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A research paper, sometimes called a *term* or *library* paper, reports research findings. Most often, the research is a literal *searching* again through what others have written on a subject. In some cases, when the paper reports entirely on primary research [see primary research in the Glossary], the writer may find a laboratory or technical report more suitable than a research paper.

Research papers may either report research or evaluate research information. If the paper reports your research, it tells what you have read, either from a single source or from many sources. **If the paper evaluates research information, it addresses why or how; thus, it is usually either a comparison-and-contrast or cause-and-effect paper.** [See Cause and Effect and Comparison and Contrast in Part II.] More likely, it is this evaluative paper that you will be asked to write. As an evaluative paper, it requires numerous sources, and it assumes a writer's ability to show originality and imagination.

CHARACTERISTICS

An effective research paper

- indicates careful, comprehensive reading and understanding of the topic,
- establishes, in its introduction, a thesis to be developed during the course of the paper [see thesis statement in the Glossary and Writing a Multi-Paragraph Paper in Part I],
- follows a clear organization [see organization, chronological order, spatial order, and order of importance in the Glossary],
- employs the principles of good composition,
- includes direct quotations, paraphrases, or precis that support the thesis [see Paraphrase and Precis earlier in Part III],
- includes parenthetical notes, endnotes, or footnotes,
- includes a list of works cited,
- exhibits careful, thorough documentation of sources of ideas,
- includes direct quotations in support of its thesis,
- follows a carefully prescribed format.

PROCESS

The step-by-step development of a research paper sounds rather simple and direct. The research process, however, always requires a kind of yo-yo approach: rather than completing one step and moving neatly to the next, you will find that you confront problems that either cause you to go back to a previous step or to think ahead to the next. Just when you think you have completed the research, you may discover that you need new information to fill a gap or add support. And just when you think you have completed a sensible outline, you may find that the paper does not flow smoothly, given its method of organization. So you must go back—rethink, reread, rewrite. The yo-yo process continues until you have printed your final draft.

The following process works well if you understand—and accept as a fact of the research life—the yo-yo approach.

STEP 1 Prewriting • Selecting a Suitable Subject

In some cases, you may be assigned a broad research topic; in other cases, you may be free to select whatever topic you wish. Selecting the right topic often determines the success of the paper.

Begin with general, broad topics that interest you. [See Prewriting in Part I for suggestions for sources of topics.] In order to select one topic, narrow it, and wed it to the paper's purpose, do exploratory reading in the general area. Browse through encyclopedias, magazines, reference books, and online research for thought-provoking ideas. Read quickly. Then, put your general subject in the form of a question. Answers to this question will suggest narrowed topics, some of them possibly suitable for your research paper.

General topic:

What influenced us as children to become the kinds of young adults we are?

Narrowed topics:

television, parents, neighborhood, siblings, games, toys, books, food, friends, relatives

Perhaps, after exploratory reading in the area of child psychology, you're intrigued by an authority's claim that parents influence a child by what they read to him or her. You decide to pursue this subject.

Further reading, however, convinces you that the topic is still too broad. You list all the kinds of books you can think of that parents read to their children:

- | | |
|----------------|-------------------|
| fairy tales | classical stories |
| jingles | rhymes, poetry |
| fantasy | picture books |
| number books | nonfiction |
| alphabet books | animal stories |

Later, you find an item about the impact Mother Goose rhymes have on children. Now *that's* what you'd like to research! Finally, you have a suitably narrowed subject:

The Impact of Mother Goose Rhymes on Children

Use a similar process to narrow your own broad subject to something manageable.



Selecting a suitable subject is so vital that a few warnings are in order. Be critical enough to evaluate your proposed subject according to these possible pitfalls:

- **The subject may be too broad.** Even if you've been assigned a 1,500-word paper, keep in mind that most five-paragraph themes run over 700 words. Magazine articles run less than 3,000 words. So don't try to cope with a book-length subject in half the length of a magazine article.
- **The subject may be too limited for research.** Although you may have a special interest in a subject, if little or no research is available, you cannot write a successful research paper.
- **The subject may be too technical.** Unless you already have a good background in hydraulics, for instance, don't write a paper about the subject. In fact, unless a paper is for a technical class, avoid subjects that rely on technical terms.
- **The subject may be too ordinary.** Research should provide new information. To do research on the effects of sun lotion on skin exposed to ultraviolet rays will probably prove tiresome and dull unless, of course, you have just invented a revolutionary lotion.
- **The subject may be too controversial.** A highly contested issue may prove more than a single, carefully organized research paper can describe or evaluate. If volumes have already been written, chances are you have not chosen well.

*gehovah Wit.
+ the Holocaust*

Avoiding these pitfalls will help you select a workable, satisfactory subject.

STEP 2 Prewriting • Listing the Possible Parts

With your narrowed subject in mind, use logic and imagination to decide what to include. Make a list of possible topics. Then, to put yourself in the reader's seat. What do you want to know about this subject? What questions need answers? For example:

Suitable subject:

Impact of Mother Goose Rhymes on Children

Possible subtopics:

author of rhymes
 publication of book
 distinguishing fact from fiction
 educational value
 musical quality
 teaching rhythm
 promoting memorization
 any negative aspects
 characterizations
 lulling to sleep
 introduction to literature
 classical allusion
 stimulating imagination
 translations

By listing topics, you can avoid wasting time later and avoid reading unrelated material. Of course, a preliminary list is just that—preliminary. It will change as you do your research. So, develop a list of possible subtopics to guide your early research.

STEP 3 Prewriting • Writing the Thesis Statement

Now you are ready to write a thesis statement. [See thesis statement in the Glossary.] Like the list, the thesis statement may change somewhat, but it will serve throughout your research. So write one now:

The Mother Goose nursery rhymes have a positive influence on children.

STEP 4 Prewriting • Finding the Materials

With your thesis and list of possible topics in place, select books, magazines, pamphlets, electronic, and other pertinent sources. Go to the library and check the computer catalog, the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature* (either a print or electronic version), the vertical file [see vertical file in the Glossary], and the various reference books and

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electronic resources available, including *but not limited to* the Internet. Consider searching certain respected databases:

- *DIALOG* is a broad-based, highly respected database.
- *InfoTrak* includes over 1,000 business, technological, and general-interest periodicals, including *The New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*.
- *LEXIS/NEXIS* includes thousands of full-text articles.
- *MEDLINE* has information on medical topics.
- *ERIC* (Educational Resources Information Center) has information on education topics.
- *OCLC First Search* has many indexes for periodicals, media, and books in the United States and Canada.
- *VU/TEXT* is a newspaper database.

Be alert to publication dates. If you are doing historical research, the new electronic databases may not go back far enough to index the materials you need. Consult both print and electronic indexes.

As you search the Web, try several different search engines, such as *AltaVista*, *Cyberhound*, *HotBot*, *InfoSeek*, *Lycos*, *WebCrawler*, or *Yahoo!* Not every search engine calls up the same sources. Check out the search engine's online help to make your search most effective and least time-consuming.

STEP 5 Prewriting • Developing a Preliminary Bibliography

As you find seemingly useful materials, prepare bibliography cards for them. **A bibliography is a list of sources** and is an important part of your finished paper. The preliminary bibliography is the start of that component. Here's how to do it.

Prepare a separate 3" x 5" card for each source, including **electronic sources and Web sites**. Using this approach, you can throw away cards for sources that later prove useless. Similarly, you can alphabetize those that prove helpful. Follow these general instructions for making bibliography cards:

★ For books:

- List the call number in the upper left corner.
- List the author, last name first.
 - ◊ If there is an editor, list his or her name, followed by *ed.*
 - ◊ If there are two authors, list the name of the first author in reverse order but list the name of the second author in natural order.
 - ◊ If there are more than two authors, list the name of the first author in reverse order and follow it with *and others*.

Bing

Google

Step 6