

Research Paper Guidelines

Definition: A literary research paper is a compilation and interpretation of factual materials and of critics' opinions on a specific subject in a literary work. Since the selection of materials is filtered and processed by the writer, the paper reflects the author's views also; hence, it is both objective and subjective in content. Because the paper expresses the writer's opinions, s/he must find a topic of interest from a work that s/he has read and examined.

Writing Process

1. **Select a topic** related to a poem, short story, play, or novel that you have read.
Note: The work which is under study is called the primary source; the critical and historical references are called secondary sources.
2. **Write a tentative thesis** to establish your purpose for research. This is what you are trying to support. After some reading, you may need to refine your thesis statement.
3. **Prepare a working bibliography**—a list of available sources.
 - Consult books of literary criticism, the *MLA International Bibliography*, and other books and periodicals related to your subject and author.
 - If your topic is current, check the Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature. In addition, remember that much information is available on computer. Microfiche catalogs have replaced the card catalog in most libraries. Microforms contain information on a screen.
 - Make copies of information that you think is pertinent.
4. **Take notes.** There are two methods of note-taking: index cards and highlighting your copies. Select the one that works better for you unless instructed otherwise. If you select to use highlighting, use a different color highlighter for each topic within your subject (comparable to main points on the outline).
5. **Make an outline** using the information assembled from the notes.
6. **Write a rough draft** inserting parenthetical citations within the text unless instructed otherwise. This method of acknowledging sources has replaced footnotes and end notes because it is immediately accessible to the reader. Use guidelines from *The Modern Language Association Handbook for Writers of Research Papers (MLA)*, or some other source as assigned, for citations and works cited.
7. **Write a Works Cited** (bibliography) following MLA guidelines or any other reference assigned.
8. Lay the paper aside; **proofread** later.
9. **Write the final copy.**
10. **Proofread the final copy.**

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Sample Outline

Notice that no correct number of letters or numbers exists; the only determining factor is the number of points you need to make for the required length of your paper.

I. Introduction

- A. Background information connecting the reader to the subject
- B. Thesis statement

II. First Main Point

- A. First subpoint
 - 1. Supporting example or detail—either your insight or a critic's comment
paraphrased or *directly quoted*
Never start a sentence with a quote that you have not introduced.
 - a) First comment on support
 - b) Second comment on support
 - 2. Supporting example or detail (your comment on supporting detail from a critic)
 - a) First comment
 - b) Second comment
- B. Second subpoint
 - 1. Supporting example or detail
 - 2. Supporting example or detail
- C. Third subpoint (same as A, B above)
At this point continue with D, E... if needed

III. Second Main Point

- A. First subpoint—Comment on subpoint (only one comment on this detail)
As in the above example, use a **dash** after a point if it is followed by **only one** detail or comment.
 - B. Second sub point
 - 1. Supporting example—only one comment on this example: hence use the dash, not an *a* by itself
 - 2. Supporting example
 - a) Comment
 - b) Comment
- Continue with the same sequence alternating numerals and letters until you have completed outlining all of your material.

IV. Critical Thinking Section

- A. Incorporate reactions to the source materials
- B. Include insights about the research topic
- C. Synthesize critical thinking threads

V. Conclusion

Affirm that the thesis has been proven