

# College Composition



# COLLEGE COMPOSITION

A Book for TCC Comp 2 eCore  
Classes

TULSA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Tulsa Community College



*College Composition by Tulsa Community College is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/), except where otherwise noted.*

This material is adapted from the following open textbook:

Crowther, Kathryn; Curtright, Lauren; Gilbert, Nancy; Hall, Barbara; Ravita, Tracienne; and Swenson, Kirk, “Successful College Composition” (2016). English Open Textbooks.

<https://oer.galileo.usg.edu/english-textbooks/8>.

This work is licensed by The Tulsa Community College Library under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

# CONTENTS

|                 |     |
|-----------------|-----|
| About This Book | vii |
|-----------------|-----|

## Part I. Main Body

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Unit 1: What Will I Write About?: From Topic to Research Question          | 1  |
| 1.1 Becoming a Successful Writer   | 2  |
| 1.2 Purpose, Audience, Tone and Content                                    | 10 |
| 1.3 Using Sources  | 21 |
| 1.4 Writing About Research   | 28 |
| 1.5 Developing Your Topic and Research Question                            | 35 |
| 1.6 Prewriting Techniques  | 47 |
| Unit 2: How Can I find Research?: From Research Question to Research Notes | 58 |
| 2.1 Scheduling Your Research   | 60 |
| 2.2 Staying Organized  | 63 |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| 2.3 Gathering Your Sources   | 68  |
| 2.4 Types of Sources   | 71  |
| 2.5 Using Databases  | 85  |
| 2.6 Using the TCC Library  | 93  |
| 2.7 Evaluating Sources   | 99  |
| 2.8 Taking Research Notes  | 107 |
| Unit 3: How Do I Write This Paper?: From<br>Research Notes to Drafting | 112 |
| 3.1 Applying Your Research   | 113 |
| 3.2 Finding Connections  | 119 |
| 3.3 Organizing Your Paper  | 125 |
| 3.4 Writing Your Draft--Introduction and<br>Conclusion                 | 128 |
| 3.5 Writing Your Draft—Body Paragraphs                                 | 133 |
| 3.6 Documenting Your Source Material                                   | 148 |
| 3.7 Avoiding Plagiarism  | 153 |
| Unit 4: How Can I Revise This Paper?:<br>From Drafting to Polishing    | 161 |
| 4.1 Revising --Organization and Cohesion                               | 162 |
| 4.2 Revising--Style and Tone   | 171 |
| 4.3 Editing Your Paper   | 176 |

# ABOUT THIS BOOK

---

Welcome to **College Composition**, a Pressbook developed by the TCC Library.

## How to Move Around This Book

Use the **arrows at the bottom left and right** of each page to move forward and backward through the modules. Or, **use the Contents menu** in the top left hand corner to go to a particular section.

## Download

If you would prefer to download a PDF copy of this book, or if you prefer to read it on another eBook platform, here are some options:

- PDF (formatted for digital use with active hyperlinks, etc.)
- PDF (formatted for printing; placeholders are provided with a URL directing you back to the ebook to engage

with the active & other digital content)

- EPUB (for Nook, Apple Books, Kobo, Kindle etc.)

The following formats are for those who wish to create an adaptation of this Open Educational Resource:

- Pressbooks XML
- Common Cartridge with Web Links
- XHTML (unsupported by Pressbooks)
- HTMLBook (unsupported by Pressbooks)
- OpenDocument (unsupported by Pressbooks)
- WordPress XML (unsupported by Pressbooks)

Files for download can be found on [this book's home page](#), just under the cover image.

## Content Cues

This book includes embedded videos that will only be accessible in the online version of the text. Also included are the following:



Examples

Purple coded boxes, with or without the dark header, indicate writing that serves as an example of concepts discussed in that section.

### Key Takeaways

Orange coded boxes indicate practical application of concepts. Often, these are titled “Writing at Work” and illustrate how skills are used in the workplace.

## Find a Mistake?

Every effort has been made to ensure this text is accurate and free of mistakes. If you find an error, including broken links, please notify us at [OERLibrarian@tulsacc.edu](mailto:OERLibrarian@tulsacc.edu).

# License Information:

*[College Composition](#) by Tulsa Community College is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](#), except where otherwise noted.*

*Except where otherwise noted, this material is adapted from the following open textbook:*

*Crowther, Kathryn; Curtright, Lauren; Gilbert, Nancy; Hall, Barbara; Ravita, Traciennne; and Swenson, Kirk, “Successful College Composition” (2016). English Open Textbooks. <https://oer.galileo.usg.edu/english-textbooks/8>.*

*Cover image by Photo by [Hannah Olinger](#) on [Unsplash](#)*

# UNIT 1: WHAT WILL I WRITE ABOUT?: FROM TOPIC TO RESEARCH QUESTION

---

In Unit 1, you will learn some basic concepts related to college-level composition. When you write as an academic, you are entering the scholarly conversation. This conversation is already in progress. Other researchers, writers, and experts have been discussing your subject for a while. Your task will be to read their writing, think about your own ideas, and make connections. Then you will be writing your part of the conversation so that others can join you in the conversation.



*One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:*

<https://open.ocolearnok.org/tccecorecomp2/?p=44#oembed-1>

# 1.1 BECOMING A SUCCESSFUL WRITER

---

In her book *On Writing*, Eudora Welty maintains: “To write honestly and with all our powers is the least we can do, and the most.” But writing well is difficult. People who write for a living sometimes struggle to get their thoughts on the page; even people who generally enjoy writing have days when they would rather do anything else. For people who do not like writing or do not think of themselves as good writers, writing assignments can be stressful or even intimidating. And, of course, you cannot get through college without having to write—sometimes a lot, and often at a higher level than you are used to. No magic formula will make writing quick and easy. However, you can use strategies and resources to manage writing assignments more easily. College will challenge you as a writer, but it is also a unique opportunity to grow.

## *Writing to Think and Communicate*

One purpose of writing is to help you clarify and articulate your thoughts. Writing a list of points, both pro and con, on an issue of concern allows you to see which of your arguments are the strongest or reveals areas that need additional support.

Putting ideas on paper helps you review and evaluate them, reconsider their validity, and perhaps generate new concepts. Writing your thoughts down may even help you grasp them for the first time. Another important—and practical—function of writing is to communicate ideas. For your college classes you are required to write essays, research papers, and essay responses on tests. If you apply to other colleges or universities, you will have to compose letters of application, respond to specific questions, or write an autobiographical sketch. When you enter your chosen career you may have to send emails and write reports, proposals, grants, or other work-related documents. You must correspond with clients, business associates, and co-workers. And on a personal level, you want to contact friends and relatives. You may even find yourself responding to a community or national issue by writing a letter to the editor of your local newspaper. Writing is an essential skill you must have in order to function in the twenty-first century, but like any skill, it is something that can be acquired and refined. Some people just naturally express themselves better than others, but everyone can learn the basic craft of writing.

Overcoming Writer's Block

At some point, every writer experiences writer's block: staring at a blank page or computer screen without being able to put down even a single line. Your mind is blank, and panic sets in because writer's block usually happens when you are working against a deadline such as in a timed writing assignment or for a paper that is due the next day.

Even though there is nothing you can do to prevent writer's block from happening, there are several techniques you can use to help you overcome its negative effects:

**Don't Procrastinate:** Give yourself as much time as possible to complete your assignment. Budget your time so you can write the assignment in sections and still have time to edit and revise. If you are in a timed writing situation, jot down ideas in a scratch outline and work from that.

**Try Freewriting without Guilt:** Just start putting ideas down on paper. You don't need to worry about whether or not you are making spelling and grammatical errors; you shouldn't fret over organization. Keep in mind that you can always delete what you have written once your ideas begin to flow.

**Follow Your Inspiration:** Begin by writing the section of the paper you feel best able to write. If you cannot start at the beginning, write the conclusion first, or begin writing the body of the paper. If you have an outline, you will already have the ideas and organization you need to write the body paragraphs.

**Break the Writing Project into Parts:** Think of the paper as a series of short sections. Sometimes you can be overwhelmed by the prospect of writing a ten-page research paper, but if you break it up into manageable pieces, the assignment does not seem so daunting.

**Review the Assignment:** Reread the instructions for the assignment to make sure you understand what you are expected to write. Look for keywords that you can research to give you insight into your topic. Often discussing the assignment with your professor can give you the clarity you need to begin writing.

**Verbalize Your Ideas:** Discuss your ideas with a classmate, friend or family member. You can gain new insights and confidence by hearing what others have to say about your topic and sharing your misgivings with them.

**Visualize a Friendly Audience:** Imagine you are

writing the paper to a friend or someone you know well. Often the fear of rejection paralyzes your ability to start writing, so removing that obstacle should enable you to write without inhibition.

**Take a Break:** Try working on another writing project or switch to a completely different activity. Often if you get bogged down on one subject, thinking about something else for a while might clear your brain so you can come back to the original project with a new perspective. And getting up from the computer usually unclogs any mental blocks: take a walk, wash the dishes, or play with the dog.

**Change Locations:** Try moving to another area more conducive to your writing style. Some people write best in a noisy environment while others require a place with minimal distractions. Find what works best for you. Remember that writer's block is only temporary—relax and start writing.

## *Selecting an Appropriate Voice*

Whether you are writing an argumentative essay expressing your conviction that whale hunting should be abolished or a

literary analysis of Kate Chopin's novel *The Awakening*, your paper should express a distinct point of view. Your purpose should be to convince your audience that you have something worthwhile to say. Gaining their approval depends to a large degree on their perception of the writer: you need to present yourself as educated, rational, and well-informed. But in doing so, you need to be careful not to lose your own voice. You should never use a wordy, artificial style in an attempt to impress your readers; neither should you talk down to them or apologize for your writing.

### *Choosing the Proper Pronoun Focus*

One important consideration in selecting the appropriate voice for your paper is to choose the proper pronoun focus, and this is dependent upon the nature of the assignment. In some instances, the first person ("I") is acceptable: for example, if you are writing an autobiographical sketch for an application to a university, anything other than first person would sound odd. Likewise, if you are writing an extemporaneous essay that answers a question prompting a first-person response, such as "Explain why you do or do not vote," again, first person would be the obvious choice. Even within the development of an essay that takes a third person approach, if you use an example from your personal experience to illustrate a point, you can discuss that isolated example using the first person.

Most of the same arguments apply to the use of the second

person pronoun (“you”). This textbook, for instance, utilizes the second person because of the unique relationship between the student/reader and the instructor/writer. The appropriateness of the first-person pronoun in college writing is a topic of debate, but academic writing more often requires you to adopt a third-person focus, preferably in the plural form (“they”). Using third person enables you to avoid boring the reader by suggesting that the topic is of interest only to you; in other words, it broadens the audience appeal. Using third person in the plural form also allows you to avoid making pronoun agreement errors which might occur as the natural result of imitating spoken English which seems to favor the plural form instead of the more grammatically correct singular: for example, most people would say, “Everyone should have their book in class” instead of “Everyone should have his book in class,” even though the former is technically incorrect. In addition, using third person plural eliminates the problem of sexist language and prevents the awkward use of “his/her.” Consider the following examples for their use of pronoun focus imagining they appeared in an essay about the validity of using source materials from the Internet:

### Examples

**Weak Example:** As I surfed the Internet, I found a lot of articles that I couldn't trust because I didn't see any authors' names or sponsoring organizations.

**Weak Example:** As we surf the Internet, we frequently find articles we cannot trust because we do not find authors' names or sponsoring organizations.

**Weak Example:** As one surfs the Internet, one frequently finds articles one cannot trust because one cannot find authors' names or sponsoring organizations.

**Stronger Example:** Surfing the Internet for source information is unreliable because many articles do not indicate their authors or sponsoring organizations.

The first example is too limited—who cares what you found on the Internet? The second example generalizes the focus better than the first, but it, too, restricts the audience. Changing the pronoun to “one” is also problematic because it is repetitious and awkward. The final example is the best to use in an essay because it emphasizes the point in an all-inclusive manner, without being redundant or sounding artificial.

## 1.2 PURPOSE, AUDIENCE, TONE AND CONTENT

---

Imagine reading one long block of text, with each idea blurring into the next. Even if you are reading a thrilling novel or an interesting news article, you will likely lose interest in what the author has to say very quickly. During the writing process, it is helpful to position yourself as a reader. Ask yourself whether you can focus easily on each point you make. Keep in mind that three main elements shape the content of each essay:

**Purpose:** The reason the writer composes the essay.

**Audience:** The individual or group whom the writer intends to address.

**Tone:** The attitude the writer conveys about the essay's subject.

The assignment's purpose, audience, and tone dictate what each paragraph of the essay covers and how the paragraph supports the main point—the thesis.

## Identifying Common Academic Purposes

The purpose for a piece of writing identifies the reason you write it by, basically, answering the question “Why?” For example, why write a play? To entertain a packed theater. Why write instructions to the babysitter? To inform him or her of your schedule and rules. Why write a letter to your congressman? To persuade him to address your community’s needs.

In academic settings, the reasons for writing typically fulfill four main purposes:

- to summarize
- to analyze
- to synthesize
- to evaluate

A **summary** shrinks a large amount of information into only the essentials, using your own words; although shorter than the original piece of writing, a summary should still communicate all the key points and key support of the original document.

An **analysis**, on the other hand, separates complex materials into their different parts and studies how the parts relate to one another. In the sciences, for example, the analysis of simple table salt would require a deconstruction of its parts—the elements sodium (Na) and chloride (Cl). Then, scientists

would study how the two elements interact to create the compound NaCl, or sodium chloride: simple table salt.

In an **academic analysis**, instead of deconstructing compounds, the essay takes apart a primary source (an essay, a book, an article, etc.) point by point. It communicates the main points of the document by examining individual points and identifying how the points relate to one another.

The third type of writing—**synthesis**—combines two or more items to create an entirely new item. Take, for example, the electronic musical instrument aptly named the synthesizer. It looks like a simple keyboard but displays a dashboard of switches, buttons, and levers. With the flip of a few switches, a musician may combine the distinct sounds of a piano, a flute, or a guitar—or any other combination of instruments—to create a new sound. The purpose of an academic synthesis is to blend individual documents into a new document by considering the main points from one or more pieces of writing and linking the main points together to create a new point, one not replicated in either document.

Finally, an **evaluation** judges the value of something and determines its worth. Evaluations in everyday life are often not only dictated by set standards but also influenced by opinion and prior knowledge such as a supervisor's evaluation of an employee in a particular job. Academic evaluations, likewise, communicate your opinion and its justifications about a particular document or a topic of discussion. They are influenced by your reading of the document as well as your

prior knowledge and experience with the topic or issue. Evaluations typically require more critical thinking and a combination of summary, analysis, and synthesis skills.

You will encounter these four purposes not only as you read for your classes but also as you read for work or pleasure, and, because reading and writing work together, your writing skills will improve as you read. Remember that the purpose for writing will guide you through each part of your paper, helping you make decisions about content and style.

When reviewing directions for assignments, look for the verbs that ask you to summarize, analyze, synthesize, or evaluate. Instructors often use these words to clearly indicate the assignment's purpose. These words will cue you on how to complete the assignment because you will know its exact purpose.

## Identifying the Audience

Imagine you must give a presentation to a group of executives in an office. Weeks before the big day, you spend time creating and rehearsing the presentation. You must make important, careful decisions not only about the content but also about your delivery. Will the presentation require technology to project figures and charts? Should the presentation define important words, or will the executives already know the terms? Should you wear your suit and dress shirt? The answers to these questions will help you develop an appropriate

relationship with your audience, making them more receptive to your message.

Now imagine you must explain the same business concepts from your presentation to a group of high school students. Those important questions you previously answered may now require different answers. The figures and charts may be too sophisticated, and the terms will certainly require definitions. You may even reconsider your outfit and sport a more casual look. Because the audience has shifted, your presentation and delivery will shift as well to create a new relationship with the new audience.

In these two situations, the audience—the individuals who will watch and listen to the presentation—plays a role in the development of presentation. As you prepare the presentation, you visualize the audience to anticipate their expectations and reactions. What you imagine affects the information you choose to present and how you will present it. Then, during the presentation, you meet the audience in person and discover immediately how well you perform.

Although the audience for writing assignments—your readers—may not appear in person, they play an equally vital role. Even in everyday writing activities, you identify your readers' characteristics, interests, and expectations before making decisions about what you write. In fact, thinking about audience has become so common that you may not even detect the audience-driven decisions.

For example, you update your status on a social networking

site with the awareness of who will digitally follow the post. If you want to brag about a good grade, you may write the post to please family members. If you want to describe a funny moment, you may write with your friends' senses of humor in mind. Even at work, you send emails with an awareness of an unintended receiver who could intercept the message.

In other words, being aware of “invisible” readers is a skill you most likely already possess and one you rely on every day. Consider the following paragraphs. Which one would the author send to her parents? Which one would she send to her best friend?

### **Example A**

*Last Saturday, I volunteered at a local hospital. The visit was fun and rewarding. I even learned how to do cardiopulmonary resuscitation, or CPR. Unfortunately, I think caught a cold from one of the patients. This week, I will rest in bed and drink plenty of clear fluids. I hope I am well by next Saturday to volunteer again.*

### **Example B**

*OMG! You won't believe this! My advisor forced me to do my community service hours*

*at this hospital all weekend! We learned CPR but we did it on dummies, not even real peeps. And some kid sneezed on me and got me sick! I was so bored and sniffing all weekend; I hope I don't have to go back next week. I def do NOT want to miss the basketball tournament!*

Most likely, you matched each paragraph to its intended audience with little hesitation. Because each paragraph reveals the author's relationship with the intended readers, you can identify the audience fairly quickly. When writing your own essays, you must engage with your audience to build an appropriate relationship given your subject. Imagining your readers during each stage of the writing process will help you make decisions about your writing. Ultimately, the people you visualize will affect what and how you write.

While giving a speech, you may articulate an inspiring or critical message, but if you left your hair a mess and laced up mismatched shoes, your audience would not take you seriously. They may be too distracted by your appearance to listen to your words. Similarly, grammar and sentence structure serve as the appearance of a piece of writing.

Polishing your work using correct grammar will impress your readers and allow them to focus on what you have to say.

Because focusing on audience will enhance your writing, your process, and your finished product, you must consider the specific traits of your audience members. Use your imagination to anticipate the readers' demographics, education, prior knowledge, and expectations.

**Demographics:** These measure important data about a group of people, such as their age range, their ethnicity, their religious beliefs, or their gender. Certain topics and assignments will require these kinds of considerations about your audience. For other topics and assignments, these measurements may not influence your writing in the end. Regardless, it is important to consider demographics when you begin to think about your purpose for writing.

**Education:** Education considers the audience's level of schooling. If audience members have earned a doctorate degree, for example, you may need to elevate your style and use more formal language. Or, if audience members are still in college, you could write in a more relaxed style. An audience member's major or emphasis may also dictate your writing.

**Prior knowledge:** This refers to what the audience already knows about your topic. If your readers have studied certain topics, they may already know some terms and concepts related to the topic. You may decide whether to define terms and explain concepts based on your audience's prior knowledge. Although you cannot peer inside the brains of

your readers to discover their knowledge, you can make reasonable assumptions. For instance, a nursing major would presumably know more about health-related topics than a business major would.

**Expectations:** These indicate what readers will look for while reading your assignment. Readers may expect consistencies in the assignment's appearance, such as correct grammar and traditional formatting like double-spaced lines and legible font. Readers may also have content-based expectations given the assignment's purpose and organization. In an essay titled "The Economics of Enlightenment: The Effects of Rising Tuition," for example, audience members may expect to read about the economic repercussions of college tuition costs.

## Selecting an Appropriate Tone

Tone identifies a speaker's attitude toward a subject or another person. You may pick up a person's tone of voice fairly easily in conversation. A friend who tells you about her weekend may speak excitedly about a fun skiing trip. An instructor who means business may speak in a low, slow voice to emphasize her serious mood. Or, a coworker who needs to let off some steam after a long meeting may crack a sarcastic joke.

Just as speakers transmit emotion through voice, writers can transmit a range of attitudes and emotions through prose—from excited and humorous to somber and critical.

These emotions create connections among the audience, the author, and the subject, ultimately building a relationship between the audience and the text. To stimulate these connections, writers intimate their attitudes and feelings with useful devices, such as sentence structure, word choice, punctuation, and formal or informal language. Keep in mind that the writer's attitude should always appropriately match the audience and the purpose.

Read the following paragraph and consider the writer's tone. How would you describe the writer's attitude toward wildlife conservation?

Many species of plants and animals are disappearing right before our eyes. If we don't act fast, it might be too late to save them. Human activities, including pollution, deforestation, hunting, and overpopulation, are devastating the natural environment. Without our help, many species will not survive long enough for our children to see them in the wild. Take the tiger, for example. Today, tigers occupy just seven percent of their historical range, and many local populations are already extinct. Hunted for their beautiful pelts and other body parts, the tiger population has plummeted from one hundred thousand in 1920 to just a few thousand. Contact your local wildlife conservation society today

to find out how you can stop this terrible destruction.

## Choosing Appropriate, Interesting Content

Content refers to all the written substance in a document. After selecting an audience and a purpose, you must choose what information will make it to the page. Content may consist of examples, statistics, facts, anecdotes, testimonies, and observations, but no matter the type, the information must be appropriate and interesting for the audience and purpose. An essay written for third graders that summarizes the legislative process, for example, would have to contain succinct and simple content.

Content is also shaped by tone. When the tone matches the content, the audience will be more engaged, and you will build a stronger relationship with your readers. Consider that audience of third graders. You would choose simple content that the audience will easily understand, and you would express that content through an enthusiastic tone. The same considerations apply to all audiences and purposes.

## 1.3 USING SOURCES

---



Photo by  
Retha  
Ferguson  
from  
Pexels

### **What are “sources” and how do you use them in college?**

A source is anything that you didn’t write or create; a source is anything that you are using to build something that you are writing or creating. You’re probably used to thinking of sources for research papers, such as articles you found through library databases. But you will use sources for almost ALL of your writing in college. For example, the novel, poem, or play you’re reading in English is a source for the literary analysis paper you have to write; a website is a source for a market analysis in your business class; a newspaper editorial is a source for your response in a current events class; a film is the source for a film analysis; a source could be a quote you use to begin a paper in history class, and so on.

### Key Takeaways

Any time that you use something that you did not write or create yourself, you are using a source.

### **What kinds of projects use sources?**

Most of the writing that you will do here will use some kind of source. You will use sources not only in research papers and projects, but also in summaries, analyses, responses, presentations, video and audio projects, editorials, websites, blog posts, slide shows, and even personal essays. Basically, almost everything you write here will have to engage with sources in some way. Why do you have to involve sources in your writing?

Depending on the size and scope of the writing project, you may have to build arguments based on sources you've read in class, you may have to write an argument based on research sources, you may have to write a personal response to a course text, you may have to summarize or analyze a course text, or you may have to present on a text in class. In short, you will need to support what you communicate in the college classroom. You will need evidence. Sources are that evidence.

There is a larger philosophical reason: when you write in academia, you take part in a conversation that has gone on for centuries before you and will go on long after you. Using sources is the main way you become involved in—and later help to shape— that conversation. You converse both with your colleagues and professors about sources, but you also converse with the sources, and that dialogue composes a large measure of your learning. In order to take part in that conversation, you need to understand the conventions of academic culture (even though you may be skeptical or critical of parts of that culture at times). These conventions are not only the conventions of American Standard English but are also the conventions of good source use. This academic conversation is sometimes called the “Burkean Parlor,” for the philosopher Kenneth Burke, who describes academic dialogue in this way:

*Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defense; another aligns himself against*

*you, to either the embarrassment or gratification of your opponent, depending upon the quality of your ally's assistance. However, the discussion is interminable. The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress.*<sup>1</sup>

What kinds of sources should you use, and what parts of them do you use?

The type of class and the assignment will determine what kinds of sources you use. Sometimes you'll use texts that your professor has supplied, and other times, you'll have to go and do research to find outside sources. When dealing with written sources, you'll either quote, paraphrase, or summarize.

When you quote, you use the exact wording from the source.

When you paraphrase, you put a passage or part of a text in your own words, being careful not to copy the sentence structure of the original source.

When you summarize, you give a very broad overview of a passage or a text— writing your summary in a 10th of the size of the original text.

### **How do you use sources well in your writing?**

Good source use means both ethical source use and well-integrated source use. They work together so that at the same time you are giving due credit to the creator of the source you're using or engaging; you are making it work well with your words and ideas.

Ethical Source Use means giving credit, and it also means

providing the required information about the source. Giving credit in something you write may look a lot like the Burke example above, where Burke was introduced by name and then the quote was annotated. There are a number of valid ways to ethically use a source, and these often depend on what discipline you're writing in, such as English, psychology, journalism, or history.

## Guidelines for Source Use

Make sure you have permission to use the source. How do you know? For the most part, you can use a small part of any written text in something you create for school, if you know you have permission and if you give proper credit. An exemption to the U.S. Copyright law says that using a small amount of a source is fine if you're using it "for commentary or scholarship."

Properly cite the source. This means providing information that your reader can use to find the source. In the MLA and APA citation styles, proper citation includes both the in-text citation of the page number, year, and / or author of the source and the full citation at the end of the paper. Other styles, such as the Chicago style (used by historians) use footnotes instead of parenthetical in-text citations.

Include the full citation for the source at the end of your paper.

## Explicating Sources

You can see examples of citations in Documenting Your Source Material in Unit 3. In addition to properly citing the source, you need to integrate it well. This means both introducing cited material effectively with signal phrases and explicating quotations and paraphrases. You do not need to explicate summary, since you are giving a broad overview and don't have to explain it in detail.

In addition to properly introducing and documenting sources, writers need to explicate quotations and paraphrases. Explicating sources means justifying their place in your work. A good guideline to follow for explicating source material (in the form of quotations and paraphrases) is for every sentence of quotation or paraphrase that you use, follow it with three sentences of explication. Those sentences should include this information:

- “In other words”: Tell your readers what the quote or paraphrase means.
- How it supports your argument: Tell your readers how this quote or paraphrase is evidence that supports your argument.
- Context: Provide some context for this quote or paraphrase—where in the text did it come from—the beginning, middle, or end? What is the author of the source doing or trying to do in this section or passage?

## Tips

- Restrict direct quotations to when an author(s) says something that just can't be paraphrased, or when an author(s) says something in a unique way.
  - Quote when authors say something especially relevant or meaningful.
  - Use quotes sparingly. For most of the papers you write, you won't need very long quotes—a good guideline is to use no more than three sentences (which each need three sentences of explication) each time you quote.
  - Do not rely on block quotes; use those only when absolutely necessary and follow your style's the formatting rules for block quotes.

# 1.4 WRITING ABOUT RESEARCH

---

## The Purpose of Research Writing

Who has written poetry about exile? What roles did women play in the American Revolution? Where do cicadas go during their ‘off’ years? When did bookmakers start using movable type? Why was the Great Wall of China built? How does the human brain create, store, and retrieve memories? You may know the answers to these questions off the top of your head. If you are like most people, however, you find answers to tough questions like these by searching the Internet, visiting a library, or asking others for information. To put it simply, you perform research.

Whether or not you realize it, you probably already perform research in your everyday life. When your boss, your instructor, or a family member asks you a question that you don’t know the answer to, you locate relevant information, analyze your findings, and share your results. Locating, analyzing, and sharing information are key steps in the research process. In this chapter, you will learn more about each step. By developing your research writing skills, you will prepare yourself to answer challenging questions.

Sometimes you perform research simply to satisfy your own curiosity. Once you find the answer to your questions, your search may be over, or it may lead to more in-depth research about that topic or about another topic. Other times, you want to communicate what you have learned to your peers, your family, your teachers, or even the editors of magazines, newspapers, or journals. In your personal life, you might simply discuss the topic with your friends. In more formal situations, such as in business and school, you communicate your findings in writing or in a presentation. A report may simply relay the results of your research in an organized manner. In contrast, a research paper presents an original thesis about a topic and develops that thesis with ideas and information gathered from a variety of sources. In a research paper, you use facts, interpretations, and opinions you encounter in your research to create a narrative and support an argument about your topic.

A student in an art history course might write a research paper about an artist's work or an aesthetic movement. A student in a psychology course might write a research paper about current findings in childhood development. No matter what field of study you pursue, you will most likely be asked to write a research paper in your college degree program and to apply the skills of research and writing in your career. For similar reasons as professionals, students do research to answer specific questions, to share their findings with others, to

increase their understanding of challenging topics, and to strengthen their analytical skills.

Having to write a research paper may feel intimidating at first. After all, researching and writing a long paper requires a lot of time, effort, and organization. However, its challenges have rewards. The research process allows you to gain expertise on a topic of your choice. The writing process helps you to remember what you learned and to understand it on a deeper level. Thus writing a research paper can be a great opportunity to explore a topic that particularly interests you and to grow as a person.

### Writing at Work

Knowing how to write a good research paper is a valuable skill that will serve you well throughout your career. For example, laboratory technicians and information technology professionals do research to learn about the latest technological developments in their fields. A small business owner may conduct research to learn about the latest trends in his or her industry. A freelance writer will need to research his or her topics to write informed, up-to-date articles.

Whether you are developing a new product, studying the best way to perform a procedure, discovering the challenges and opportunities in your field of employment, or learning about how to find a job, you will use research techniques to guide your exploration. Because effective communication is essential to any company, employers seek to hire people who can write clearly and professionally.

## Process Overview

How does a research paper grow from a folder of notes to a polished final draft? No two projects are identical, but most writers of research papers follow six basic steps.

### **Step 1: Choosing a Topic**

To narrow the focus of your topic, brainstorm using Prewriting Techniques. Starting with your topic, formulate a specific research question—a broad, open-ended question that will guide your research—as well as propose a possible answer, or a working thesis.

### **Step 2: Planning and Scheduling**

Before you start researching your topic, take time to plan

your researching and writing schedule. Research projects can take days, weeks, or even

months to complete. Creating a schedule is a good way to ensure that

you do not end up being overwhelmed by all the work you have to do as the deadline approaches. During this step of the process, it is also a good idea to plan the resources and organizational tools you will use to keep yourself on track throughout

the project. Flowcharts, calendars, and checklists can all help you stick to your schedule.

### **Step 3: Conducting Research**

When going about your research, you will likely use a variety of sources—anything from books and periodicals to video presentations and in-person interviews. However, you should pay close attention to instructions; instructors often specify what kinds of sources they require for research papers. Some may assign you to only use scholarly (peer-reviewed) sources. For some assignments, your sources might include both primary sources and secondary sources. Primary sources provide firsthand information or raw data. For example, surveys, in-person interviews, historical documents, works of art, and works of literature are primary sources. Secondary sources, such as biographies, literary reviews, or news articles, include some analysis or interpretation of the information presented. As you conduct research, you should take detailed, careful notes about your discoveries. You should also evaluate

the reliability of each source you find, especially sources that are not peer-reviewed.

### Step 4: Organizing Your Research and Ideas



Photo by  
Daria  
Nepriakhi  
na on  
Unsplash

When your research is complete, you will organize your findings and decide which sources to cite in your paper. You will also have an opportunity to evaluate the evidence you have collected and determine whether it supports your thesis, or the focus of your paper. You may decide to adjust your thesis or conduct additional research to ensure that your thesis is well supported.

### Step 5: Drafting Your Paper

Now you are ready to combine your research findings with your critical analysis of the results in a rough draft. You will incorporate source materials into your paper and discuss each source thoughtfully in relation to your thesis or purpose statement. It is important to pay close attention to standard conventions for citing sources in order to avoid plagiarism,

which is the practice of using someone else's words without acknowledging the source. In later sections, you will learn how to incorporate sources in your paper and avoid some of the most common pitfalls of attributing information.

### **Step 6: Revising and Editing Your Paper**

In the final step of the research writing process, you will revise and polish your paper. You might reorganize your paper's structure or revise for unity and cohesion, ensuring that each element in your paper smoothly and logically flows into the next. You will also make sure that your paper uses an appropriate and consistent tone. Once you feel confident in the strength of your writing, you will edit your paper for proper spelling, grammar, punctuation, mechanics, and formatting. When you complete this final step, you will have transformed a simple idea or question into a thoroughly researched and well-written paper of which you can be proud.

Writing a good research paper takes time, thought, and effort. Although this assignment is challenging, it is manageable. Focusing on one step at a time will help you develop a thoughtful, informative, well-supported research paper.

# 1.5 DEVELOPING YOUR TOPIC AND RESEARCH QUESTION

---

Your first step is to choose a topic and then to develop research questions and a working thesis. It's important to set aside adequate time for this part of the process. Fully exploring ideas will help you build a solid foundation for your paper.

## Identifying Potential Topics

When you choose a topic for a research paper, you are making a major commitment. Your choice will help determine whether you enjoy the lengthy process of research and writing—and whether your final paper fulfills the assignment requirements. If you choose your topic hastily, you may later find it difficult to work with your topic. By taking your time and choosing carefully, you can ensure that this assignment is not only challenging but also rewarding.

Writers understand the importance of choosing a topic that fulfills the assignment requirements and fits the assignment's purpose and audience. Choosing a topic that genuinely interests you is also crucial. Your instructor may provide a list

of suggested topics or ask you to develop a topic on your own. You may find inspiration for topic ideas in your everyday life, by browsing magazines, or looking at lists of topics or themes in library databases such as the Gale In Context databases, CQ Researcher, and Literature Resource Center. In addition to Prewriting Techniques (section 1.6), use tools on the Web, such as Topic-o-rama (<http://www.ozline.com/electraguide/topics.html>) and Wridea (<https://wridea.com/>), to help you brainstorm your topic.

You may benefit from identifying several possibilities before committing to one idea. Building a list of potential topics will help you to identify additional, related topics. In this chapter, you will follow a writer named Jorge, who is studying healthcare administration, as he prepares a research paper. Jorge was assigned to write a research paper on current debates about healthy living for an introductory course in health care. Although a general topic was selected for the students, Jorge had to decide which specific issues interested him. He brainstormed the following list of possibilities:

Jorge's Possible Topics

*Health Maintenance Organizations (HMOs)  
in the news*

*Sexual education programs*

*Hollywood and eating disorders*

*Americans' access to public health  
information*

*Medial portrayals of health care reform*

*Depictions of drugs on television*

*The effect of the Internet on mental health*

*Popularized diets (such as low-carbohydrate  
diets)*

*Fear of pandemics (bird flu, H1N1, SARS)*

*Electronic entertainment and obesity*

*Advertisements for prescription drugs*

*Public education and disease prevention*

## Focusing on a Topic

After identifying potential topics, you will need to evaluate your list and choose one topic to pursue as the focus of your research paper. Discussing your ideas with your instructor,

peers, and tutors will help ensure that you choose a manageable topic that fits the requirements of the assignment. The following are some questions to consider:

- Will you be able to find enough information about the topic?
- Can you take an arguable position on the topic?
- Is the topic too broad or too narrow for the scope of the assignment? If so, can you modify the topic so it is more manageable?

You will also need to narrow your topic so you can formulate a concise, manageable thesis about it. Most writers find that the topics they listed during brainstorming or idea mapping are broad—too broad for the scope of the assignment. Working with an overly broad topic, such as sexual education programs or popularized diets, can be frustrating and overwhelming. Each topic has so many facets that it would be impossible to cover them all in a college research paper. However, more specific choices, such as the pros and cons of sexual education in kids’ television programs or the physical effects of the South Beach diet, are specific enough to write about without being so narrow that they can’t sustain an entire research paper. A good research paper provides focused, in-depth information and analysis. If your topic is too broad, you will find it difficult to do more than skim the surface when you research it and write about it. To narrow your focus, explore your topic in writing. Also, conduct preliminary research, including discussing the topic with others.

You may be asking yourself, “How am I supposed to narrow my topic when I haven’t even begun researching yet?” In fact, you may already know more than you realize. Review your list and identify your top two or three topics. Set aside some time to explore each one through Prewriting Techniques (discussed in the section 1.6).

Taking the time to focus on your topic may yield fresh angles. For example, Jorge knew that he was especially interested in the topic of diet fads, but he also knew that it was much too broad for his assignment.

Jorge used freewriting to explore his thoughts so he could narrow his topic. Read Jorge’s following ideas from freewriting.

Our instructors are always saying that accurate, up-to-date information is crucial in encouraging people to make better choices about their health. I don’t think the media does a very good job of providing that, though. Every time I go on the Internet, I see tons of ads for the latest ‘miracle food’. One week it’s acai berries, the next week it’s green tea, and then six months later I see a news story saying all the fabulous claims about acai berries and green tea are overblown! Advice about weight loss is even worse. Think about all the diet books that are out there! Some say that a low-fat diet is best; some say you

should cut down on carbs; and some make bizarre recommendations like eating half a grapefruit with every meal. I don't know how anybody is supposed to make an informed decision about what to eat when there's so much confusing, contradictory information. I bet even doctors, nurses, and dieticians have trouble figuring out what information is reliable and what is just the latest hype.

Another way that writers focus on a topic is by conducting preliminary research. Talk about your ideas with your classmates, friends, and family. Like freewriting, exploratory reading can help you identify interesting angles. Surfing the web is a good way to start. Find out what people are saying about your topic in online newspapers, magazines, blogs, and discussion boards. Keep in mind that the reliability of online sources varies greatly. In this exploratory phase of your research, you do not need to evaluate sources as closely as you will later; however, use common sense as you refine your paper topic. If you read a fascinating blog comment that gives you a new idea, search for some fully developed sources on that topic to see if it's worth pursuing. If you are writing a research paper for a specialized course, look back through your notes and course activities to identify potential topics. Remind yourself of reading assignments and class discussions that especially engaged you. Doing so can help you identify topics to pursue.

If the readings or viewings assigned in your course deal with your topic, then review and take notes on those materials. Librarians and instructors can help you to determine if there are enough sources available on your topic, or if there are so many sources that it would be wise to narrow your topic further.

Jorge's freewriting exercise helped him realize that the assigned topic of current debates about healthy living intersected with a few of his own interests—diet, nutrition, and obesity. Preliminary online research and discussions with his classmates strengthened his impression that many people are confused or misled by media coverage of these subjects. Jorge decided to focus his paper on a topic that had garnered a great deal of media attention—low-carbohydrate diets. He wanted to find out whether low-carbohydrate diets were as effective as their proponents claimed.

### Writing at Work

At work, you may need to research a topic quickly to find general information. This information can be useful in understanding trends in a given industry or generating competition. For example, a company

may research a competitor's prices and use the information when pricing their own product. You may find it useful to skim a variety of sources and take notes on your findings.

## Developing a Research Question and Determining Paths of Inquiry

Your freewriting and preliminary research have helped you choose a focused, manageable topic for your research paper. To work with your topic successfully, you will need to determine what exactly you want to learn about it—and what you want to say about it. Before you begin conducting in-depth research, you will further define your focus by developing research questions and a working thesis.

By forming research questions about your topic, you are setting a goal for your research. Determine your main question—the primary focus of your paper—and several sub-questions that you will need to research in more depth to answer your main question. Your main research question should be substantial enough to form the guiding principle of your paper—but focused enough to guide your research.

A strong research question requires you not only to find information but also to put together different pieces of information, interpret and analyze them, and figure out what you think. As you consider potential research questions, ask yourself whether they would be too hard or too easy to answer. Review the results of your prewriting, and skim through your preliminary research. From these, write both simple, factual questions and more complex questions that would require analysis and interpretation to answer.

Below are the research questions Jorge will use to focus his research. Notice that his main research question has no obvious, straightforward answer. Jorge will need to research his sub-questions, which address narrower topics, to answer his main question.

**Topic:**

*Low-carbohydrate diets*

**Main question:**

*Are low-carbohydrate diets as effective as they have been portrayed to be by media sources?*

**Sub-questions:**

*Who can benefit from following a low-carbohydrate diet?*

*What are the supposed advantages to following a low-carbohydrate diet?*

*When did low-carbohydrate diets become a 'hot' topic in the media?*

*Where do average consumers get information about diet and nutrition?*

*Why has the low-carb approach received so much media attention?*

*How do low-carb diets work?*

A working thesis concisely states a writer's initial answer to the main research question. It does not merely state a fact or present a subjective opinion. Instead, it expresses a debatable idea or claim that you hope to prove through research. Your working thesis is called a working thesis for a reason: it is subject to modification. You may adapt your thinking in light of your research findings. Let your working thesis serve as a guide to your research, but do not hesitate to change your path as you learn about your topic.

One way to determine your working thesis is to consider how you would complete statements that begin, "I believe..." or "My opinion is...". These first-person phrases are useful

starting points even though you may eventually omit them from sentences in your research paper. Generally, formal research papers use an assertive, objective voice and, therefore, do not include first-person pronouns. Some readers associate “I” with informal, subjective writing. Some readers think the first-person point of view diminishes the impact of a claim. For these reasons, some instructors will tell you not to use “I” in research papers.

Jorge began his research with a strong point of view based on his preliminary writing and research. Read his working thesis statement, below, which presents the point he will argue. Notice how it states Jorge’s tentative answer to his research question.

***Main research question:***

*Are low-carb diets as effective as they have sometimes been portrayed to be by the mass media?*

***Working thesis statement:***

*Low-carb diets do not live up to the media hype surrounding them.*



*One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You*

*can view them online here:*

[https://open.ocolearnok.org/  
tccecorecomp2/?p=52#oembed-1](https://open.ocolearnok.org/tccecorecomp2/?p=52#oembed-1)

## Writing at Work

Before you begin a new project at work, you may have to develop a project summary document that states the purpose of the project, explains why it would be a wise use of company resources, and briefly outlines the steps involved in completing the project. This type of document is similar to a research proposal for an academic purpose. Both define and limit a project, explain its value, discuss how to proceed, and identify what resources you will use.

# 1.6 PREWRITING TECHNIQUES

---

Loosely defined, prewriting includes all the writing strategies employed before writing your first draft. Although many more prewriting strategies exist, the following section covers: using experience and observations, reading, freewriting, asking questions, listing, and clustering/idea mapping. Using the strategies in the following section can help you overcome the fear of the blank page and confidently begin the writing process.

## Choosing a Topic

In addition to understanding that writing is a process, writers also understand that choosing a good general topic for an assignment is an essential first step. Sometimes your instructor will give you an idea to begin an assignment, and other times your instructor will ask you to come up with a topic on your own. A good topic not only covers what an assignment will be about, but it also fits the assignment's purpose and its audience.

In the next few sections, you will follow a writer named Mariah as she explores and develops her essay's topic and focus.

You will also be planning one of your own. The first important step is for you to tell yourself why you are writing (to inform, to explain, or some other purpose) and for whom you are writing. Write your purpose and your audience on your own sheet of paper, and keep the paper close by as you read and complete exercises in this chapter and write the first draft.



*One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:*

<https://open.oclearnok.org/tccecorecomp2/?p=54#oembed-1>

## Prewriting Techniques: Brainstorming

Brainstorming refers to writing techniques used to:

- Generate topic ideas
- Transfer your abstract thoughts on a topic into more concrete ideas on paper (or digitally on a computer screen)
- Organize the ideas you have generated to discover a focus and develop a working thesis

Although brainstorming techniques can be helpful in all stages of the writing process, you will have to find the

techniques that are most effective for your writing needs. The following general strategies can be used when initially deciding on a topic, or for narrowing the focus for a topic: **Freewriting, Asking questions, Listing, and Clustering/Idea Mapping.**

In the initial stage of the writing process, it is fine if you choose a general topic. Later you can use brainstorming strategies to narrow the focus of the topic.

## Experience and Observations

When selecting a topic, you may want to consider something that interests you or something based on your own life and personal experiences. Even everyday observations can lead to interesting topics. After writers think about their experiences and observations, they often take notes on paper to better develop their thoughts.

These notes help writers discover what they have to say about their topic.

### **Reading**

Reading plays a vital role in all the stages of the writing process, but it first figures in the development of ideas and topics. Different kinds of documents can help you choose and develop a topic. For example, a magazine cover advertising the latest research on the threat of global warming may catch your eye in the supermarket. This subject may interest you, and you may consider global warming as a topic. Or maybe a novel's

courtroom drama sparks your curiosity of a particular lawsuit or legal controversy.

After you choose a topic, critical reading is essential to the development of a topic. While reading almost any document, you evaluate the author's point of view by thinking about his main idea and his support. When you judge the author's argument, you discover more about not only the author's opinion but also your own. If this step already seems daunting, remember that even the best writers need to use prewriting strategies to generate ideas.

Prewriting strategies depend on your critical reading skills. Reading, prewriting and brainstorming exercises (and outlines and drafts later in the writing process) will further develop your topic and ideas. As you continue to follow the writing process, you will see how Mariah uses critical reading skills to assess her own prewriting exercises.

### **Freewriting**

Freewriting is an exercise in which you write freely about any topic for a set amount of time (usually five to seven minutes). During the time limit, you may jot down any thoughts that come to your mind. Try not to worry about grammar, spelling, or punctuation. Instead, write as quickly as you can without stopping. If you get stuck, just copy the same word or phrase over and over again until you come up with a new thought.

Writing often comes easier when you have a personal connection with the topic you have chosen. Remember, to

generate ideas in your freewriting, you may also think about readings that you have enjoyed or that have challenged your thinking. Doing this may lead your thoughts in interesting directions.

Quickly recording your thoughts on paper will help you discover what you have to say about a topic. When writing quickly, try not to doubt or question your ideas. Allow yourself to write freely and unselfconsciously. Once you start writing with few limitations, you may find you have more to say than you first realized. Your flow of thoughts can lead you to discover even more ideas about the topic. Freewriting may even lead you to discover another topic that excites you even more.

Look at the example below. The instructor allowed the members of the class to choose their own topics, and Mariah thought about her experiences as a communications major. She used this freewriting exercise to help her generate more concrete ideas from her own experience.

#### Freewriting Example

*Last semester my favorite class was about mass media. We got to study radio and*

television. People say we watch too much television, and even though I try not to, I end up watching a few reality shows just to relax. Everyone has to relax! It's too hard to relax when something like the news (my husband watches all the time) is on because it's too scary now. Too much bad news, not enough good news. News. Newspapers I don't read as much anymore. I can get the headlines on my homepage when I check my email. Email could be considered mass media too these days. I used to go to the video store a few times a week before I started school, but now the only way I know what movies are current is to listen for the Oscar nominations. We have cable but we can't afford movie channels, so I sometimes look at older movies late at night. UGH. A few of them get played again and again until you're sick of them. My husband thinks I'm crazy, but sometimes there are old black-and-whites on from the 1930s and '40s. I could never live my life in black-and-white. I like the home decorating shows and love how people use color on their walls. Makes rooms look so bright. When we

*buy a home, if we ever can, I'll use lots of color. Some of those shows even show you how to do major renovations by yourself. Knock down walls and everything. Not for me—or my husband. I'm handier than he is. I wonder if they could make a reality show about us?*

## Narrowing the focus

After rereading her essay assignment, Mariah realized her general topic, mass media, is too broad for her class's short paper requirement. Three pages are not enough to cover all the concerns in mass media today. Mariah also realized that although her readers are other communications majors who are interested in the topic, they might want to read a paper about a particular issue in mass media.

The prewriting techniques of brainstorming by freewriting and asking questions helped Mariah think more about her topic, but the following prewriting strategies can help her (and you) narrow the focus of the topic:

- Listing

- Clustering/Idea Mapping

Narrowing the focus means breaking up the topic into subtopics, or more specific points. Generating lots of subtopics will help you eventually select the ones that fit the assignment and appeal to you and your audience.

### **Listing**

Listing is a term often applied to describe any prewriting technique writers use to generate ideas on a topic, including freewriting and asking questions. You can make a list on your own or in a group with your classmates. Start with a blank sheet of paper (or a blank computer screen) and write your general topic across the top. Underneath your topic, make a list of more specific ideas. Think of your general topic as a broad category and then list items as things that fit in that category. Often you will find that one item can lead to the next, creating a flow of ideas that can help you narrow your focus to a more specific paper topic. The following is Mariah's brainstorming list:

*Mass Media:*

*Magazines*

*Newspapers*

*Broadcasting*

*Radio*

*Television*

*DVDs*

*Gaming/Video Games*

*Internet*

*Cellphones*

*Smart Phones*

*Text Messages*

*Tiny Cameras*

*GPS*

From this list, Mariah could narrow her focus to a particular technology under the broad category of “mass media.”

### **Idea Mapping**

Idea mapping, sometimes called clustering or webbing, allows you to visualize your ideas on paper using circles, lines, and arrows. This technique is also known as clustering because ideas are broken down and clustered, or grouped together. Many writers like this method because the shapes show how the ideas relate or connect, and writers can find a focused topic from the connections mapped. Using idea mapping, you might discover interesting connections between topics that you had not thought of before.

**To create an idea map:**

1. Start by writing your general topic in a circle in the center of a blank sheet of paper. Moving out from the main circle, write down as many concepts and terms/ideas you can think of related to your general topic in blank areas of the page. Jot down your ideas quickly—do not overthink your responses. Try to fill the page.

2. Once you've filled the page, circle the concepts and terms that are relevant to your topic. Use lines or arrows to categorize and connect closely related ideas. Add and cluster as many ideas as you can think of.

To continue brainstorming, Mariah tried idea mapping. Review the following idea map that Mariah created:



Notice Mariah's largest circle contains her general topic, mass media. Then, the general topic branches into two subtopics written in two smaller circles: television and radio. The subtopic television branches into even more specific topics: cable and DVDs. From there, Mariah drew more circles and wrote more specific ideas: high definition and digital recording from cable and Blu-ray from DVDs. The radio topic led Mariah to draw connections between music, downloads versus CDs, and, finally, piracy. From this idea map, Mariah saw she could consider narrowing the focus of her mass media topic to the more specific topic of music piracy.

## Topic Checklist: Developing a Good Topic

- Am I interested in this topic?
  - Would my audience be interested?
  - Do I have prior knowledge or experience with this topic? If so, would I be comfortable exploring this topic and sharing my experience?
  - Do I want to learn more about this topic?
  - Is this topic specific?
  - Does it fit the length of the assignment?

Prewriting strategies are a vital first step in the writing process. First, they help you choose a broad topic, and then they help you narrow the focus of the topic to a more specific idea.

# UNIT 2: HOW CAN I FIND RESEARCH?: FROM RESEARCH QUESTION TO RESEARCH NOTES

---

Now that you have determined a topic for your research paper, it is time to find out more about that topic. Please watch these two videos about finding and evaluating sources, then move on to the other pages in this unit.



*One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:*

<https://open.oclearnok.org/tccorecomp2/?p=56#oembed-1>



*One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You*

*can view them online here:*

[https://open.ocolearnok.org/  
tccecorecomp2/?p=56#oembed-2](https://open.ocolearnok.org/tccecorecomp2/?p=56#oembed-2)

## 2.1 SCHEDULING YOUR RESEARCH

---

Step 1 “Choosing a Topic” (section 1.5), helped you begin to plan the content of your research paper—your topic, research questions, and preliminary thesis. It is equally important to plan out the process of researching and writing the paper. Although some types of writing assignments can be completed relatively quickly, developing a good research paper is a complex process that takes time and attention. Careful planning helps ensure that you will keep your project running smoothly and produce your best work. Think about how you will complete each step and what resources you will use. Resources may include anything from online databases and digital technologies to interview subjects and writing tutors.

### Scheduling Research and Writing

Set up a project schedule that shows when you will complete each step. To develop your schedule, use a calendar and work backward from the date your final draft is due. Generally, it is wise to divide half of the available time on the research phase of the project and half on the writing phase. For example, if you have a month to work, plan for two weeks for each phase.

If you have a full semester, plan to begin research early and to start writing by the middle of the term. You might think that no one really works that far ahead, but try it. You will probably be pleased with the quality of your work and with the reduction in your stress level.

Plan your schedule realistically, and consider other commitments that may sometimes take precedence. A business trip or family visit may mean that you are unable to work on the research project for a few days. Make the most of the time you have available. Plan for unexpected interruptions, but keep in mind that a short time away from the project may help you come back to it with renewed enthusiasm. Another strategy many writers find helpful is to finish each day's work at a point when the next task is an easy one. That makes it easier to start again.

As you plan, break down major steps into smaller tasks if necessary. For example, Step 3: Conducting Research, involves locating potential sources, evaluating their usefulness and reliability, reading, and taking notes. Defining these smaller tasks makes the project more manageable by giving you concrete goals to achieve.

Jorge had six weeks to complete his research project. Working backward from a due date of May 2, he mapped out a schedule for completing his research by early April so that he would have ample time to write. Jorge chose to write his schedule in his weekly planner to help keep himself on track. Review Jorge's schedule. Key target dates are shaded.

Note that Jorge planned times to use available resources by visiting the library and writing center and by meeting with his instructor.

Sample Schedule for Writing a Research Paper

| S        | M                                | T                       | W                    | T   | F                       | S                       |
|----------|----------------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|---|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| March 20 | 21                               | 22                      | 23                   | 24  | 25                      | 26                      |
|          |                                  | Choose Topic            | Preliminary research | Write research questions and working thesis | Write research proposal |                         |
| 27       | 28                               | 29                      | 30                   | 31  | April 1                 | 2                       |
|          | Research proposal due            | Look for sources online | Library              | Evaluate sources; make source cards         | Take notes              | →                       |
| 3        | 4                                | 5                       | 6                    | 7   | 8                       | 9                       |
| →        | →                                | Finish note cards       | Organize notes       | →   | Write outline           | →                       |
| 10       | 11                               | 12                      | 13                   | 14  | 15                      | 16                      |
|          | Outline due                      | Write draft             |                      |   | Off - Trip to NYC       | Off - Trip to NYC       |
| 17       | 18                               | 19                      | 20                   | 21  | 22                      | 23                      |
|          | Conference with Prof. Habib 2:00 | Finish writing draft    |                      | Revise draft                                | →                       | Library?                |
| 24       | 25                               | 26                      | 27                   | 28  | 29                      | 30                      |
|          |                                  | Finish revising draft   | Edit draft           | Writing Center 4:30                         | Finish editing draft    | Create Works Cited page |
| May 1    | 2                                | 3                       | 4                    | 5   | 6                       | 7                       |
|          | Final draft due                  |                         |                      |   |                         |                         |

## 2.2 STAYING ORGANIZED

---

Although setting up a schedule is relatively easy, sticking to one is challenging. Even if you are the rare person who never procrastinates, unforeseen events may interfere with your ability to complete tasks on time. A self-imposed deadline may slip your mind despite your best intentions. Organizational tools (e.g., calendars, checklists, note cards, software) and setting up a buddy system with a classmate can help you stay on track.

Throughout your project, organize both your time and resources systematically. Review your schedule frequently and check your progress. It helps to post your schedule in a place where you will see it every day. Email systems usually include a calendar feature where you can record tasks, arrange to receive daily reminders, and check off completed tasks. Electronic devices such as smartphones have similar features. There are online task-management tools you may use for free on the Web, such as Google Tasks, HiTask (<https://hitask.com/>), Nirvana (<https://nirvanahq.com/>), and Remember the Milk (<https://www.rememberthemilk.com/>). Some people enjoy using the most up-to-date technology to help them stay organized. Other people prefer simple methods, such as crossing off items on a checklist. The key to staying organized

is finding a system you like enough to use daily. The particulars of the method are not important as long as you are consistent.

Organize project documents in a binder or digital folder. Label these clearly. Use note cards, an electronic document, an online database folder (this will require you to set up a free account on the database), or free downloadable software such as Zotero (<https://www.zotero.org/>) to record bibliographical information for sources you want to use in your paper. Tracking this information during the research process will save you time when creating a list of references.

### Writing at Work

When you create a project schedule at work, you set target dates for completing certain tasks and identify the resources you plan to use on the project. It is important to build in some flexibility. Materials may not be received on time because of a shipping delay. An employee on your team may be called away to work on a higher-priority project. Essential equipment may malfunction. You should always plan for the unexpected.

## Anticipating Challenges

Do any of these scenarios sound familiar? You have identified a book that would be a great resource for your project, but it is currently checked out of the library. You planned to interview a subject-matter expert on your topic, but she calls to cancel. You have begun writing your draft, but now you realize that you will need to modify your thesis and conduct additional research. Or, you have finally completed your draft when your computer crashes, and days of hard work disappear in an instant. These troubling situations are all too common. No matter how carefully you plan your schedule, you may encounter a glitch or setback. Managing your project effectively means anticipating potential problems, taking steps to minimize them where possible, and allowing time in your schedule to handle any setbacks.

Many times a situation becomes a problem due only to lack of planning. For example, if a book is checked out of your college's library, you can request it through interlibrary loan to have it delivered to your campus in a few days. Alternatively, you might locate another equally useful source. If you have allowed enough time for research, a brief delay will not become a major setback.

You can manage other potential problems by staying organized and maintaining a take-charge attitude. Take the

time to save a backup copy of your work on a portable flash drive. Or, instead of using the hard drive of one computer to save your work, create your word-processing files using cloud storage such as Dropbox or Google Drive, which you can access with a username and password from any computer with an Internet connection. If you don't have a reliable Internet connection off campus, then visit a computer lab on campus or a public library with desktop computers, or you can go to a coffee shop with a laptop; it is important to find a space where you can concentrate and that is open during times that work with your schedule. As you conduct research, maintain detailed records and notes of sources—doing so will make citing sources in your draft infinitely easier. If you run into difficulties with your research or your writing, ask your instructor or a librarian for help, or meet with a peer or writing tutor.

### Writing at Work

In the workplace, documents prepared at the beginning of a project often include a detailed plan for risk management. When you manage a project, it makes sense to anticipate and prepare for potential

setbacks. For example, to roll out a new product line, a software development company must strive to complete tasks on a schedule in order to meet the new product release date. The project manager may need to adjust the project plan if one or more tasks fall behind schedule.

## 2.3 GATHERING YOUR SOURCES

---

Now that you have planned your research project, you are ready to begin the research. This phase can be both exciting and challenging. As you read this section, you will learn ways to locate sources efficiently, so you will have enough time to read the sources, take notes, and think about how to use them in your research paper. In addition to finding sources, research entails determining the relevance and reliability of sources, organizing findings, as well as deciding whether and how to use sources in your paper. The technological advances of the past few decades—particularly the rise of online media—mean that, as a twenty-first-century student, you have countless sources of information available at your fingertips. But how can you tell whether a source is reliable? This section will discuss strategies for finding and evaluating sources so that you can be a media-savvy researcher.

Depending on your assignment, you will likely search for sources by using:

- **Internet search engines** to locate sources freely available on the web.
- **A library's online catalog** to identify print books, ebooks, periodicals, DVDs, and other items in

the library's collection. The catalog will help you find journals by title, but it will not list the journal's articles by title or author.

- **Online databases** to locate articles, ebooks, streaming videos, images, and other electronic resources. These databases can also help you identify articles in print periodicals.

Your instructor, as well as writing tutors and librarians, at your college can help you determine which of these methods will best fit your project and learn to use the search tools available to you. You can also find research guides and tutorials on library websites and YouTube channels that can help you identify appropriate research tools and learn how to use them. As you gather sources, you will need to examine them with a critical eye. Smart researchers continually ask themselves two questions: “Is this source relevant to my purpose?” and “Is this source reliable?” The first question will help you avoid wasting valuable time reading sources that stray too far from your specific topic and research questions. The second question will help you find accurate, trustworthy sources.

Writing at Work

Businesses, government organizations, and nonprofit organizations produce published materials that range from brief advertisements and brochures to lengthy, detailed reports. In many cases, producing these publications requires research. A corporation's annual report may include research about economic or industry trends. A charitable organization may use information from research in materials sent to potential donors. Regardless of the industry you work in, you may be asked to assist in developing materials for publication. Often, incorporating research in these documents can make them more effective in informing or persuading readers.

## 2.4 TYPES OF SOURCES

---

### Primary and Secondary Periodicals

When you chose a paper topic and determined your research questions, you conducted preliminary research to stimulate your thinking. Your research plan included some general ideas for how to go about your research—for instance, interviewing an expert in the field or analyzing the content of popular magazines. You may even have identified a few potential sources. Now it is time to conduct a more focused, systematic search for informative primary and secondary sources. Writers classify research resources in two categories: primary sources and secondary sources.

**Primary sources** are direct, firsthand sources of information or data. For example, if you were writing a paper about the First Amendment right to freedom of speech, the text of the First Amendment in the Bill of Rights would be a primary source. Other primary sources include the following:

- Data
- Works of visual art
- Literary texts
- Historical documents such as diaries or letters

- Autobiographies, interviews, or other personal accounts

**Secondary sources** discuss, interpret, analyze, consolidate, or otherwise rework information from primary sources. In researching a paper about the First Amendment, you might read articles about legal cases that involved First Amendment rights, or editorials expressing commentary on the First Amendment. These sources would be considered secondary sources because they are one step removed from the primary source of information. The following are examples of secondary sources:

- Literary criticism
- Biographies
- Reviews
- Documentaries
- News reports

Your topic and purpose determine whether you must cite both primary and secondary sources in your paper. Ask yourself which sources are most likely to provide the information that will answer your research questions. If you are writing a research paper about reality television shows, you will need to use some reality shows as a primary source, but secondary sources, such as a reviewer's critique, are also important. If you are writing about the health effects of nicotine, you will probably want to read the published results of scientific studies, but secondary sources, such as magazine

articles discussing the outcome of a recent study, may also be helpful.

Some sources could be considered primary or secondary sources, depending on the writer's purpose for using them. For instance, if a writer's purpose is to inform readers about how the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation has affected elementary education in the United States, then a *Time* magazine article on the subject would be a secondary source. However, suppose the writer's purpose is to analyze how the news media has portrayed the effects of NCLB. In that case, articles about the legislation in news magazines like *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *US News & World Report* would be primary sources. They provide firsthand examples of the media coverage the writer is analyzing.

Once you have thought about what kinds of sources are most likely to help you answer your research questions, you may begin your search for sources. The challenge here is to conduct your search both efficiently and thoroughly. On the one hand, effective writers use strategies to help them find the sources that are most relevant and reliable while steering clear of sources that will not be useful; on the other hand, they are open to pursuing different lines of inquiry that come up along the way than those that seemed relevant at the start of research. As a process of discovery, good research requires critical thinking about, and often revising of, writers' plans and ideas.



*One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You*

*can view them online here:*

<https://open.ocolearnok.org/tccecorecomp2/?p=63#oembed-1>

## Popular and Scholarly Sources

When you search for periodicals, be sure to distinguish among different types. Mass- market publications, such as newspapers and popular magazines, differ from scholarly publications in their accessibility, audience, and purpose. Newspapers and magazines are written for a broader audience than scholarly journals. Their content is usually quite accessible and easy to read. Trade magazines that target readers within a particular industry may presume the reader has background knowledge, but these publications are still reader-friendly for a broader audience. Their purpose is to inform and, often, to entertain or persuade readers as well.

Scholarly or academic journals are written for a much smaller and more expert audience. The creators of these publications are experts in the subject and assume that most of their readers are already familiar with the main topic of the journal. The target audience is also highly educated. Informing is the primary purpose of a scholarly journal. While a journal

article may advance an agenda or advocate a position, the content will still be presented in an objective style and formal tone. Entertaining readers with breezy comments and splashy graphics is not a priority.

Because of these differences, scholarly journals are more challenging to read. That doesn't mean you should avoid them. On the contrary, they can provide in-depth information unavailable elsewhere. Because knowledgeable professionals carefully review the content before publication in a process called "peer-review," scholarly journals are far more reliable than much of the information available in popular media. Seek out academic journals along with other resources. Just be prepared to spend a little more time processing the information.



*One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:*

<https://open.ocolearnok.org/tccecorecomp2/?p=63#oembed-2>

Periodicals databases are not just for students writing research papers. They also provide a valuable service to workers in various fields. The owner of a small business might use a database such as Business Source Premiere to find articles on management, finance, or trends within a particular industry. Health care professionals might consult databases such as MedLine to research a particular disease or medication. Regardless of what career path you plan to pursue, periodicals databases can be a useful tool for researching specific topics and identifying periodicals that will help you keep up with the latest news in your industry.

## Web Sources

When faced with the challenge of writing a research paper, some students rely on popular search engines, such as Google, as their only source of information. Typing a keyword or phrase into a search engine instantly pulls up links to dozens, hundreds, or even thousands of related websites—what could be easier? While the Web is useful for retrieving information,

you should be wary of limiting your research to sources from the open Web.

For example, wikis, including online encyclopedias, such as Wikipedia, and community- driven question-and-answer sites, such as Yahoo Answers, are very easy to access on the Web. They are free, and they appear among the first few results when using a search engine. Because these sites are created and revised by a large community of users, they cover thousands of topics, and many are written in an informal and straightforward writing style. However, these sites may not have a reliable control system for researching, writing, and reviewing posts. While wikis may be a good starting point for finding other, more trustworthy, more fully developed sources, usually they should not be your final sources.



*One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:*

<https://open.ocolearnok.org/tccecorecomp2/?p=63#oembed-3>

Despite its apparent convenience, researching on the open Web has the following drawbacks to consider:

- Results do not consider the reliability of the sources. The first few hits that appear in search results

often include sites whose content is not always reliable. Search engines cannot tell you which sites have accurate information.

- Results may be influenced by popularity or advertisers. Search engines find websites that people visit often and list the results in order of popularity rather than relevance to your topic.

- Results may be too numerous for you to use. Search engines often return an overwhelming number of results. Because it is difficult to filter results for quality or relevance, the most useful sites may be buried deep within your search results. It is not realistic for you to examine every site.

- Results do not include many of the library's high quality electronic resources that are only available through password-protected databases or on campus.

- Because anyone can publish anything on the Web, the quality of the information varies greatly, and you will need to evaluate web resources carefully.



Nevertheless, a search on the open Web can provide a helpful overview of a topic and may pull up genuinely useful sources. You may find specialized search engines

recommended on your college library's website. For example, <http://www.usa.gov> will search for information on

United States government websites. If you are working at your personal computer, use the Bookmarks or Favorites feature of your web browser to save and organize sites that look promising.

To get the most out of a search engine, use strategies to make your search more efficient. Depending on the specific search engine you use, the following options may be available:

- Limit results to websites that have been updated within a particular time frame.
- Limit results by language or region.
- Limit results to scholarly works available online.

Google Scholar is an example.

- Limit results by file type.
- Limit results to a particular site or domain type, such as .edu (school and university sites) or .gov (government sites). This is a quick way to filter out commercial sites that often lead to less objective results.

## Types and Formats of Library Sources

Information accessible through a college library comes in a variety of types and formats of sources. Books, DVDs, and various types of periodicals can be found in physical form at the library. Many of these same materials are available in electronic format in the form of ebooks, electronic journal articles, and streaming videos. Your college library may have

some resources in both print and electronic formats while others may be available exclusively in one format. The following lists different types of resources available at college libraries. In addition to the resources noted, library holdings may include primary sources such as historical documents, letters, diaries, and images.

## Types of sources

**Reference works** provide a summary of information about a particular topic. Almanacs, encyclopedias, atlases, medical reference books, and scientific abstracts are examples of reference works. In most cases, reference books may not be checked out of a library. Note that reference works are many steps removed from original primary sources and are often brief, so these should be used only as a starting point when you gather information.

### Examples

The World Almanac and Book of Facts 2010;  
Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, published by the  
American Psychiatric Association.

**Nonfiction books** provide in-depth coverage of a topic. Trade books, biographies, and how-to guides are usually written for a general audience. Scholarly books and scientific studies are usually written for an audience that has specialized knowledge of a topic.

### Examples

*The Low-Carb Solution: A Slimmer You in 30 Days; Carbohydrates, Fats and Proteins: Exploring the Relationship Between Macronutrient Ratios and Health Outcomes*

**Periodicals** are published at regular intervals—daily, weekly, monthly, or quarterly. Newspapers, magazines, and academic journals are different kinds of periodicals. Some periodicals provide articles on subjects of general interest while others are more specialized.

### Examples

The New York Times; PC Magazine; JAMA: The Journal of the American Medical Association.

**Government publications** by federal, state, and local agencies publish information on a variety of topics. Government publications include reports, legislation, court documents, public records, statistics, studies, guides, programs, and forms.

### Examples

The Census 2000 Profile; The Business Relocation Package, published by the Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce.

**Business publications** and publications by nonprofit

organizations are designed to market a product, provide background about the organization, provide information on topics connected to the organization, or promote a cause. These publications include reports, newsletters, advertisements, manuals, brochures, and other print documents.

### Examples

A company's instruction manual explaining how to use a specific software program; a news release published by the Sierra Club.

**Documentaries** are the moving-image equivalent of nonfiction books. They cover a range of topics and can be introductory or scholarly. Newsreels can be primary sources about then-current events. Feature-length programs or episodes of a series can be secondary sources about historical phenomena or life stories. You may view a documentary in a movie theater, on television, on an open website, or in a subscription-accessed database such as Films on Demand.

### Examples

Freedom Riders, directed by Stanley Nelson; Finding Your Roots, with Henry Louis Gates, Jr.

As you gather information, strive for a balance of accessible, easy-to-read sources and more specialized, challenging sources. Relying solely on lightweight books and articles written for a general audience will drastically limit the range of useful, substantial information. However, restricting oneself to dense, scholarly works could make the research process overwhelming. An effective strategy for unfamiliar topics is to begin your reading with works written for the general public, and then move to more scholarly works as you learn more about your topic.

## 2.5 USING DATABASES

---

While library catalogs can help you locate print and electronic book-length sources, as well as some types of non-print holdings, such as CDs, DVDs, and audiobooks, the best way to locate shorter sources, such as articles in magazines, newspapers, and journals, is to search online databases accessible through a portal to which your college's library subscribes. In many cases, the full texts of articles are available from these databases. In other instances, articles are indexed, meaning there is a summary and publication information about the article, but the full text is not immediately available in the database; instead, you may find the indexed article in a print periodical in your college's library holdings, or you can submit an online request for an interlibrary loan, and a librarian will email a digitized copy of the article to you.

When searching for sources using a password-protected portal, such as the databases at the Tulsa Community College Library, it's important to understand where and how to look up your topic. (To access most results, it is necessary to be logged in through MyTCC.) On its homepage, TCC Library has a general search bar called the "Discovery" tool, which allows you to search many (but not all) databases at once. If you don't find useful sources using the portal's general

search bar, then you may retrieve better results by going to specific databases within the portal. These can be found under the “Articles & Databases” link on the website. Databases may be general, including many types of resources on a broad range of subjects, or they may be specialized, focusing on a particular format of resource or a specific subject area. The following list describes some commonly used indexes and databases accessible through libraries’ research portals.

- **Academic Search Premier** includes articles on a wide variety of topics published in various forums, both scholarly and popular.
- **Opposing Viewpoints** includes articles, statistics, and recommended websites related to a wide range of controversial issues.
- **CQ Researcher** Online has full-text articles about issues in the news.
- **Business Source Premier** comprises business-related content from magazines, journals, and trade publications.
- **Films on Demand** has streaming video of documentaries and historic newsreels.
- **Artstor** has high-quality images of works of visual art of various media, as well as information on the creators, subjects, materials, and holdings of artworks.
- **JSTOR** includes full-text scholarly secondary sources, including books and articles, as well as

primary sources on a wide variety of topics, mostly in the humanities and social sciences.

- **U.S. History in Context** and **World History in Context** both have contextual information on people, events, and topics in history. It includes full-text magazines, journals, primary source documents, images, videos, audio and links to vetted websites.

- **Literature Resource Center** includes full-text print and electronic sources relevant to literature, such as biographies of authors, reviews of works, overviews of plots and characters, analyses of themes, and scholarly criticism.

- **ScienceDirect** has journal articles from journals in various scientific and technical fields.

- **MEDLINE** and **Health Source Consumer Edition** contain articles in medicine and health.



*One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You*

*can view them online here:*

<https://open.ocolearnok.org/tccorecomp2/?p=65#oembed-1>

Sometimes you will know exactly which source you are looking for, for example, if your instructor or another writer references

that source. Having the author (if available), title, and other information about the source included in an end-of-text citation will help you to find that source. However, keep in mind that, especially when you first start researching, you will also need to find sources about your topic having little or no idea what sources are out there. Therefore, rather than authors and titles, you will need to enter keywords, or subject search terms, related to your topic. The next section instructs you on how to do that.

## Entering Search Terms

One of the most important steps in conducting research is to learn how to communicate with a database. To find reliable sources efficiently, you must identify single words or phrases that represent the major concepts of your research—that is, your keywords, or subject search terms. Your starting points for developing search terms are the topic and the research questions you identify, but you should also think of synonyms for those terms. Furthermore, as you begin searching for sources, you should notice additional terms in the subjects listed in the records of your results. These subjects will help you find additional sources.

As Jorge used his library's catalog and databases, he worked to refine his search by making note of subjects associated with sources about low-carb dieting. His search helped him to

identify the following additional terms and related topics to research:

- *Low-carbohydrate diet*
- *Insulin resistance reducing diets*
- *Glycemic index*
- *Dietary carbohydrates*

Searching the library's online resources is similar in many ways to searching the Internet, except some library catalogs and databases require specific search techniques. For example, some databases require that you use Boolean operators to connect your search terms. In other databases, Boolean operators are optional, but can still help you get better search results. Here are some of the ways you can use **Boolean operators**:


- **Connect keywords with AND** to limit results to citations that include both keywords—for example, carbohydrates AND diet.
- **Connect keywords with OR** to search for results that contain either of two terms. For example, searching for diet OR nutrition locates articles that

use “diet” as a keyword as well as articles that use “nutrition” as a keyword.

- **Connect keywords with NOT** to search for the first word without the second. This can help you eliminate irrelevant results based on words that are similar to your search term. For example, searching for obesity NOT childhood locates materials on obesity but excludes materials on childhood obesity.

- **Enclose a phrase in quotation marks** to search for an exact phrase, such as “morbid obesity.”

Here is an example of using Boolean operators in an Advanced Search:



|               |                    |
|---------------|--------------------|
| carbohydrates | SU Subject Terms ▼ |
| AND ▼         | diet or nutrition  |
|               | SU Subject Terms ▼ |

Many databases offer tools for improving your search. Make your search in library catalogs and databases more effective by using the following tips:

- **Use limiters** (often located on the left side of the search results) to further refine your results after searching.
- **Change the sort of your results** so the order of the articles best fits your needs. Sorting by date allows

you to put the most recent or the oldest articles at the top of the results list. Other types of sorts include relevance, alphabetical by author's name or alphabetical by article title.

- **Use the Advanced Search** functions of your database to further refine your results or to create more complex combinations of search terms.

- **Use the Help** section of the database to find more search strategies that apply to that particular database.



*One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:*

<https://open.oclearnok.org/tcccorecomp2/?p=65#oembed-2>

## Consulting a Reference Librarian

Sifting through library stacks and database search results to find the information you need can be like trying to find a needle in a haystack. Knowing the right keywords can sometimes make all the difference in conducting a successful search. If you are not sure how you should begin your search, or if your search is yielding too many, or too few, results, then you are not alone. Many students find this process challenging,

although it does get easier with experience. One way to learn better search strategies is to consult a reference librarian and watch online tutorials that research experts have created to help you. If you have trouble finding sources on a topic, consult a librarian.

Reference librarians are intimately familiar with the systems that libraries use to organize and classify information. They can help you locate a particular book in the library stacks, steer you toward useful reference works, and provide tips on how to use databases and other electronic research tools. Take the time to see what resources you can find on your own, but if you encounter difficulties, ask for help. Many academic librarians are available for online chatting, texting, and emailing as well as face-to-face reference consultations. To make the most of your reference consultation, be prepared to explain, to the librarian, the assignment and your timeline as well as your research questions and ideas for keywords. Because they are familiar with the resources available, librarians may be able to recommend specific resources that fit your needs and tailor your keywords to the search tools you are using.

You can make an appointment with a Tulsa Community College Librarian on the library website under “[Schedule a Research Consultation](#)”.

## 2.6 USING THE TCC LIBRARY

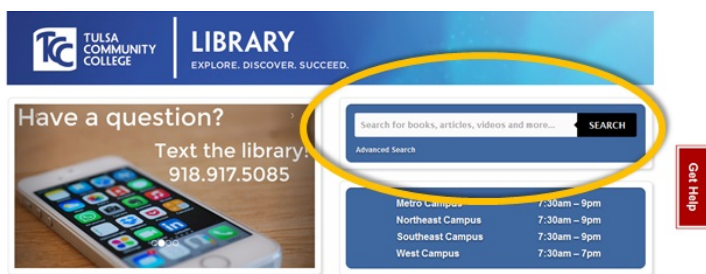
---

The Tulsa Community College Library website is located at [library.tulsacc.edu](http://library.tulsacc.edu). You can get there through the main TCC homepage under the “Student Resources” menu, and also through MyTCC. There is a link to the library on the “Student Home” page in the quick links box. There are many resources available to students from the library page, and most will require you to be logged in through MyTCC. This includes the databases mentioned in the previous section. In this section of the text, we will focus on the Library’s “Discovery” search.

### What is Discovery Search?

Discovery search is a fast and convenient way to search both the library catalog and the library databases at the same time. Discovery search lets you discover the library, and your search will display records for books, ebooks, and journal

articles in one convenient place.



Think of Discovery as a database that sits on top of the other databases. It searches a massive collection of resources from various databases and directs you to the one that best fits your needs.



*One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:*

<https://open.oclearnok.org/tccecorecomp2/?p=69#oembed-1>

## Does Discovery search only search TCC's catalog and databases?

No! While a search for books and articles that are available through TCC will come up first, Discovery searches the world! If TCC doesn't have access to what you need directly,

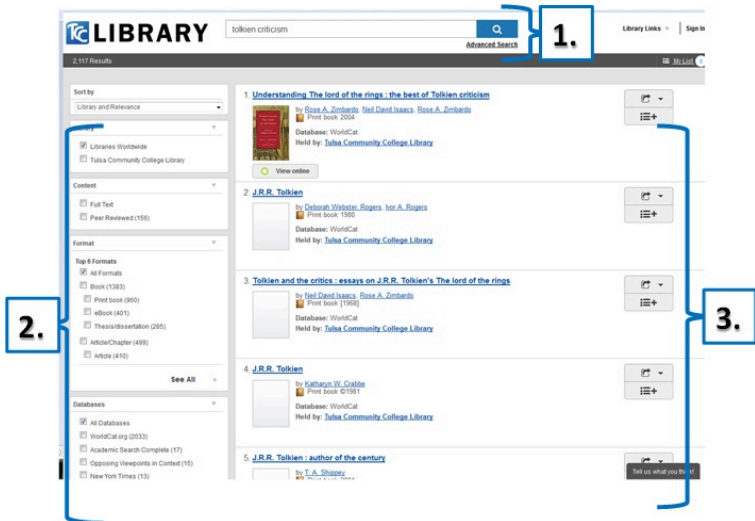
you can view who does, and request it through our InterLibrary Loan program.

### Can I still search individual databases from the library for information?

Yes! You can still access individual databases from the “Articles and Databases” link on the front page of the TCC library homepage. This is particularly helpful if you want to search a database containing very specific knowledge, like our health sciences and nursing databases.

## Parts of the discovery search interface

After entering your search terms in the box on the homepage, you will see a results screen similar to this:



**1. Search Box** – You can do a simple keyword search here after your initial keyword search from the main library

website. Type in your new search, and press enter or the magnifying glass button to do a new search for books, ebooks, and articles.

**2. Search Filters** – Search filters are used to refine your initial keyword search. The purpose is to broaden or narrow the results on display from your search.

### **Search Filter Descriptions:**

**Library**–By default world libraries are selected, so that discovery searches the world libraries. TCC materials are still prioritized to the top of the search results list. To search only TCC materials and nothing else, you can opt to select “Tulsa Community College Library”

**Content**–Selecting either option will remove print books from search. Peer Reviewed pertains to articles: selecting this will screen articles and remove popular sources and newspapers.

**Format**–By default, all formats are selected, so that a search will bring back books, ebooks, and articles. You can limit your search to only one or more of these formats by selecting the appropriate option here.

**Databases**–Discovery can search articles from specific named databases, if you wish to further narrow your search. By default, all databases are selected to give you the broadest search.

**Author**–Screen materials by specific author.

**Year**–You can specify a date range of publication

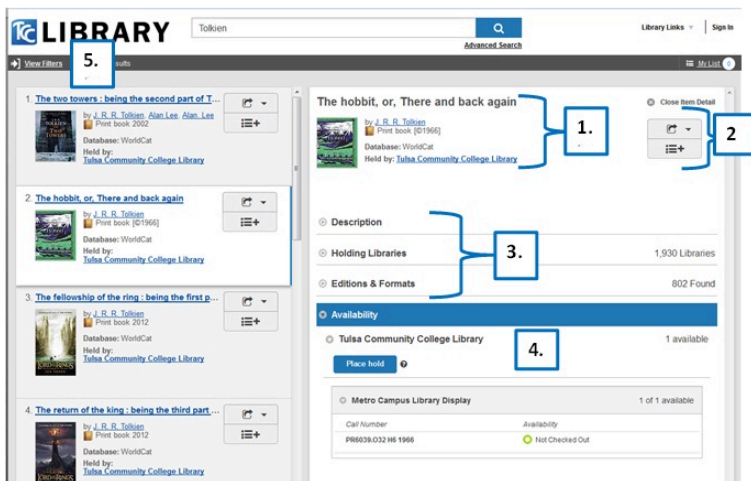
for your search if you require newly published information in your field. As a rule of thumb, five years is considered new for most fields, while 2 years is considered new for health sciences.

**Topic**–Limit your search by subject area.

**3. Search results** – The results of your search display here. Default order is ranked by relevance, with materials available through the Tulsa Community College library appearing first. Click on a title to view more information about the item.

### *A closer look at a book record*

After you click on the title link of a book, your screen should look like this:



The title, author, and format of the item you are viewing is located here. In this example, the record is a print book, but ebooks and articles are other formats.

You can share or email the information on a record to yourself with the top sharing button. you can also add the

record to your list for viewing later, thus allowing you to find a multitude of items before reviewing them for your needs. Items added to your list only stay for the current searching session; they disappear if you close your browser.

Dropdown sections that provide you with additional information about the book, ebook or article.

The “Availability” dropdown section is open by default. This will tell you how to access the item. For books, the location of the library will be displayed, along with the option to place a hold on the book ( and have the book sent to a TCC library of your choice for pickup). For ebooks and available articles, there will be links to access the item.

Your filters minimize when you click on an item to view more information. you can return to the filter menu with the “View Filters” link, or look at additional items from your original search along the left column.

## 2.7 EVALUATING SOURCES

---

### Is the Source Relevant?

At this point in your research process, you may have identified dozens of potential sources. It is easy for writers to get so caught up in checking out books and printing out articles that they forget to ask themselves how they will use these resources in their research. Now is a good time to get a little ruthless. Reading and taking notes takes time and energy, so you will want to focus on the most relevant sources.

You may benefit from seeking out sources that are current, or up to date. Depending on your topic, sources may become outdated relatively soon after publication, or they may remain useful for years. For instance, online social networking sites have evolved rapidly over the past few years. An article published in 2002 about this topic will not provide current information. On the other hand, a research paper on elementary education practices might refer to studies published decades ago by influential child psychologists. When using websites for research, look on the webpage to see when the site was last updated. Many non-functioning links are a sign that a website is not regularly updated. Do not be afraid to

ask your instructor, tutors, and librarians for suggestions if you find that many of your most relevant sources are not especially reliable, or that your most reliable sources are not relevant.

To weed through your collection of books and articles, skim their contents. Read quickly with your research questions and subtopics in mind. The following tips explain how to skim to get a quick sense of what topics are covered. If a book or article is not especially relevant, put it aside. You can always come back to it later if you need to.

### **Tips for Skimming Books**

1. Read the book cover and table of contents for a broad overview of the topics covered.
2. Use the index to locate more specific topics and see how thoroughly they are covered.
3. Flip through the book and look for subtitles or key terms that correspond to your research.

### **Tips for Skimming Articles**

1. Journal articles often begin with an abstract or summary of the contents. Read it to determine the article's relevance to your research.
2. Skim the introduction and conclusion for summary material.
3. Skim through subheadings and text features such as sidebars.
4. Look for keywords related to your topic.

## Is the Source Reliable?

All information sources are not created equal. Sources can vary greatly in terms of how carefully they are researched, written, edited, and reviewed for accuracy. Common sense will help you identify obviously questionable sources, such as tabloids that feature tales of alien abductions, or personal websites with glaring typos. Sometimes, however, a source's reliability—or lack of it—is not so obvious. To evaluate your research sources, you will use critical thinking skills consciously and deliberately.

Sources you encounter will be written for distinct purposes and with particular audiences in mind, which may account for differences such as the following:

- How thoroughly writers cover a given topic
- How carefully writers research and document facts
- How editors review the work
- What biases or agendas affect the content

A journal article written for an academic audience for the purpose of expanding scholarship in a given field will take an approach quite different from a magazine feature written to inform a general audience. Textbooks, hard news articles, and websites approach a subject from different angles as well. To some extent, the type of source provides clues about its overall depth and reliability. Use the following descriptions of types of sources to help you determine the quality of your sources.

**High Quality Sources** provide the most in-depth information. They are written and reviewed by

subject-matter experts. Examples: books published by University presses and articles in scholarly journals, such as *Mosaic: A Journal for the*

*Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*; trade books and magazines geared toward an educated general audience, such as Smithsonian Magazine; government documents; documents by reputable organizations, such as universities and research institutes.

**Varied Quality Sources** are often useful; however, they do not cover subjects in as much depth as high-quality sources, and they are not always rigorously researched and reviewed. Some, such as popular magazine articles or company brochures, may be written to market a product or a cause. Textbooks and reference books are usually reliable, but they may not cover a topic in great depth. Use them with caution. Examples: news stories and feature articles (print or online) from reputable newspapers, magazines, or organizations, such as The New York Times or the Public Broadcasting Service; popular magazine articles, which may or may not be carefully researched and fact checked; documents by businesses and nonprofit organizations.

**Questionable Sources** are often written primarily to attract a large readership or to present the author's opinions, and they are not subject to careful review. Generally, avoid using these as final sources. If you

want to use a source that fits into this category, then carefully evaluate it using criteria below. Examples: loosely regulated or unregulated media content, such as Internet discussion boards, blogs, free online encyclopedias, talk shows, television news shows with obvious political biases, personal websites, and chat rooms.

Even when you are using a type of source that is generally reliable, you will still need to evaluate the author's credibility and the publication itself on an individual basis. To examine the author's credibility—that is, how much you can believe of what the author has to say—examine his or her credentials. What career experience or academic study shows that the author has the expertise to write about this topic? Keep in mind that expertise in one field is no guarantee of expertise in another, unrelated area. For instance, an author may have an advanced degree in physiology, but this credential is not a valid qualification for writing about psychology. Check credentials carefully.

Just as important as the author's credibility is the publication's overall reputability. Reputability refers to a source's standing and reputation as a respectable, reliable source of information. An established and well-known newspaper, such as *The New York Times* or *The Wall Street Journal*, is more reputable than a college newspaper put out by comparatively inexperienced students. A website that is maintained by a well-known, respected organization and

regularly updated is more reputable than one created by an unknown author or group.

Whenever you consult a source, always think carefully about the author's or authors' purpose in presenting the information. Few sources present facts completely objectively. In some cases, the source's content and tone are significantly influenced by biases or hidden agendas. Bias refers to favoritism or prejudice toward a particular person or group. For instance, an author may be biased against a certain political party and present information in a way that subtly—or not so subtly—makes that organization look bad. Bias can lead an author to present facts selectively, edit quotations to misrepresent someone's words, and distort information. Hidden agendas are goals that are not immediately obvious but influence how an author presents the facts. For instance, an article about the role of beef in a healthy diet would be questionable if it were written by a representative of the beef industry—or by the president of an animal-rights organization. In both cases, the author would likely have a hidden agenda.

As Jorge conducted his research, he read several research studies in which scientists found significant benefits to following a low-carbohydrate diet. He also noticed that many studies were sponsored by a foundation associated with the author of a popular series of low-carbohydrate diet books. Jorge read these studies with a critical eye, knowing that a hidden agenda might be shaping the researchers' conclusions.

In sum, to evaluate a source, you should consider not only how current the source is but also criteria such as the type of source, its intended purpose and audience, the author's (or authors') qualifications, the publication's reputation, any indications of bias or hidden agendas, and the overall professionalism of the source's language, ideas, and design. You should consider these criteria as well as your overall impressions of sources' quality. Read carefully, and notice how well authors present and support their statements. Stay actively engaged—do not simply accept sources' words as truth.

### Writing at Work

The critical thinking skills you use to evaluate research sources as a student are equally valuable when you conduct research on the job. If you follow certain periodicals or websites, you have probably identified publications that consistently provide reliable information. Reading blogs and online discussion groups is a great way to identify new trends and hot topics in a particular field, but these

sources should not be your final sources if you're doing substantial research.

## 2.8 TAKING RESEARCH NOTES

---

Writers sometimes get caught up in taking extensive notes, so much so that they lose sight of how their sources help them to answer their research questions. The challenge is to stay focused and organized as you gather information from sources. Before you begin taking notes, take a moment to step back and remind yourself of your goal as a researcher: to find information that will help you answer your research questions. That goal will determine what information you record and how you organize it. When you write your paper, you will present your conclusions about the topic supported by research. Therefore, you do not need to write down every detail of your sources; some of the information in relevant sources will be irrelevant to your research questions.

There are several formats you can use to take notes. No technique is necessarily better than the others—it is more important to choose a format you are comfortable using.

Choose a note-taking method from among those listed below that works best for you, and use it as you gather sources. Using the techniques discussed in this section will prepare you for the next step in writing your research paper: organizing and synthesizing the information you find.

**Use index cards.** This traditional format involves writing each note on a separate index card. It takes more time than copying and pasting into an electronic document, which encourages you to be selective in choosing which ideas to record. Recording notes on separate cards makes it easy to later organize your notes according to major topics. Some writers color-code their cards to make them still more organized.

**Maintain a research notebook.** Instead of using index cards or electronic note cards, you may wish to keep a notebook or electronic folder, allotting a few pages (or one file) for each of your sources. This method makes it easy to create a separate column or section of the document where you add your responses to the information you encounter in your research.

**Annotate your sources.** This method involves making handwritten notes in the margins of sources that you have printed or photocopied. If using electronic sources, you can make comments within the source document. For example, you might add comment boxes to a PDF version of an article. This method works best for experienced researchers who have already thought a great deal about the topic because it can be difficult to organize your notes later when starting your draft.

**Use note-taking software.** There are many

options for taking and organizing notes electronically. These include word-processing software that you can use offline on a computer. They also include tools like Diigo (<https://www.diigo.com/>), Evernote (<https://evernote.com/>), and Mindomo (<https://www.mindomo.com/mind-maps-for-education>), available on the Web for free or reduced prices if you will use the tool for educational purposes. Although you may need to set aside time to learn how to use them, digital tools offer you possibilities that handwritten note cards do not, such as searching your notes, copying and pasting your notes into your paper, and saving and sharing your notes online.

Whether you use old-fashioned index cards or organize your notes digitally, you should keep all your notes in one place, and use topic headings to group related details. Doing so will help you identify connections among different sources. It will also help you make connections between your notes and the research questions and subtopics you identified earlier. Throughout the process of taking notes, be scrupulous about making sure you have correctly attributed each idea or piece of information to its source. Always include source information or use a code system (e.g., numbers, letters, symbols, or colors) so you know exactly which claims or evidence came from which sources.

Effective researchers make choices about which types of

notes are most appropriate for their purpose. Your notes may fall into three categories:

**Summary notes** sum up the main ideas in a source in a few sentences or a short paragraph. A summary is considerably shorter than the original text and captures only the major ideas. Use summary notes when you do not need to record specific details but you intend to refer to broad concepts the author discusses.

**Paraphrased notes** restate a fact or idea from a source using your own words and sentence structure.

**Direct quotations** use the exact wording used by the original source and enclose the quoted material in quotation marks. It is a good strategy to copy direct quotations when an author expresses an idea in an especially lively or memorable way. However, do not rely exclusively on direct quotations in your note taking.

Summarizing and paraphrasing as you take notes is usually a better strategy than copying direct quotations because it forces you to think through the claims and evidence in your source and to understand it well enough to restate it. In short, these methods of note-taking help you to stay engaged with your topic instead of simply copying and pasting text from sources. Using them will help you when you draft your paper. Paraphrase ideas carefully, and check your paraphrased notes

against the original text to make sure you have restated the author's ideas accurately.

Use quotation marks to set off any words or phrases taken directly from the source. With direct quotations, again, make sure your notes accurately reflect the content of the original text: check that quoted material is copied verbatim. If you omit words from a quotation, use ellipses to show the omission, and make sure the omission does not change the author's meaning. If you add your own responses and ideas to your notes, mark them as such so that your own thinking about the topic stands out from ideas you summarized or paraphrased.

# UNIT 3: HOW DO I WRITE THIS PAPER?: FROM RESEARCH NOTES TO DRAFTING

---

Now that you have gathered resources on your topic, it is time to use those sources to write your paper.



Photo by  
Green  
Chamele  
on on  
Unsplash

## 3.1 APPLYING YOUR RESEARCH

---

At this point in your project, you are preparing to move from the research phase to the writing phase. You have gathered much of the information you will use, and soon you will be ready to begin writing your draft. This section helps you transition smoothly from one phase to the next.

Beginning writers sometimes attempt to transform a pile of note cards into a formal research paper without any intermediary step. This approach presents problems. The writer's original question and thesis may be buried in a flood of disconnected details taken from researched sources. The first draft may present redundant or contradictory information. Worst of all, the writer's ideas and voice may be lost.

An effective research paper focuses on the writer's ideas—from the question that sparked the research process to how the writer answers that question based on the research findings. Before beginning a draft, or even an outline, good writers pause and reflect. They ask themselves questions such as the following:

- How has my thinking changed based on my research? What have I learned?

- Was my working thesis on target? Do I need to rework my thesis based on what I have learned?
- How does the information in my sources mesh with my research questions and help me answer those questions?
- Have any additional important questions or subtopics come up that I will need to address in my paper?
- How do my sources complement each other? What ideas or facts recur in multiple sources?
- Where do my sources disagree with each other, and why?

In this section, you will reflect on your research and review the source material you have gathered. You will determine what you now think about your topic. You will synthesize, or put together, different pieces of information that help you answer your research questions. Finally, you will determine the organizational structure that works best for your paper and begin planning your outline.

## Selecting Useful Details

At this point in the research process, you have gathered evidence, ideas, and information from a wide variety of sources. Now it is time to think about how you will use your source materials as a writer. When you conduct research, you keep an open mind and seek out many promising sources.

You take notes on any information that looks like it might help you answer your research questions. Often, new ideas and terms come up in your reading, and these, too, find their way into your notes. You may record claims or examples that catch your attention and seem relevant to your research questions. By now, you have probably amassed an impressively detailed collection of notes. However, you will not use all of your notes in your paper.

Effective writers are selective. They determine which information is most relevant and appropriate for their purpose. They include details that develop or explain their ideas— and they leave out details that do not. The writer, not the notes, is the controlling force. The writer shapes the content of the research paper. While gathering sources, you used strategies to filter out irrelevant and unreliable sources and details. Now you will apply your critical-thinking skills to the details you recorded—analyzing how it is relevant, determining the ways in which it meshes with your ideas and forms patterns.

As Jorge reviewed his research, he realized that some of the information was not especially useful for his purpose. His notes included several statements about the relationship between soft drinks that are high in sugar and childhood obesity—a subtopic that was too far outside of the main focus of the paper. Jorge decided to cut this material.

Do not feel anxious if you still have trouble seeing the big picture. Systematically looking through your notes will help

you. Begin by identifying the notes that clearly support your thesis. Mark or group these, either physically or using the cut-and-paste function in your word-processing program. As you identify the crucial details that support your thesis, make sure you analyze them critically. Ask the following questions to focus your thinking:

**Is this detail from a reliable, high-quality source?** Is it appropriate for me to cite this source in an academic paper? The bulk of the support for your thesis should come from reliable, reputable sources. You've already thought about and made choices in the quality of sources you gathered earlier in the research process. If most of the details that support your thesis are from less-reliable sources, you may need to do additional research or modify your thesis.

**Is the link between this information and my thesis obvious—or will I need to explain it to my readers?** Remember, you have spent more time thinking and reading about this topic than your audience. Some connections might be obvious to both you and your readers. More often, however, you will need to provide the analysis or explanation that shows how the information supports your thesis. As you read through your notes, jot down ideas you have for making those connections clear.

**What personal biases or experiences might affect the way I interpret this information?** No

researcher is 100 percent objective. We all have personal opinions and experiences that influence our reactions to what we read and learn. Good researchers are aware of this human tendency. They keep an open mind when they read opinions or facts that contradict their beliefs.

It can be tempting to ignore information that does not support your thesis or that contradicts it outright. However, such information is important. At the very least, it gives you a sense of what has been written about the topic. More importantly, it can help you question and refine your own thinking so that writing your research paper is a true learning process. Remember, your working thesis is not set in stone. You can and should change your working thesis throughout the research writing process if the evidence you find does not support your tentative thesis. Never try to force evidence to fit your argument. For example, suppose your tentative thesis is “Mars cannot support life-forms.” Yet, a week into researching your topic, you find an article in *The New York Times* detailing new findings of bacteria under the Martian surface. Instead of trying to argue that bacteria are not life forms, you would do better to alter your thesis to “Mars cannot support complex life-forms.” In sum, you should carefully consider how information that challenges your thesis fits into the big picture of your research. You may decide that the source is unreliable or the information is irrelevant, or you may decide that it is an important point you need to bring up. What matters is

that you give careful consideration to various perspectives and current research on the topic.

### Writing at Work

When you create workplace documents based on research, selectivity remains important. A project team may spend months conducting market surveys to prepare for rolling out a new product, but few managers have time to read the research in its entirety. Most employees want the research distilled into a few well-supported points. Focused, concise writing is highly valued in the workplace.

## 3.2 FINDING CONNECTIONS

---

As you find connections between your ideas and information in your sources, also look for commonalities between your sources. Do most sources seem to agree on a particular idea? Are some facts mentioned repeatedly in many different sources? What key terms or major concepts come up in most of your sources regardless of whether the sources agree on the finer points? Identifying these connections will help you identify important ideas to discuss in your paper. Look for subtler ways your sources complement one another, too. Does one author refer to another's book or article? How do sources that are more recent build upon the ideas developed in earlier sources?

Be aware of any redundancies in your sources. If you have amassed solid support from a reputable source, such as a scholarly journal, there is no need to cite the same facts from an online encyclopedia article that is many steps removed from any primary research. If a given source adds nothing new to your discussion and you can cite a stronger source for the same information, use the stronger source.

Determine how you will address any contradictions found among different sources. For instance, if one source cites a

startling fact that you cannot confirm anywhere else, it is safe to dismiss the information as unreliable. However, if you find significant disagreements among reliable sources, you will need to review them and evaluate each source. Which source presents a sounder argument or more solid evidence? It is up to you to determine which source is the most credible and why.

## Reevaluating Your Working Thesis

A careful analysis of your notes will help you reevaluate your working thesis and determine whether you need to revise it. Remember that your working thesis was the starting point—not necessarily the end point—of your research. You should revise your working thesis if your ideas have changed. Even if your sources generally confirmed your preliminary thinking on the topic, it is still a good idea to tweak the wording of your thesis to incorporate the specific details you learned from research.

Jorge realized that his working thesis oversimplified the issues. He still believed that the media was exaggerating the benefits of low-carb diets. However, his research led him to conclude that these diets did have some advantages. Read Jorge's revised thesis:

Although following a low-carbohydrate diet can benefit some people, these diets are not necessarily

the best option for everyone who wants to lose weight or improve their health.

## Synthesizing Source Material

By now, your ideas about your topic are taking shape. You have a sense of what major ideas to address in your paper, what points you can easily support, and what questions or subtopics might need a little more thought. In short, you have begun the process of synthesizing source material—that is, of putting the pieces together into a coherent whole.

It is normal to find this part of the process a little difficult. Some questions or concepts may still be unclear to you. You may not yet know how you will tie all of your research together. Synthesizing is a complex, demanding mental task, and even experienced researchers struggle with it at times. A little uncertainty is often a good sign. It means you are challenging yourself to work thoughtfully with your topic instead of simply restating the same information.

You have already considered how your notes fit with your working thesis. Now, take your synthesis a step further. Analyze how your notes relate to your major research question

and the subquestions you identified at the start of the research process.

Organize your notes with headings that correspond to those questions. As you proceed, you might identify some important subtopics that were not part of your original plan, or you might decide that some questions are not relevant to your paper.

Categorize information carefully, and continue to think critically about the material. Ask yourself whether the connections between ideas are clear. Remember, your ideas and conclusions will shape the paper. They are the glue that holds the rest of the content together. As you work, begin jotting down the big ideas you will use to connect the dots for your reader. (If you are not sure where to begin, try answering your major research question and subquestions. Add and answer new questions as appropriate.) You might record these big ideas on paper sticky notes or type them into a word-processing document or other digital format.

Jorge looked back on the list of research questions that he had written down earlier. He changed a few to match his new thesis, and he began the following rough outline for his paper:

**Topic:** *Low-carbohydrate diets*

**Main question:** *Are low-carbohydrate diets*

*as effective as they have been portrayed to be by media sources?*

**Thesis:** *Although following a low-carbohydrate diet can benefit some people, these diets are not necessarily the best option for everyone who wants to lose weight or improve their health.*

**Main points:**

*How do low-carb diets work?*

*Low-carb diets cause weight loss by lowering insulin levels, causing the body to burn stored fat.*

*When did low-carbohydrate diets become a 'hot' topic in the media?*

*The Atkins diet was created by Richard Atkins in 1972, but it didn't gain wide-scale attention until 2003. The South Beach diet and other low-carb diets became popular around the same time, and led to a low-carb craze in America from 2003 to 2004.*

*What are the supposed advantages to following a low-carbohydrate diet?*

*They are said to help you lose weight faster than other diets and allow people to continue eat protein and fats while dieting.*

*What are some of the negative effects of a low-carb diet?*

*Eating foods higher in saturated fats can increase your cholesterol levels and lead to heart disease. Incomplete fat breakdown can lead to a condition called ketosis, which puts a strain on the liver and can be fatal.*

## 3.3 ORGANIZING YOUR PAPER

---

You may be wondering how your ideas are supposed to shape the paper, especially since you are writing a research paper based on your research. Integrating your ideas and your information from research is a complex process, and sometimes it can be difficult to separate the two. Some paragraphs in your paper will consist mostly of details from your research. That is fine, as long as you explain what those details mean or how they are linked. You should also include sentences and transitions that show the relationship between different claims and evidence from your research by grouping related ideas or pointing out connections or contrasts. The result is that you are not simply presenting information; you are synthesizing, analyzing, and interpreting it.

The final step to complete before beginning your draft is to choose an organizational structure. For some assignments, this may be determined by the instructor's requirements. For instance, if you are asked to explore the impact of a new communications device, a cause-and-effect structure is obviously appropriate. In other cases, you will need to determine the structure based on what suits your topic and purpose.

The purpose of Jorge's paper was primarily to persuade. With that in mind, he planned the following outline:

***I. Introduction***

***A. Background***

***B. Thesis***

***II. Purported Benefits of Low-Carbohydrate Diets***

***A. United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) nutrition guidelines***

***B. Potential flaws in USDA nutrition guidelines***

***1. Effects of carbohydrates on blood sugar, insulin***

***2. Relationship to metabolism and obesity***

***III. Research on Low-Carbohydrate Diets and Weight Loss***

***A. Short-term effectiveness for weight-loss***

***B. Long-term effectiveness not established***

***IV. Other Long-Term Health Outcomes***

***A. Cholesterol and heart disease***

***B. Blood pressure***

***C. Diabetes***

***V. Conclusion***

## 3.4 WRITING YOUR DRAFT--INTRODUCTION AND CONCLUSION

---

At last, you are ready to begin writing the rough draft of your research paper. Putting your thinking and research into words is exciting. It can also be challenging. In this section, you will learn strategies for drafting your research paper, such as integrating material from your sources, citing information correctly, and avoiding misuse of your sources.

### The Structure of a Research Paper

Research papers generally follow the same basic structure: an introduction that presents the writer's thesis; a body section that develops the thesis with supporting points and evidence; and a conclusion that revisits the thesis and provides additional insights or suggestions for further research.

Your writing voice will come across most strongly in your introduction and conclusion as you work to attract your readers' interest and establish your thesis. These sections usually do not cite sources at length. They focus on the big picture, not specific details. In contrast, the body of your paper

will cite sources extensively. As you present your ideas, you will support your points with details from your research.

## Writing Your Introduction

There are several approaches to writing an introduction, each of which fulfills the same goals. The introduction should get readers' attention, provide background information, and present the writer's thesis. Many writers like to begin with one of the following catchy openers:

- A surprising fact
- A thought-provoking question An attention-getting quote
- A brief anecdote that illustrates a larger concept
- A connection between your topic and your readers' experiences

The next few sentences place the opening in context by presenting background information. From there, the writer builds toward a thesis, which is traditionally placed at the end of the introduction. Think of your thesis as a signpost that lets readers know in what direction the paper is headed.

Jorge decided to begin his research paper by connecting his topic to readers' daily experiences. Read the first draft of his introduction. The thesis is in bold. Note how Jorge progresses from the opening sentences, to background information, to his thesis.

## Introduction Draft

*Over the past decade, increasing numbers of Americans have jumped on the low-carb bandwagon. Some studies, such as those conducted by Lisa Sanders and David L. Katz and by Julie Hirsch, estimate that approximately forty million Americans, or about twenty percent of the population, are attempting to restrict their intake of food high in carbohydrates. Proponents of low-carb diets say they are not only the most effective way to lose weight, but they also yield health benefits such as lower blood pressure and improved cholesterol levels. Meanwhile, some doctors claim that low-carb diets are overrated and caution that their long-term effects are unknown.*

***Although following a low-carbohydrate diet can benefit some people, these diets are not necessarily the best option for everyone who wants to lose weight or improve their health.***

Writers often work out of sequence when writing a research paper. If you find yourself struggling to write an engaging introduction, you may wish to write the body of your paper first. Writing the body sections first will help you clarify your main points. Writing the introduction should then be easier. You may have a better sense of how to introduce the paper after you have drafted some or all of the body.

## Writing Your Conclusion

In your introduction, you tell readers where they are headed. In your conclusion, you recap where they have been. For this reason, some writers prefer to write their conclusions soon after they have written their introduction. However, this method may not work for all writers. Other writers prefer to write their conclusion at the end of the paper, after writing the body paragraphs. No process is absolutely right or absolutely wrong; find the one that best suits you.

No matter when you compose the conclusion, it should revisit your thesis and sum up your main ideas. The conclusion should not simply echo the introduction or rely on bland summary statements, such as “In this paper, I have demonstrated that....” In fact, avoid repeating your thesis verbatim from the introduction. Restate it in different words that reflect the new perspective gained through your research. That helps keep your ideas fresh for your readers. An effective writer might conclude a paper by asking a new question the

research inspired, revisiting an anecdote presented earlier, or reminding readers of how the topic relates to their lives.

## 3.5 WRITING YOUR DRAFT—BODY PARAGRAPHS

---

### Using Primary and Secondary Research

As you write your draft, be mindful of how you are using primary and secondary source material to support your points. Recall that primary sources present firsthand information. Secondary sources are one step removed from primary sources. They present analyses or interpretations of primary sources. How you balance primary and secondary source material in your paper will depend on the topic and assignment.

Some types of research papers must use primary sources extensively to achieve their purpose. Any paper that analyzes a primary text or presents the writer's own experimental research falls in this category. Here are a few examples:

- A paper for a **literature** course analyzing several poems by Emily Dickinson
- A paper for a **political science** course comparing televised speeches delivered by two presidential candidates

- A paper for a **communications** course discussing gender biases in television commercials
- A paper for a **business administration** course that discusses the results of a survey the writer conducted with local businesses to gather information about their work-from-home and flex-time policies
- A paper for an **elementary education** course that discusses the results of an experiment the writer conducted to compare the effectiveness of two different methods of mathematics instruction

For these types of papers, primary research is the main focus. If you are writing about a work (including non-print works, such as a movie or a painting), it is crucial to gather information and ideas from the original work, rather than relying solely on others' interpretations. And, of course, if you take the time to design and conduct your own field research, such as a survey, a series of interviews, or an experiment, you will want to discuss it in detail. Interviews may provide interesting responses that you want to share with your readers.

Even if your paper is largely based on primary sources, you may use secondary sources to develop your ideas. For instance, an analysis of Alfred Hitchcock's films would focus on the films themselves as primary sources, but it might also cite commentary and interpretations by critics. A paper that presents an original experiment would include some discussion of similar prior research in the field.

For some assignments, it makes sense to rely more on

secondary sources than primary sources. If you are not analyzing a text or conducting your own field research, then you will need to use secondary sources extensively. As much as possible, use secondary sources that are closely linked to primary research, such as a journal article that presents the results of the authors' scientific study or a book that cites interviews and case studies. These sources are more reliable and add more value to your paper than sources that are further removed from primary research. For instance, a popular magazine article on junk-food addiction might be several steps removed from the original scientific study on which it is loosely based. As a result, the article may distort, sensationalize, or misinterpret the scientists' findings.

Jorge knew he did not have the time, resources, or experience needed to conduct original experimental research for his paper. Because he was relying on secondary sources to support his ideas, he made a point of citing sources that were not far removed from primary research.

## Incorporating Source Material into Your Body Paragraphs

One of the challenges of writing a research paper is successfully integrating your ideas with material from your sources. Your paper must explain what you think, or it will read like a disconnected string of facts and quotations. However, you also

need to support your ideas with research, or they will seem insubstantial. How do you strike the right balance?

You have already taken a step in the right direction if you have drafted your introduction and conclusion. The introduction and conclusion function like the frame around a picture. They define and limit your topic and place your research in context. However, you may choose to wait to write your introduction and conclusion until after writing your body paragraphs. Either way, as you draft your body paragraphs, you must express your critical thinking about the ideas and information that you incorporate from your sources. You must offer claims of your own that either challenge or extend points from your sources.

In the body paragraphs of your paper, you will need to integrate ideas carefully at the paragraph level and at the sentence level. Use topic sentences and concluding sentences of body paragraphs to make sure readers understand the significance of any facts, details, or points you cite. In particular, you must continually explain how source material relates to your thesis. Indicate your interpretation of, and attitude toward, source material within and between sentences in which you summarize, paraphrase, or quote material from your sources. You will also include sentences that transition between ideas from your research, either within a paragraph or from one paragraph to the next. At the sentence level, you will need to think carefully about how you introduce your summarized, paraphrased, and quoted material.

You have already learned about summarizing, paraphrasing, and quoting sources when taking notes. Here, you will learn how to use these techniques in the body of your paper to weave in source material to develop your ideas.

## Introducing Cited Material Effectively

Including a signal phrase in your text, such as “Jackson wrote” or “Copeland found,” often helps you integrate source material smoothly. This citation technique also helps convey that you are actively engaged with your source material. Unfortunately, during the process of writing your research paper, it is easy to fall into a rut and use the same few dull verbs repeatedly, such as “Jones said,” “Smith stated,” and so on. Punch up your writing by using strong verbs that help your reader understand how the source material presents ideas. There is a world of difference between an author who “suggests” and one who “claims,” one who “questions” and one who “criticizes.” You do not need to consult your thesaurus every time you cite a source, but do think about which verbs will accurately represent the ideas and make your writing more engaging.

The following list includes some possibilities:

argue

ask

assert

assess

believe

claim

compare

conclude

contrast

determine

evaluate

explain

find

hypothesize

insist

measure

point out

propose

question

recommend

study

suggest

sum up

warn

## Summarizing, Paraphrasing and Quoting Sources

### **Summarizing Sources**

When you summarize material from a source, you zero in on the main points and restate them concisely in your own words. This technique is appropriate when only the major ideas are relevant to your paper or when you need to simplify complex information into a few key points for your readers. Be sure to review the source material as you summarize it. Identify the main idea and restate it as concisely as you can— preferably in one sentence. Depending on your purpose, you may also add another sentence or two condensing any important details or examples. Check your summary to make sure it is accurate and complete.

In his draft, Jorge summarized research materials that presented scientists' findings about low-carbohydrate diets. Read the following passage from a trade magazine article and Jorge's summary of the article.

*Assessing the Efficacy of Low-Carbohydrate Diets (from Adrienne Howell, Ph.D.)*

*Over the past few years, a number of clinical studies have explored whether high-protein, low-carbohydrate diets are more effective for weight loss than other frequently recommended diet plans, such as diets that drastically curtail fat intake (Pritikin) or that emphasize consuming lean meats, grains, vegetables, and a moderate amount of unsaturated fats (the Mediterranean diet). A 2009 study found that obese teenagers who followed a low-carbohydrate diet lost an average of 15.6 kilograms over a six-month period, whereas teenagers following a low-fat diet or a Mediterranean diet lost an average of 11.1 kilograms and 9.3 kilograms respectively. Two 2010 studies that measured weight loss for obese adults following these same three diet plans found*

*similar results. Over three months, subjects on the low-carbohydrate diet plan lost anywhere from four to six kilograms more than subjects who followed other diet plans.*

### Sample Summary

***Adrienne Howell points out that in three recent studies, researchers compared outcomes for obese subjects who followed either a low-carbohydrate diet, a low-fat diet, or a Mediterranean diet and found that subjects following a low-carbohydrate diet lost more weight in the same time.***

A summary restates ideas in your own words—but for specialized or clinical terms, you may need to use terms that appear in the original source. For instance, Jorge used the term

obese in his summary because related words such as heavy or overweight have a different clinical meaning.

### **Paraphrasing Sources**

When you paraphrase material from a source, restate the information from an entire sentence or passage in your own words, using your own original sentence structure. A paraphrased source differs from a summarized source in that you focus on restating the ideas, not condensing them. Again, it is important to check your paraphrase against the source material to make sure it is both accurate and original. Inexperienced writers sometimes use the thesaurus method of paraphrasing—that is, they simply rewrite the source material, replacing most of the words with synonyms. This constitutes a misuse of sources. A true paraphrase restates ideas using the writer’s own language and style.

In his draft, Jorge frequently paraphrased details from sources. At times, he needed to rewrite a sentence more than once to ensure he was paraphrasing ideas correctly.

Read the following passage from a website. Then read Jorge’s initial attempt at paraphrasing it, followed by the final version of his paraphrase.

*Original Source (from Tracy Niethercott)*

*Some insulin users in particular find that their*

*blood glucose is far easier to control when they limit the carbs in their diet.*

### **Initial Paraphrase**

***According to one source, some people find they can control their blood glucose when they limit the carbs they eat (Neithercott).***

After reviewing the paraphrased sentence, Jorge realized he was following the original source too closely. He did not want to quote the full passage verbatim, so he again attempted to restate the idea in his own style.

### **Revised Paraphrase**

***Some people with diabetes are better able to control their blood sugar when they reduce their carb intake (Neithercott).***

## **Quoting Sources Directly**

Most of the time, you will summarize or paraphrase source

material instead of quoting directly. Doing so shows that you understand your research well enough to write about it confidently in your own words. However, direct quotes can be powerful when used sparingly and with purpose.

Quoting directly can sometimes help you make a point in a colorful way. If an author's words are especially vivid, memorable, or well phrased, quoting them may help hold your reader's interest. Direct quotations from an interviewee or an eyewitness may help you personalize an issue for readers. And when you analyze primary sources, such as a historical speech or a work of literature, quoting extensively is often necessary to illustrate your points. These are valid reasons to use quotations.

Less experienced writers, however, sometimes overuse direct quotations in a research paper because it seems easier than paraphrasing. At best, this reduces the effectiveness of the quotations. At worst, it results in a paper that seems haphazardly pasted together from outside sources. Use quotations sparingly for greater impact.

When you do choose to quote directly from a source, follow these guidelines:

- Make sure you have transcribed the original statement accurately.
- Represent the author's ideas honestly. Quote enough of the original text to reflect the author's point accurately.
- Never use a stand-alone, or "dropped in,"

quotation. Always integrate the quoted material into your own sentence.

- Use ellipses (...) if you need to omit a word or phrase. Use brackets [ ] if you need to replace a word or phrase or add any explanation or clarification of the original.

- Make sure any omissions or changed words do not alter the meaning of the original text. Omit or replace words only when absolutely necessary to shorten the text or to make it grammatically correct within your sentence.

- Remember to include correctly formatted citations that follow the assigned style guide.

Jorge wanted to use the following information from an article on the American Heart Association's website.

*Original Source (from the American Heart Association)*

*A high carbohydrate diet that includes fruits, vegetables, nonfat dairy products and whole grains also has been shown to reduce blood pressure.*

*Because this particular sentence would be difficult to paraphrase properly, Jorge decided to quote it instead.*

*Quotation from the Source*

*According to the American Heart Association, “A high carbohydrate diet that includes fruits, vegetables, nonfat dairy products and whole grains also has been shown to reduce blood pressure.”*

Notice how Jorge smoothly integrated the quoted material by starting the sentence with an introductory, or “signal,” phrase.

Writing at Work

It is important to accurately represent a colleague’s ideas or communications in the workplace. When writing professional or academic papers, be mindful of how the words you use to describe someone’s tone or ideas carry certain connotations. Do not say a source argues a particular point unless an argument is, in fact, presented. Use lively language, but avoid

language that is emotionally charged. Doing so will ensure you have represented your colleague's words in an authentic and accurate way.

## 3.6 DOCUMENTING YOUR SOURCE MATERIAL

---

A reader interested in your subject wants not only to read what you wrote but also to be aware of the works that you used to create it. Readers may want to enter the discussion on your topic, using some of the same sources that you have. They also may want to examine your sources to see if you know your subject, if you missed anything, or if you offer anything new and interesting. Your sources may offer the reader additional insight on the subject being considered. It also demonstrates that you, as the author, are up-to-date on what is happening in the field or on the subject. In sum, giving credit where it is due contributes to research on your topic and enhances your credibility.

Throughout the writing process, be scrupulous about documenting information taken from sources. Again, there are multiple reasons for doing so:

- To give credit to others for their ideas
- To allow your reader to follow up and learn more about the topic if desired
- To build your own reputation as a writer

It is important to indicate the source both in your essay and in a bibliography, list of references, or Works Cited, to prevent the possibility of plagiarism. If you follow the appropriate style guide (e.g., APA, Chicago Manual, and MLA), pay attention to detail, and clearly indicate your sources, then this approach to formatting and citation offers a proven way to demonstrate your respect for others and earn their respect in return.

## Citing Sources in Your Paper

You need to cite all your information: if someone else wrote it, said it, drew it, demonstrated it, or otherwise expressed it, you need to cite it. The exception to this statement is common, widespread knowledge, but if you are ever in doubt, go ahead and document the material.

If you are using MLA style, then your citation of the source in the body of the essay will point to the Works Cited page at the end. You must cite your sources as you use them, mentioning the author or title of the source by name if you summarize its ideas and giving the author or title of the source as well as the page number (if available) in parentheses if you paraphrase or directly quote the source. The reference to the author or title is like a signal to readers that information has been incorporated from a separate source. It also provides readers with the information they need to locate the source in the Works Cited at the end of your essay where they can find the complete reference.

**Rules for In-Text Citations:**

The following examples illustrate basic rules for documenting sources within the text of your paper in MLA style:

**Author named in the introduction to the paraphrase or quote:** Jacob Leibowitz found that low-carbohydrate diets often helped subjects with Type II diabetes maintain a healthy weight and control blood-sugar (56). Leibowitz states, “People with Type II diabetes should follow a low-carbohydrate diet in order to prevent weight gain and unbalanced blood-sugar levels” (56).

**Author named in parentheses:** One source indicates that low-carbohydrate diets often helped subjects with Type II diabetes maintain a healthy weight and control blood-sugar (Leibowitz 56). A noted nutritionist advises diabetics: “People with Type II diabetes should follow a low-carbohydrate diet in order to prevent weight gain and unbalanced blood-sugar levels” (Leibowitz 56).

**Unknown author:** One website points out that a low-carbohydrate diet may aggravate a heart condition by raising a person’s bad cholesterol (“Cholesterol and the Low-carb Diet”).

**Unknown or No Page Reference:** The risks of following a low-carbohydrate diet outweigh any benefits according to one researcher (Jones). Gerald

Jones believes that “a balanced diet is still the safest and most effective approach to good health.”

**A source quoted in another source (an indirect quotation):** “For the chronically overweight,” states Martin Rogers, “a low-carbohydrate diet may provide a viable option for weight loss” (qtd. in Evans 46).

## Creating a List of References

Each of the sources you cite in the body of your paper should appear in a list of references at the end of your paper. If you’re using MLA style, then your Works Cited should list the sources alphabetically by last name, or by title if the author is not identified. While in-text citations provide the most basic information about the source, your Works Cited will include more complete publication details. There are a number of ways to learn how to properly cite your sources on your Works Cited:

- The [MLA Guide at Purdue University’s Online Writing Lab](#) (OWL)
- A current edition of *The MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*.
- Online videos found by searching for “MLA style” on YouTube.
- Help is available at the [TCC Writing Center](#)

One of the many advantages of using sources from databases is that the databases themselves, or the platforms

which host them, usually include a citation of the source at the bottom of the HTML full text of the source or a “Cite” tool accessible from the record of the source in the list of search results. When using these automatically-generated citations, be sure to select and copy the citation in the style that you have been assigned to use. Also, be sure to review the citation that the database or platform has generated, as it may include some errors in it. An error that consistently occurs using a “Cite” tool is the capitalization of titles; in the United States, the first letters of the first and last words of titles are always capitalized, and so are the first letters of all words in- between except for articles (a, an, the), conjunctions (and, but, or), and prepositions (at, by, for, in, of, on, etc.). The “Cite” tool does not distinguish between parts of speech when capitalizing words in titles, so you will need to change some letters in titles to lowercase in order to properly format your citations.

## 3.7 AVOIDING PLAGIARISM

---

Your research paper presents your thinking about a topic, supported and developed by other people's ideas and information. It is crucial to always distinguish between the two—as you conduct research, as you plan your paper, and as you write. Failure to do so can lead to plagiarism.

If you incorporate the words or ideas of a source into your own writing without giving full credit, then you are plagiarizing that source. In both professional and academic settings, the penalties for plagiarism are severe. In the professional world, plagiarism may result in loss of credibility, diminishment in compensation, and even loss of employment, including future opportunities. That is, employees may be fired for plagiarism and do irreparable damage to their professional reputation. In a class, a student's plagiarism may result in a range of sanctions, from the loss of points on an assignment to a failing grade in the course to expulsion from college.

The concepts and strategies discussed in this section connect to a larger issue—academic integrity. You maintain your integrity as a member of an academic community by representing your work and others' work honestly and by

using other people's work only in legitimately accepted ways. It is a point of honor taken seriously in every academic discipline and career field. Even when cheating and plagiarism go undetected, they still result in a student's failure to learn necessary research and writing skills. In short, it is never worth the risk to plagiarize. For more information about Academic Integrity, consult your college's Student Handbook.

## Working with Sources Carefully

Disorganization and carelessness sometimes lead to plagiarism. For instance, writers may be unable to provide complete, accurate citations if they did not record bibliographical information. Writers may cut and paste passages from websites into their papers and later forget where the material came from. Writers who procrastinate may rush through drafts; this easily leads to sloppy paraphrasing and inaccurate quotations. Any of these actions can create the appearance of plagiarism and lead to negative consequences. Carefully organizing your time and notes is the best guard against these forms of plagiarism. As discussed above, you should maintain a detailed working bibliography and thorough notes throughout the research process. As you incorporate source material into your draft, check original sources again to clear up any uncertainties. Schedule plenty of time for writing your draft so there is no temptation to cut corners.

## Intentional and Accidental Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the act of misrepresenting someone else's work as your own. Sometimes a writer plagiarizes work on purpose—for instance, by purchasing an essay from a website and submitting it as original course work. In other cases, a writer may commit accidental plagiarism due to carelessness, haste, or misunderstanding. To avoid unintentional plagiarism, follow these guidelines:

- Understand what types of information must be cited.
- Understand what constitutes fair use of a source.
- Keep source materials and notes carefully organized.
- Follow guidelines for summarizing, paraphrasing, and quoting sources.

## When to Cite

Whether it is quoted or paraphrased, any idea or fact taken from an outside source must be cited, in both the body of your paper and your list of references. The only exceptions are facts or general statements that are common knowledge. Common-knowledge facts or general statements are commonly supported by and found in multiple sources. For example, a writer would not need to cite the statement that most breads, pastas, and cereals are high in carbohydrates; this is well known

and well documented. However, if a writer explained in detail the differences among the chemical structures of carbohydrates, proteins, and fats, a citation would be necessary. When in doubt, cite.

## Fair Use

In recent years, issues related to the fair use of sources have been prevalent in popular culture. Recording artists, for example, may disagree about the extent to which one has the right to sample another's music. For academic purposes, however, the guidelines for fair use are reasonably straightforward. Writers may quote from or paraphrase material from previously published works without formally obtaining the copyright holder's permission. Fair use means that the writer legitimately uses brief excerpts from source material to support and develop his or her own ideas. For instance, a columnist may excerpt a few sentences from a novel when writing a book review. However, quoting or paraphrasing another's work at excessive length, to the extent that large sections of the writing are unoriginal, is not fair use.

As he worked on his draft, Jorge was careful to cite his sources correctly and not to rely excessively on any one source. Occasionally, however, he caught himself quoting a source at great length. In those instances, he highlighted the paragraph in question so that he could go back to it later and revise. Read the example, along with Jorge's revision.

### Initial Use of Source Material

*Heinz found that “subjects in the low-carbohydrate group (30% carbohydrates; 40% protein, 30% fat) had a mean weight loss of 10 kg (22 lbs) over a 4-month period.” These results were “noticeably better than results for subjects on a low-fat diet (45% carbohydrates, 35% protein, 20% fat)” whose average weight loss was only “7 kg (15.4 lbs) in the same period.” From this, it can be concluded that “low-carbohydrate diets obtain more rapid results.” Other researchers agree that “at least in the short term, patients following low-carbohydrate diets enjoy greater success” than those who follow alternative plans (Johnson and Crowe).*

After reviewing the paragraph, Jorge realized that he had drifted into unoriginal writing. Most of the paragraph was taken verbatim from a single article. Although Jorge had

enclosed the material in quotation marks, he knew it was not an appropriate way to use the research in his paper.

### Revised Use of Source Material

*Low-carbohydrate diets may indeed be superior to other diet plans for short-term weight loss. In a study comparing low-carbohydrate diets and low-fat diets, Heinz found that subjects who followed a low-carbohydrate plan (30% of total calories) for four months lost, on average, about three kilograms more than subjects who followed a low-fat diet for the same time. Heinz concluded that these plans yield quick results, an idea supported by a similar study conducted by Johnson and Crowe. What remains to be seen, however, is whether this initial success can be sustained for longer periods.*

As Jorge revised the paragraph, he realized he did not need to quote these sources directly. Instead, he paraphrased their

most important findings. He also made sure to include a topic sentence stating the main idea of the paragraph and a concluding sentence that transitioned to the next major topic in his essay.

### Writing at Work

Citing other people's work appropriately is just as important in the workplace as it is in school. If you need to consult outside sources to research a document you are creating, follow the general guidelines already discussed, as well as any industry-specific citation guidelines. For more extensive use of others' work—for instance, requesting permission to link to another company or organization's website on your own employer's website—always follow your employer's established procedures.

Consult [Academic Integrity at Tulsa Community](#)

[College](#) for more information and College policy.

# UNIT 4: HOW CAN I REVISE THIS PAPER?: FROM DRAFTING TO POLISHING

---

Congratulations on finishing your draft! But good writers never stop there. It is time to revise and improve what you've written. Please watch this TEDx video before moving on to the other pages in this unit.



*One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:*

[https://open.ocolearnok.org/  
tccecorecomp2/?p=80#oembed-1](https://open.ocolearnok.org/tccecorecomp2/?p=80#oembed-1)

## 4.1 REVISING --ORGANIZATION AND COHESION

---

Given all the time and effort you have put into your research paper, you will want to make sure that your final draft represents your best work. This requires taking the time to revise and edit your paper carefully. You may feel that you need a break from your paper before you revise and edit it. That is understandable—but leave yourself with enough time to complete this important stage of the writing process. In this section, you will learn the following specific strategies that are useful for revising and editing a research paper:

- How to evaluate and improve the overall organization and cohesion
- How to maintain an appropriate style and tone
- How to use checklists to identify and correct any errors in language, citations, and formatting

### Revising Your Paper's Organization and Cohesion

When writing a research paper, it is easy to become overly

focused on editorial details, such as the proper format for bibliographic entries. These details do matter. However, before you begin to address them, it is important to spend time reviewing and revising the content of the paper. A good research paper is both organized and cohesive. Organization means that your argument flows logically from one point to the next. Cohesion means that the elements of your paper work together smoothly and naturally. In a cohesive research paper, information from research is seamlessly integrated with the writer's ideas.

When you revise to improve organization, you look at the flow of ideas throughout the essay as a whole and within individual paragraphs. You check to see that your essay moves logically from the introduction to the body paragraphs to the conclusion, and that each section reinforces your thesis. Writers choose transitions carefully to show the relationships between ideas—for instance, to make a comparison or elaborate on a point with examples. Make sure your transitions suit your purpose, and avoid overusing the same ones. You can reference the [Table of Common Transitional Words and Phrases](#) to help find a variety of transition words.

Jorge reread his draft paragraph by paragraph. As he read, he highlighted the main idea of each paragraph so he could see whether his ideas proceeded in a logical order. For the most part, the flow of ideas was clear. However, he did notice that one paragraph did not have a clear main idea. It interrupted the flow of the writing. During revision, Jorge added a topic

sentence that clearly connected the paragraph to the one that had preceded it. He also added transitions to improve the flow of ideas from sentence to sentence. Read the following paragraphs: the first example is Jorge's first draft without any changes, and the second paragraph shows his revisions underlined.

### First Draft:

*Picture this: you're standing in the aisle of your local grocery store when you see a chubby guy nearby staring at several brands of ketchup on display. After deliberating for a moment, he reaches for the bottle with the words "Low Carb!" displayed prominently on the label. (You can't help but notice that the low carb ketchup is higher priced.) Is he making a smart choice that will help him lose weight and enjoy better health—or is he just buying into the latest diet fad? Some researchers estimate that approximately forty million Americans, or about one fifth of the population, have attempted to restrict*

*their intake of foods high in carbohydrates (Sanders and Katz; Hirsch). Proponents of low carb diets say they are the most effective way to lose weight. They yield health benefits such as lower blood pressure and improved cholesterol levels. Some doctors claim that low carbohydrate diets are overrated and caution that their long term effects are unknown. Although following a low carbohydrate diet can have many benefits—especially for people who are obese or diabetic—these diets are not necessarily the best option for everyone who wants to lose weight or improve their health.*

Revised Paragraph

*Picture this: you're standing in the aisle of*

*your local grocery store when you see a chubby guy nearby staring at several brands of ketchup on display. After deliberating for a moment, he reaches for the bottle with the words “Low Carb!” displayed prominently on the label. (You can’t help but notice that the low carb ketchup is higher priced.) Is he making a smart choice that will help him lose weight and enjoy better health—or is he just buying into the latest diet fad? Proponents of low carb diets say they are not only the most effective way to lose weight but also yield health benefits such as lower blood pressure and improved cholesterol levels. Meanwhile, some doctors claim that low carbohydrate diets are overrated and caution that their long term effects are unknown. Although following a low carbohydrate diet can have many benefits—especially for people who are obese or diabetic—these diets are not necessarily the best option for everyone who wants to lose weight or improve their health.*

When you revise to improve cohesion, you analyze how the

parts of your paper work together. You look for anything that seems awkward or out of place. Revision may involve deleting unnecessary material or rewriting parts of the paper so that the out-of- place material fits in smoothly. In a research paper, problems with cohesion usually occur when a writer has trouble integrating source material. If facts or quotations have been awkwardly dropped into a paragraph, they distract or confuse the reader instead of working to support the writer's point. Overusing paraphrased and quoted material has the same effect.

As Jorge reread his draft, he looked to see how the different pieces fit together to prove his thesis. He realized that he had too much information on the popularity of low-carb diets and the debate over their effect on weight loss, when his focus only emphasized the various health risks of low-carb diets, so he had to eliminate some material. He also realized that some of his supporting information needed to be integrated more carefully. Read the following paragraph, first without Jorge's revisions and then with them.

Initial Paragraph

*One likely reason for these lackluster long-*

*term results is that a low carbohydrate diet—like any restrictive diet—is difficult to adhere to for any extended period. Most people enjoy foods that are high in carbohydrates, and no one wants to be the person who always turns down that slice of pizza or birthday cake. In commenting on the Gardner study, experts at the Harvard School of Public Health noted that women in all four diet groups had difficulty following the plan. They further comment that because it is hard for dieters to stick to a low-carbohydrate eating plan, the initial success of these diets is short lived. Medical professionals caution that low carbohydrate diets are difficult for many people to follow consistently and that, to maintain a healthy weight, dieters should try to develop nutrition and exercise habits they can incorporate in their lives in the long term (Mayo Foundation). “For some people, [ low carbohydrate diets] are great, but for most, any sensible eating and exercise plan would work just as well” (Kwon 78).*

## Revised Paragraph

*One likely reason for these lackluster long-term results is that a low carbohydrate diet—like any restrictive diet—is difficult to adhere to for any extended period. In commenting on the Gardner study, experts at the Harvard School of Public Health noted that women in all four diet groups had difficulty following the plan. They further comment that because it is hard for dieters to stick to a low-carbohydrate eating plan, the initial success of these diets is short lived. Medical professionals caution that low carbohydrate diets are difficult for many people to follow consistently and that, to maintain a healthy weight, dieters should try to develop nutrition and exercise habits they can incorporate in their lives in the long term (Mayo Foundation).*

Jorge decided that his comment about pizza and birthday cake came across as subjective and was not necessary to make his

point, so he deleted it. He also realized that not only was the quotation at the end of the paragraph “dropped in,” but also it was awkward and ineffective. How would his readers know who Kwon was or why her opinion should be taken seriously? Adding a signal phrase helped Jorge integrate this quotation smoothly and establish the credibility of his source.

### Writing at Work

Understanding cohesion can also benefit you in the workplace, especially when you have to write and deliver a presentation. Speakers sometimes rely on cute graphics or funny quotations to hold their audience’s attention. If you choose to use these elements, make sure they work well with the substantive content of your presentation. For example, if you are asked to give a financial presentation and the financial report shows that the company lost money, then funny illustrations would not be relevant or appropriate for the presentation.

## 4.2 REVISING--STYLE AND TONE

---

Once you are certain that the content of your paper fulfills your purpose, you can begin revising to improve style and tone. Together, your style and tone create the voice of your paper, or how you come across to readers. Style refers to the way you use language as a writer—the sentence structures you use and the word choices you make. Tone is the attitude toward your subject and audience that you convey through your word choice.

Although accepted writing styles will vary within different disciplines, the underlying goal is the same—to come across to your readers as a knowledgeable, authoritative guide. Writing about research is like being a tour guide who walks readers through a topic. A stuffy, overly formal tour guide can make readers feel put off or intimidated. Too much informality or humor can make readers wonder whether the tour guide really knows what he or she is talking about. Extreme or emotionally charged language comes across as unbalanced.

To help prevent being overly formal or informal, determine an appropriate style and tone at the beginning of the research process. Consider your topic and audience because these can help dictate style and tone. For example, a paper on new

breakthroughs in cancer research should be more formal than a paper on ways to get a good night's sleep. A strong research paper comes across as straightforward, appropriately academic, and serious.

Using plural nouns and pronouns or recasting a sentence can help you keep your language gender neutral while avoiding awkwardness. For example, the following sentence is gender-biased: "When a writer cites a source in the body of his paper, he must list it on his references page." The following is less gender biased but awkward: "When a writer cites a source in the body of his or her paper, he or she must list it on his or her references page." Making the subject third-person plural avoids bias and awkwardness: "Writers must list any sources cited in the body of a paper on the references page."

As you revise your paper, make sure your style is consistent throughout. Look for instances where a word, phrase, or sentence just does not seem to fit with the rest of the writing. It is best to reread for style after you have completed the other revisions so you are not distracted by any larger content issues. Revising strategies to use include the following:

- Read your paper aloud. Sometimes your ears catch inconsistencies that your eyes miss.
- Share your paper with another reader whom you trust to give you honest feedback. It is often difficult to evaluate one's own style objectively—especially in the final phase of a challenging writing project. Another reader may be more likely to notice instances of

wordiness, confusing language, or other issues that affect style and tone.

- Line edit your paper slowly, sentence by sentence. You may even wish to use a sheet of paper to cover everything on the page except the paragraph you are editing—that forces you to read slowly and carefully. Mark any areas where you notice problems in style or tone, and then take time to rework those sections.

On reviewing his paper, Jorge found that he had generally used an appropriate academic style and tone. However, he noticed one glaring exception—his first paragraph. He realized there were places where his overly informal writing could come across as unserious or, worse, disparaging. Revising his word choice and omitting a humorous aside helped Jorge maintain a consistent tone. Read his revision below.

### Initial Opening Paragraph

*Picture this: you're standing in the aisle of your local grocery store when you see a chubby guy nearby staring at several brands of ketchup on display. After deliberating for a moment, he reaches for the bottle with the*

*words “Low-Carb!” displayed prominently on the label. (You can’t help but notice that the low-carb ketchup is higher priced.) Is he making a smart choice that will help him lose weight and enjoy better health—or is he just buying into the latest diet fad?*

### Revised Opening Paragraph

*Picture this: standing in the aisle of your local grocery store, you see an overweight man nearby staring at several brands of ketchup on display. After deliberating for a moment, he reaches for the bottle with the words “Low-Carb!” displayed prominently on the label. Is he making a smart choice that will help him lose weight and enjoy better*

*health—or is he just buying into the latest diet fad?*

## 4.3 EDITING YOUR PAPER

---

After revising your paper to address problems in content or style, you will complete one final editorial review. Perhaps you have already caught and corrected minor mistakes during previous revisions. Nevertheless, give your draft a final edit to make sure it is error-free. Given how much work you have put into your research paper, you will want to check for any errors that could distract or confuse your readers. Using the spell-checking feature in your word-processing program can be helpful, but this should not replace a full, careful review of your document. Be sure to check for any errors that may have come up frequently for you in the past. Your final edit should focus on two broad areas:

- Errors in citing and formatting sources
- Errors in grammar, mechanics, usage, and spelling

For in-depth information on these topics, see the chapter on Grammar, the Purdue University's Online Writing Lab, or a print writing manual, such as *The MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*.

During the process of revising and editing, Jorge made changes in the content and style of his paper. He also gave

the paper a final review to check for overall correctness and, particularly, correct style for his citations and formatting.

### Writing at Work

Following MLA style guidelines may require time and effort. However, it is good practice to learn how to follow accepted conventions in any professional field. Many large corporations create a style manual with guidelines for editing and formatting documents produced by that corporation. Employees should follow the style manual when creating internal documents and documents for publication.

## Checklist for Revision

Ask yourself the following about your draft to help you revise for:

### **Organization**

Overall:

- Does my introduction proceed clearly from the opening to the thesis?
- Does each body paragraph have a clear main idea that relates to the thesis?
- Do the main ideas in the body paragraphs flow in a logical order? Is each paragraph connected to the one before it?
- Do I need to add or revise topic sentences or transitions to make the overall flow of the ideas clearer?
- Does my conclusion summarize my main ideas and revisit my thesis?

At the paragraph level:

- Does the topic sentence clearly state the main idea?
- Do the details in the paragraph relate to the main idea?
- Do I need to recast any sentences or add transitions to improve the flow of sentences?

### **Cohesion**

- Does the opening of the paper clearly connect to the broader topic and thesis?
- Do entertaining quotations or anecdotes serve a purpose?
- Have I included support from research for each main point in the body of my paper?
- Have I included introductory material before any quotations so quotations do not stand alone in paragraphs?

- Does paraphrased and quoted material clearly serve to develop my own points?
- Do I need to add to or revise parts of the paper to help the reader understand how certain information from a source is relevant?
- Are there any places where I have overused material from sources? Does my conclusion make sense based on the rest of the paper?
- Are any new questions or suggestions in the conclusion clearly linked to earlier material?

### **Style and Tone**

- Does my paper avoid excessive wordiness?
- Are my sentences varied in length and structure?
- Have I used points of view (pronouns) effectively and appropriately for the assignment?
- Have I used active voice whenever possible?
- Have I defined specialized terms that might be unfamiliar to readers?
- Have I used clear, straightforward language whenever possible and avoided unnecessary jargon?
- Does my paper support my argument using a balanced tone—neither too indecisive nor too forceful?
- Does my paper avoid vague or imprecise terms? Slang? Repetition of the same phrases (“Smith states..., Jones states...”) to introduce quoted and paraphrased material? Exclusive use of masculine pronouns or

awkward use of he or she? Use of language with negative connotations? Use of outdated or offensive terms?

Apply the following checklists to your paper before submitting your final draft:

### **Grammar, Mechanics, Punctuation, Usage, and Spelling**

- My paper is free of grammatical errors, such as errors in subject-verb agreement and sentence fragments. For additional guidance, see: sentence writing, pronouns, verbs.
- My paper is free of errors in punctuation and mechanics, such as misplaced commas or incorrectly formatted source titles. For additional, see: commas, semicolons.
- My paper is free of common usage errors, such as *alot* and *alright*. For additional guidance, see: word choice, commonly confused words.
- My paper is free of spelling errors. I have proofread my paper for spelling in addition to using the spell-checking feature in my word-processing program. For additional guidance, see spelling.
- I have checked my paper for any editing errors that I know I tend to make frequently.

### **Citations**

- Within the body of my paper, each fact or idea taken from a source is credited to the correct source.

- Each in-text citation includes the source author's name (or, if no author is given, the organization name or source title).
- I have used the correct format for in-text and parenthetical citations. If my source gives page numbers, I have included page numbers in parentheses directly after the quote or paraphrase taken from that page or pages.
- Each source cited in the body of my paper has a corresponding entry in the Works Cited at the end of my paper.

### **Formatting**

- All entries in my Works Cited are in alphabetical order by author's last name (or by title or organization if no author is listed).
- My Works Cited is consistently double spaced (both within and between entries), and each entry uses proper indentation ("hanging indent": indented on the second and all subsequent lines).
- Each entry in my Works Cited includes all the necessary information for that source type, in the correct sequence and format.
- My paper includes a heading (with your name, course information, and date) in the upper left-hand corner of the first page; if no heading is used or your instructor requests it, substitute a title page for the heading.

- My paper includes a title that reflects the topic of my paper.
- My paper includes a running head (page numbers, or a header in the upper right-hand corner of each page of the paper).
- The margins of my paper are set at one inch. The text is double spaced and set in a standard 12-point font.