - Using index cards can help organize the process of taking notes.
   - Write down each source’s name and bibliographic information so that it will be easier to cite this source if you choose to use it in your research paper.
   - Take notes on information which seem important.

4. **Organize Notes and Ideas**
   - It is important to organize your notes and ideas because they will serve as the basis of your outline.
   - Write down all of your main ideas and subordinate ideas.
   - Be careful not to repeat any ideas.
5. Write a Rough Draft
   - Write an introduction that will inform your reader of the topic.
   - The introduction should include your thesis sentence.
   - Write the body of your paper, which includes paragraphs that state your main ideas that support your thesis.
   - Write the conclusion, which is the last paragraph of the paper; its main purpose is to restate and summarize the main ideas, while providing a greater sense of importance to the topic/issue/argument.

6. Write a Works Cited Page
   - List all of your sources on the last page in the proper format.

7. Revise and Proofread Rough Draft
   - Rethink your ideas and reorganize your paragraphs (if needed).
   - Read through and fix any grammatical errors you might have made.
   - Have somebody else read your paper for mistakes or anything that might be confusing to the reader.