

How to write a term paper



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----- 11 Steps on writing a term paper 1.

----- Choose your topic. Try to make it as creative as possible; if you're given the opportunity to choose your own, take advantage of this. Choose something you're particularly interested in because this will make it easier to write; in particular, try to select the topic as a result of pressing questions you already know you want to search for answers to. Once you've decided on a topic, be sure to hone down it to a do-able topic; often a topic is initially too broad in its coverage, which will make it impossible to complete within the time and space constraints given.

Narrow down your topic to something that can really be worked within the boundaries of the paper. If the topic is already chosen for you, start exploring unique angles that can set your content and information apart from the more obvious approaches many others will probably take. Finally, whatever angle your topic takes, it should be both original in approach and insightful, something the reader will be drawn into and fascinated by. * Take great care not to choose a topic and be so set on how you see the outcome of your paper that you're closed to new ideas and avenues of thinking as you work through the paper. This is known in academia as " premature cognitive commitment". It can mar an otherwise good paper because an outcome that is pre-determined in your head, regardless of the research findings along the way, will be molded to fit the outcome, rather than the outcome reflecting a genuine analysis of the discoveries made. Instead, ask continuous questions about the topic at each stage of your research and writing and see the topic in terms of a " hypothesis" rather than as a conclusion. In this way, you'll be prepared to be challenged and to even have your opinion changed as you work through the paper. * Reading other people's comments, opinions and

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entries on a topic can often help you to refine your own, especially where they comment that "further research" is required or where they posit challenging questions but leave them unanswered. * For some more help, see How to establish a research topic. 2. -----

2 ----- Do your research. It's pointless to launch into writing before you've done the research. You need to understand the background to the topic and the current thinking, as well as finding out what future research is considered necessary in the area. While it may be tempting to rehash information you already know really well, avoid doing this or you learn nothing from the research and writing process. Go into research with a sense of adventure and an openness to learning things you've yet to grasp, as well as being ready to discover new ways of looking at old problems. When researching, use both primary (original text, document, legal case, interviews, experiment, etc.) and secondary (other people's interpretations and explanations of the primary source) sources. There is also a place for discussing with like-minded students and even finding online discussions about the topic if you feel comfortable doing this but these discussions are for idea-sharing and helping you to gel your ideas and are not usually quotable sources. For more information, here are some helpful resources to check out: * How to research a paper. * How to take notes, How to take better notes, How to take notes from a textbook, How to take notes on a book and How to take Cornell notes. 3.

----- 3 -----

Refine your thesis statement. After you've done the research, reflect back over the chosen topic. At this point, it's essential to pinpoint the single, strong idea you'll be discussing, your assertion that you believe you can

defend throughout the paper and that makes it clear to a reader what they're about to learn about and be given a sound conclusion on. Your thesis statement is the spine of your essay, the idea that you'll go on to defend in the paragraphs that follow. Serve it up half-baked and the remainder of the paper is bound to be flavorless. Construct a thesis that your research has proven is interesting to you — that way, backing it up won't be such a bore. Once you're satisfied that your topic is sound and clarified, proceed to writing your first draft. * Remember that the research doesn't stop here. And nor does the thesis statement, necessarily. Allow room for flexibility as you continue working through both the research and the writing, as you may wish to make changes that align with the ideas forming in your mind and the discoveries you continue to unearth. On the other hand, do be careful not to be a continuous seeker who never alights upon a single idea for fear of confinement. At some point you are going to have to say: " Enough is enough to make my point here!" If you're so taken with a topic, there is always the possibility of postgraduate study some day but remember that the term paper has a finite word length and due date! 4.

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Develop an outline for the paper. Some people can work on a term paper skipping this step; they're a rare and often time-pressed breed. It is far better to have an outline sketched out so that you know where you're headed, just as a road map helps you to know where you're going from A to B. Like the entire paper, the outline is not set in stone but subject to changes. However, it does give you a sense of structure and a framework to fall back on when you lose your way mid paper and it also serves as the skeleton of your paper, and the rest is just filling in the details. There are

different approaches to developing an outline and you may even have your own personal, preferred method. As a general guidance, some of the basic elements of an outline should include: * Introduction, discussion paragraphs/sections and conclusion or summary. * Descriptive or explanatory paragraphs following the introduction, setting the background or theme. * Analysis and argument paragraphs/sections. Using your research, write out the main idea for each body paragraph. * Any outstanding questions or points you're not yet sure about. * See How to write an outline for more details. 5. ----- 5

----- Make your point in the introduction. The introductory paragraph is challenging but avoid turning it into a hurdle. Of all the paper, this is the part often most likely to be rewritten as you continue working through the paper and experience changes of direction, flow and outcome. As such, see it as simply a means of getting started and remind yourself that it's always revisable. This approach allows you the freedom to mess it up but rectify it as needed. Also use this as an opportunity to help yourself come to grips with the general organization of the term paper by explaining the breakdown, something the reader will also need to be aware of from the start. Try using HIT as the means for getting your introduction underway: * Hook the reader using a question or a quote. Or perhaps relate a curious anecdote that will eventually make absolute sense to the reader in the context of the thesis. * Introduce your topic. Be succinct, clear and straightforward. * Thesis statement. This should have been clarified already in the previous step. * Don't forget to define the words contained in the question! Words like " globalization" have many differing meanings and it's important to state which ones you'll be using as part of your introductory

section. 6. ----- 6

----- Convince the reader with your body paragraphs. Make sure each paragraph supports your argument in a new way. Not sure your body's up to task? Try isolating the first sentence of each paragraph; together, they should read like a list of evidence that proves your thesis. * Try to relate the actual subject of the essay (say, Plato's Symposium) to a tangentially related issue you happen to know something about (say, the growing trend of free-wheeling hookups in frat parties). Slowly bring the paragraph around to your actual subject, and make a few generalizations about why this aspect of the book/subject is so fascinating and worthy of study (such as, how different the expectations for physical intimacy were then compared with now). 7.

----- 7 -----

Conclude with strength. Try using the ROCC method: * Restate your thesis statement. * One important detail which is usually found in your last paragraph. * Conclude — wrap it up. * Clincher — where you give the reader something left to think about. 8. ----- 8

----- Show some style. Using outside sources?

Find out which citation style your instructor prefers, MLA or APA (or other style if you're not in the USA). Each has a precise notation system, so if you're unsure of the rules, check the manual (online versions are available at owl. English. Purdue. EU). Peppering quotes throughout your text is certainly a good way to help make your point, but don't overdo it and take care not to use so many quotes as the embodiment of your points that you're basically allowing other authors to make the point and write the paper for you. * Avoid cutting and pasting from other people's arguments. By all means use

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eminent thinkers in the field's thoughts to back up your own thinking but avoid saying nothing other than " A says... B says...". The reader wants to know what you say ultimately. * It's helpful to sort out your bibliography from the beginning, to avoid having a last minute scramble: How to write a bibliography, How to write an APA style bibliography and How to write a bibliography in MLA format. 9. ----- 9

----- Burn flab, build muscle. Space is at a premium in any graded paper, so finding ways to cull words is always a sensible approach. Are your sentences in good shape? Examine each one and decide whether you've used the fewest words possible while still retaining meaning. * Trade in weak " to-be" verbs for stronger " action" verbs. For example: " I was writing my term paper" becomes " I wrote my term paper." 10. ----- 10

----- Don't be a such a slob. Running your spelling-checker is only the first step in proofreading your paper! A spell-check won't catch errors like " how" instead of " show", nor will it pick up on doubled words (" the the") or grammar problems (unless you use MS Word, which can be configured to check grammar, and already catches double words). Little goofs like these aren't likely to impress the instructor — if you're too careless to proofread, after all, there's a good chance you didn't put much effort into your paper. Address the mess: ask a friend to read through your essay, marking any mistakes. * Decent grammar should be a given. You need a teacher to give you the benefit of the doubt, not correct your apostrophe use. A few too many errors and the message is soon lost beneath the irritation of the errors involved. 11. 11 Think of a good title to catch the reader's attention, but not a too long or too short one! For

some essayists, a great title appears at the beginning of writing while for others, it only becomes apparent after slogging through the paper in its entirety. If you're still stuck, brainstorm with a friend or family member; you might be surprised how a fresh mind unacquainted with the topic can come up with a pithy title at a moment's notice!