

How to Write a Research Paper in the 21st Century

Before the use of computers, students wrote research papers by spending hours in the library searching for books with information on their chosen topic. They evaluated the information that they found as they compared primary and secondary sources. They used 3 by 5 inch index cards and pencils to organize their main points. They used these cards to keep track of their sources and also to rearrange the sequence of ideas in their papers. They either wrote their paper by hand or they used a typewriter to get their ideas on paper. While they wrote, they made sure that they added footnotes and a bibliography to give credit to their sources.

In the 21st Century, students rely more on the use of the Internet and computer tools to do their research and write their papers. While the basic steps to plan and write a research paper are the same, the tools used are quite different. Sometimes even the final form of the paper can be quite different as students present their material using presentation systems such as Microsoft PowerPoint™. This outline will help you plan and write your research paper using these 21st Century tools. Note that the 21st Century adaptations to this process are in the *italicized Comic Sans font*.

| Steps | Details |
|----------------------|---|
| 1. Define your topic | ➤ What is your broad topic? |
| 2. Narrow your topic | ➤ What aspects of the broad topic interest you? ➤ Discuss your topic with others to brainstorm ideas to make your topic more specific. ➤ <i>Conduct preliminary online research to look for more specific aspects of the broad topic that you would like to learn more about.</i> ➤ Write your topic as a question that your paper will answer. |
| 3. Conduct research | ➤ <i>Use your well-defined topic as the search engine query.</i> ➤ Use books, journal articles & reference materials to learn about your topic. ➤ Look at bibliographies & periodical indexes to find sources. ➤ <i>Use Internet search engines to look for primary & secondary sources.</i> ➤ <i>Find three other sources that agree with each fact that you have found to verify the accuracy of your research. This process is called the Triangle Method.</i> ➤ <i>Collect & organize text, images and videos using the CE PowerPoint Index Technique.</i> ➤ Paraphrase your material to avoid plagiarism or plan to use direct quotes with citations. |

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| Steps | Details |
|----------------------------------|---|
| 4. Create an outline | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>Use CE PowerPoint Index Technique to rearrange your information, as needed.</i> ➤ <i>Use CE PowerPoint Index Technique to create an outline of your paper.</i> ➤ Evaluate the usefulness of each piece of information. |
| 5. Write the introduction | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>Use the information organized in your CE PowerPoint Index to write the opening paragraph of your paper.</i> ➤ Use this paragraph to explain what the paper will be about. |
| 6. Write the body | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>If creating a paper: Use Microsoft Word or any word processor to write the paper using the CE PowerPoint Index as a guide.</i> ➤ <i>If creating a presentation: Use Microsoft PowerPoint to build a presentation using the CE PowerPoint Index data. You may either modify the CE PowerPoint Index slides or create new ones.</i> |
| 7. Write the conclusion | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Summarize your points and answer the question that you asked in Step 1 of this process. ➤ Your conclusion should cover the points that you wrote about in your introduction. |
| 8. Give credit to sources | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>Use the information in the CE PowerPoint Index to write citations for your sources.</i> ➤ <i>Use online citation tools such as www.bibme.com, www.iCyte.com, or www.knightcite.com</i> ➤ Add your citations to your paper or presentation. |
| 9. Make revisions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Read it, re-read it, read it AGAIN and AGAIN! ➤ Check to make sure your paper or presentation makes sense. Do the ideas flow in a logical manner? ➤ Does each paragraph have a topic sentence? Do you have enough details to support your ideas? Does each paragraph make a point? ➤ Are your sentences well-written? Use grammar and spell checkers, but also use your own eyes to check your grammar and spelling. ➤ Use quotation marks for direct quotes. ➤ Make sure you have given credit to all your sources. |