

The City-As-School  
Quick Guide  
to  
Writing a Research Paper

## Social Studies Research Paper Guidelines

- Consider your Social Studies class a series of lessons that will culminate in a research paper.
- At the end of each class, summarize the lesson and translate the key points into questions that YOU want answered.
- Decide which question is most important to you. This is your research topic.
- Gather at least 7 questions about your topic by asking other class members to ask one question that will clarify your topic. Answering these questions will help you write the paper.
- Go to the library and ask the Research Librarian how to research your topic. Ask how to find microfiche, newspapers, journal articles, historical documents and books.
- Create a file to contain the information you are collecting.
- Create an outline indicating the paragraphs that will answer your questions.
- Create a rough draft that includes references/footnotes.
- Edit and ask a friend to proof read.
- Finalize list of sources and make a title sheet.
- See the following pages for more information on defining a research, formal requirements for the paper, traditional components for a research paper, tips on writing the paper, plagiarism and how to cite your sources.

## What is a research paper?

A research paper is an essay that draws together information from several sources to defend an opinion. It may tell a story about an idea, or about the search to understand the idea, as demonstrated by the sample research paper at the end of this packet, or it may simply present facts that back up a point of view.

What distinguishes a research paper from, say, a personal opinion essay is that in a research paper you pose a question when you start out, develop a tentative explanation (called a thesis statement) and then gather information to answer that question. Or a topic appealed to you even without your knowing what question to ask, and in gathering information you learned your question for the first time, and then narrowed your search for information. A personal opinion essay may state your opinion without any formal evidence to back it up.

Although the paper is written in your own voice, it uses information that other people have written. But, you must make proper reference to the source material you have used.

### **Formal requirements of the City-As-School research paper**

- Minimum number of pages: 5, not including title page, contents page, and list of sources.
- All papers must be word-processed and printed on 8½ x 11" white paper.
- Double-space and indent your paragraphs. Do not skip a space between paragraphs.
- Use a 12-point standard font. Standard fonts include Times New Roman and Arial but are not limited to them. Standard fonts **do not** include typefaces that look like handwriting or have other special effects.
- Use **boldface** and *italics* only for emphasis.
- All sources must have citations in the text and be included in the list of sources. (See *The Heath Guide to Writing the Research Paper*, 2B, 19-27.)
- You must use at least three sources.
  - You may use more than three sources if you wish.
  - If you use any of the following, you are limited to only one of each type, unless you go to four or more sources: encyclopedia, periodical, interview, newspaper, website.

### **Traditional components of a research paper**

Traditionally, a high-school research paper has four components, as listed below:

1. Title page
2. Table of contents
3. Essay with citations (references to source material).
4. List of sources (bibliography).

We explain these in the next sections.

## Writing the paper itself

The preceding sections are about formalities. What about writing the paper itself? Your aim is to write a five-page research paper in which you inform the reader about a topic that you have analyzed and can now explain. As you make your explanation, you offer the conclusions you've drawn after researching various pieces of evidence.

The following guide should help as you begin the process:

1. *Ask an interesting question.* All investigations begin with a question, whether the detective in search of a criminal ("Who did it?") or a scientist in search of a drug for cancer ("What mechanism is at work here?") Finding the answer to your question is the purpose of the research you carry out.
2. *Narrow your question! Narrow your topic!*  
  
*Brainstorm topics if your question is not specific enough*  
  
*Brainstorm topics:* What is the economic impact of slavery on families? What were the civil rights of slaves? How does one family remember the days of slavery?
  - *Not specific enough:* The effects of slavery in the United States.
  - *Not specific enough:* AIDS  
*Better:* How has treatment for AIDS changed over the last ten years?  
*Or:* Why is AIDS spreading so rapidly?
  - *Not specific enough:* The Comptroller of the City of New York  
*Better:* How does the New York City Comptroller help shape the city's budget?
3. *Write a thesis statement.* A thesis statement is a declarative sentence that states the topic that you are going to investigate. It's often the answer to the question you've posed. Your research paper will develop this statement (analyze and explain it for the purpose of informing your reader). In stating the thesis statement, be clear, confident and specific.
4. *Collect your information.* Look on the Internet; consult books, magazines, newspapers, interview other people. Be sure to either paraphrase what you're reading or write the exact quote (keep a list from where the quote comes).
5. *Write an outline.* Writing an outline is helpful because it will help you see the subtopics in your paper. Each subtopic becomes another section of the paper.
6. *Write a draft of the* Sometimes this is where the real thinking begins. There is

*paper.*

nothing like writing to cause us to think! Refer to the outline when you get stuck, and use transitions between subtopics to make it all logical. *Include your own thinking, associations, feelings and experiences to give your paper your own voice.*

7. *Use citations to credit your sources.* If you use information from another source, be sure to give that source proper credit. See *Writers, Inc.* for more information.
8. *Revision, revision, revision!* When you complete your draft, show it to a trusted reader who can point out how to make it better. Then use those comments to revise what you've done.
9. *Save your work to disk.* Whether you save your work to a floppy disk or a hard drive (if possible). Using a computer will help you revise more efficiently. Best bet: save to a floppy and a hard drive. You can always retrieve your work if you save it properly.
- 10 *Enjoy the exploration!* Research is an exploration. It ought to answer a question that interests you. It's real work but it's creative work. Pick a question that intrigues you and let the fascinating process of exploration unfold!

## How not to plagiarize

No work can be accepted at City-As-School if it has been plagiarized.

Plagiarism occurs when you take another person's ideas, writing or research and use it as your own without giving credit to the original source.

Use of quotation and paraphrase permit you to avoid plagiarism.

The samples below suggest ways to use other sources. For more information look at *Writer's Inc.*, *The Heath Guide to Writing the Research Paper*, and *Writing a Research Paper: A Step-By-Step Approach*.

This quotation was taken from Page 26 of the following book: Smith, Arnold. *A Brief History of the Vietnam War*. New York: Capital Press, 1982.

*Actual words:*

**The Vietnam War involved Americans in a distant civil war. The U.S. supported the non-communist government in the south. Public opinion at first supported the war, but as U.S. casualties mounted, the war grew increasingly unpopular at home. By 1973, more than 57,700 Americans had died.**

*Quotation Example 1:*

According to Arnold Smith, "Public opinion at first supported the war, but as U.S. casualties mounted, the war grew increasingly unpopular at home." (1982, p. 26)

*Quotation Example 2:*

As noted in *A Brief History of the Vietnam War*, "The Vietnam War involved Americans in a distant civil war," a war that "grew increasingly unpopular at home" as American losses grew to upwards of 57,700 soldiers. (Smith, 1982, p. 26)

*Paraphrase (Use of information but in your own words)*

The deaths of as many as 57,700 Americans in the Vietnam War turned public opinion against being there. (Smith, 1982, p. 26)

## Writing the list of sources

Consult *How to Do Research: A Student Resource Guide* for more information.

Remember that the last page of your report is for a list of sources. You may call it "Sources," "Works Cited, or "Bibliography."

The list of sources should include every book, magazine, website or other source you consulted in your research, even if you do not quote the source directly.

## What should you do if you get stuck?

All writers get stuck sooner or later. You should understand this as part of the creative process. But there are ways to get around this.

1. *Reframe your thesis statement.* If your thesis statement is not helping you directly answer the question you posed, you may need to say it differently.
2. *Begin work on a different section of your paper.* Just because you're stuck at one part, it doesn't mean you will be stuck if you try another.
3. *Get up from your desk.* Walk around, get some juice or water, or go outside for some fresh air. Clear your mind!
4. *Ask someone to read what you've done.* A second opinion to help fill the gaps, or show you where there is a gap, can easily help get you started.
5. *Go back to one of your sources.* Re-reading your source material will help you understand it better.
6. *Pretend you're the reader.* If you were asked to read this paper, what suggestions would you make to the writer?
7. *Ask your teacher for help.* Don't work in isolation from your teacher. Ask him/her to review your work and ask for suggestions.

## Useful resources for understanding research papers

Mulderig, G. P. (1995). *The Heath Guide to Writing the Research Paper*. Lexington, MA: Heath Publishing Co.

*Writer's Inc.: A Student Handbook for Writing and Learning*. Wilmington, MA: Write Source.

*Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, fourth edition (1994).

Goldenberg, P. (1997). *Writing a Research Paper: A Step-By-Step Approach*. New York: William Sadler, Co.

**Title page**

**To Vote or Not to Vote,  
That Is the question**

Submitted for Credit in American History  
Class: Justice in America  
Kellam Ingram, Instructor

Bayard Rustin / 4782  
Marcy Mazzetti, Advisor  
May 15, 2009

Place a title at the top. Be creative and make an interesting title.

1. Kind of credit you're earning.
2. Name of class
3. Name of instructor (or Resource Coordinator)

1. Your name and ID number
2. Your Advisor
3. Date

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Young voters	3
Why don't Americans vote?	4
What will bring voters back?	5
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Place a title on the contents page, too!

1. A table of contents is like an outline. It lists the various parts of the research paper.
2. When you read the sample research paper, you'll see how the subheadings – titles for each section of the paper – become the table of contents.

Place the list of sources in the table of contents.