

# Research Paper Checklist

A research paper checklist that walks students through every stage from topic to final draft.

## Choose and narrow your topic

- Reread the assignment prompt and note the required length, format and due date.
- Brainstorm several topics that interest you and fit the prompt.
- Do background reading to see how much information exists on each.
- Narrow your choice to a focused, manageable topic.  
Too broad means you can't go deep; too narrow means too few sources.
- Write a clear research question your paper will answer.
- Confirm the topic with your teacher if approval is required.

## Develop your thesis

- Draft a one-sentence thesis that states your main argument.
- Make sure the thesis is specific and arguable, not just a fact.
- Check that you can support it with evidence you can find.
- Refine the wording so it is clear and direct.
- Keep the thesis visible as you research and write.

## Gather and evaluate sources

- Search the library catalog, databases and credible websites.
- Collect a mix of primary and secondary sources.
- Evaluate each source for authority, accuracy and bias.
- Save full citation details for every source as you go.  
Author, title, publisher, date and URL or page numbers.
- Take organized notes and label which source each note came from.
- Aim for the minimum number of sources the assignment requires.

## Outline and draft

- Group your notes into themes that support the thesis.
- Build an outline with an introduction, body sections and conclusion.
- Write a draft introduction that ends with your thesis.
- Develop each body paragraph with a point, evidence and explanation.
- Write a conclusion that restates the argument and its significance.
- Don't edit while drafting; get the full first draft down first.

## Cite your sources

- Confirm the required citation style, such as MLA, APA or Chicago.
- Add an in-text citation for every quote, paraphrase and statistic.
- Build a complete works cited or reference list.
- Format every entry exactly to the style guide.
- Run a plagiarism or similarity check to catch missing citations.

## Revise and finalize

- Reread for a clear thesis and logical flow between paragraphs.

- Cut filler and tighten weak or repetitive sentences.
- Proofread for spelling, grammar and punctuation.
- Check formatting: margins, font, spacing, title page and page numbers.
- Read the paper aloud or ask someone to review it.
- Submit before the deadline and keep a backup copy.