Research Papers Study Sheet

Goals of this Study Sheet

The goals of this study sheet are to explain what a research paper is, the types of research papers, how to choose a topic, and how to go about collecting sources.

Introduction and Explanation

A research paper is an assignment in which you will collect several sources and form an opinion or argument around them. A research paper is more than a simple collection of sources on your topic or a review of the literature in that field. It is an analysis of a perspective or argues a point based on and supported by the research you gathered. In other words, a research paper is like an expanded essay that explores your own interpretations of the topic.

When writing a research paper, you will expand upon what you already know about the topic by finding out what experts know. This involves exploring the field of research on your topic to find the most credible and the best possible information in that field.

Types of Research Papers

There are generally two different types of research papers. There is the argumentative and analytical research papers. Both types include collecting and exploring sources like articles or books that contain credible information on the topic. An argumentative research paper should begin with introduction paragraph that introduces the topic to the reader and clearly identifies your stance on the topic. Identifying your stance to your reader should be included in your thesis statement. A thesis statement in an argumentative paper should include a claim about the topic and provides specific supporting evidence that you will further explain throughout your paper. The claim you make in your thesis statement should be your own opinion about the topic.
An analytical research paper is an exploration and evaluation of the topic. In this kind of research paper you will not provide an argument or a claim in your thesis statement. Instead, in your thesis statement you will simply ask a research question pertaining to your topic.

**Choosing a Topic**

Choosing the topic of your research paper will always be the first step. Most students will encounter two situations when it comes to choosing a topic. The first and arguably more common situation is when their instructor provide the class with a list of topics that they can select from. This is often the more stress-free situation, because the topics have already been approved by the instructor. In this situation, try to pick a topic from the list that you are most comfortable or interested in writing about.

The second situation is when your instructor provides a rubric for the paper, but leaves the choice of the topic up to the students. In this situation, the instructor will often require the topic to be relevant to the course in some way. In this situation, do not be afraid to approach your instructor with any question or concerns you may have regarding selecting a topic. A helpful way in deciding on a topic is to brainstorm viable ideas. Here you will start by constructing a list of viable topics. Next, you will explore the scholarly sources relevant to your list of topics. This step is to help you narrow down your topics by seeing which topics have credible sources that you can successfully use in your paper. The last step is to decide which topic to use. It may be helpful to select the one you are most interested in or the one you think will be strongest to argue for or against. Keep in mind that brainstorming works best when you start broad and then narrow it down.

**The Research**

The next step after deciding your topic, is to collect your sources. There are several things to keep in mind in this step, but it may be helpful to start with what kind of sources you need. Do you need facts, opinions, statistics, news reports, or research
studies to best develop your paper. Keep in mind that the best research papers use a variety of type’s sources. This provides a large basis of information that is both fact and personal opinions.

After you choose what kind of sources you need for your paper, you should decide what are the best places to look for them is. You will often have to decide to choose sources form libraries, newspapers, government records, the internet, and academic periodicals. It may be helpful to keep in mind that for academic papers you need credible sources. This means that you should look for scholarly sources or ones that are peer-reviewed. Using these resources ensures that the information in your paper will be of the best quality. The best way to find these kind of resources is by using library databases like JSTOR or Academic Search Complete. However, there are several instances when you need or want to include resources from the internet or newspapers. Typically, you will use these resources to gather secondary sources that strengthen your paper. It is important to use good judgement when using resources found in this fashion. Personal web pages and blogs are generally considered less than credible and should be avoided. If you are looking for a newspaper source it might be smart to stick with big name publications like CBS or NBC.

The last thing to consider when gathering your sources is how many do you need. This is a highly subjective decision. It depends on how long your paper should be and what you need to include. Sometimes your instructor will include a minimum requirement for how many sources you need which simplifies this decision. If your instructor does not provide this requirement, there are somethings you can consider which help you make this decision. The first thing to consider is how many you need to accurately and clearly define the topic and your argument. If you can, than that should be a strong indicator in if you should add more sources. Another consideration is whether you need to argue or define both sides of topic.
Sources Referenced

“Finding Sources.” Suny Empire State College,
www.esc.edu/online-writing-center/resources/research/research-paper-steps/finding-sources/.

“Research: Where Do I Begin?” Welcome to the Purdue University Online Writing Lab (OWL), owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/552/01/.

“Tips and Examples for Writing Thesis Statements.” Welcome to the Purdue University Online Writing Lab (OWL), owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/545/01/.

“What Is a Research Paper?” Suny Empire State College,
www.esc.edu/online-writing-center/resources/research/research-paper/.

“Writing a Research Paper.” Welcome to the Purdue University Online Writing Lab (OWL), owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/658/1/.