

Writing the MLA Research Paper

Philosophy

1. Name
 - Research = re-search, i.e., search and search again for information
2. Purpose
 - a. To inform
 - b. To persuade
 - c. To persuade and to inform
3. Benefits
 - a. For the author:
 - Paper is a learning tool about the topic.
 - Paper offers a chance to learn research techniques.
 - Student learns how to incorporate outside sources and other people's writing smoothly and effectively into his own.
 - b. For the reader:
 - Paper offers a chance to learn more about the topic.
 - Reader can use your Works Cited list to find further information about the topic.

Practical Procedure

1. Select a topic.
 - Something you're interested in enough to want to read a lot about it
 - Something you would like to learn more about or need to learn more about
 - Something perhaps that you've studied in school
 - Something to do with your chosen career field
 - Something about which there is already a lot of printed material
2. Narrow down your topic
 - Go from general to fairly specific.
 - End up with something that you can work with fairly easily.
3. Make up a general content outline.
 - This is just a rather broad listing of the main points and ideas which you think you'd like to mention in your paper. (See attached sample.)
4. Start to gather your resources (books, magazine articles, journal articles, interviews, etc.)
5. Make an alphabetical listing of the sources you consult. Number each source. This is called your "working bibliography." (See sample sheet.)

6. Start reading and taking notes according to the general outline topics designated by Roman numerals. See sample note card on attached sheet.
7. Write your final content outline based on the note cards you took. You may have to discard some of the original categories if you did not find enough information during your note-taking sessions. Or you may want to add topics to your outline because you found additional ideas or information while taking notes.
8. Write your first rough draft using the final outline and note cards. The first draft is idea centered, i.e., you're concerned about the placement of ideas and quotes, logical order, relationships between ideas, and so on.
9. Write the second rough draft, which is word-centered. Fine-tune things such as transitions, your introductions to the quotes, a proper introductory paragraph, and a good conclusion.
10. Write a third draft (or check over the second draft) and take care with grammar, punctuation, and mechanics. Major areas of concern should be pronoun agreement, subject-verb agreement, and correct sentences. Minor areas of concern include use of a and an and correct capitalization.

Format at a Glance

1. Have a cover page containing the title of your paper, your name, the title of the course and its number, your instructor's name, and the date handed in. (See sample).

Order of Pages:

- Title page
- Formal outline page(s)
- Start of paper (minimum of three full pages)
- Works Cited list
- Appendix (if desired)

Do not have any blank pages anywhere in your paper. Do not put your paper into a plastic cover. See below for proper packaging and presentation of the paper.

2. Leave a 1" margin around the edge of every sheet of paper (should be no more than 1 ½" on each side).
3. Have at least three (3) full pages of the body. To be on the safe side, type something onto a fourth page at least.
4. Double-space everything. Nothing in the paper is single spaced or triple spaced.
5. Type or print out your paper in **DARK** ink. Do not hand in a paper that is printed so lightly that it can hardly be read.

6. Beginning with page one of the body of your paper, every page has your last name and the page number in the upper right-hand corner.

Handling Quotes and Citations

1. What to cite: Cite = ()
 - a. Exact quotes (whether long, short, or medium – even one word)
 - b. Specific ideas or opinions as expressed by someone else
 - c. A specific fact or statistic
 - d. Your paraphrasing of someone else’s ideas or opinions.
 - e. Anything that is not general knowledge

NOTE: The parentheses containing the citation should always be at the END of the sentence, never in the middle.

Important: For every source listed in your Works Cited list, you must have at least one corresponding citation in your paper. For example, five sources listed in your Work Cited list would mean that there must be at least five citations within parentheses ().

2. How to cite:
 - a. Short quotes (anything up to four [4] full lines)
 - Type the quoted portion in the regular sentence and put quotation marks around it.
 - Put the period after the parentheses.

Example: According to Dr. Porter, the importance of a Martian landing “would rock the known scientific world to its very foundations and would easily be the most significant scientific achievement of this century” (Munsen 29).

- b. Long quotes (anything over four lines – even one word over)
 - Indent it five extra spaces from the left hand margin. Entire left-hand side will therefore be straight and even. Leave right-hand side normal.
 - Do not put any quotation marks around a long quote.
 - Place final period in front of parentheses.

Example: According to Dr. Porter, if man landed on Mars, that event would have incredibly great significance back here on earth:

When and if human beings land on the surface of Mars, such an event would rock the known scientific world to its very foundations and would easily be the most significant scientific achievement of this century. Mankind would experience a dramatic advancement in scientific knowledge, in social awareness, and even in spiritual and philosophical benefits. (Munsen 29)

- c. Usually you should try to “set up” the reader for a long quote before typing it. In other words, tell the reader what the point of the quote is supposed to be. What is the reader supposed to get out of the quote? Why are you including it in your paper? What does the quote show or prove? (See quote directly above for example).
- d. Do not have any quotations at all in the introductory paragraph or in the conclusion. The opening and closing paragraphs of your research paper should be your thoughts and words, not someone else’s.
- e. Have a variety of types of quotations: A few direct quotes (long [but not too long!], medium, and short); some partial quotes; some quotes of only one or two words; and some paraphrased quotes. (A “long” direct quote should be only six typed lines long-or fewer.)

Writing Style of the Research Paper

1. The general writing style of the research paper is slightly more formal than that of a regular essay. You should avoid all contractions like don’t or won’t; instead, write out the phrases do not and will not. Do not begin any sentences with and or but; instead, use slightly more formal words like Also and However.
2. If your topic is something scientific or medical, be sure to explain and “break down” any technical words or medical terms. Re-define them in your own words so that the reader can easily understand them. Doing so will also help you to understand the terms yourself.

Sample Sheet

1. General Content Outline

Topic: Possibility of Life on Mars

- I. Background info on Mars Itself
 - A. When Mars was first discovered
 - B. The physical description of Mars
 - II. History of wondering about life on Mars
 - III. Why any life at all could exist on Mars
 - IV. What type of “life” might be on Mars
 - A. Microscopic
 - B. Mammalian
 - C. Human (?)
 - V. Impact of Discovering Life on Mars
 - A. On science
 - B. On sociology
 - C. On theology
 - VI. Modern-day techniques of detecting life on Mars
 - A. Space ships and probes
 - B. Huge earth telescopes sending signals into deep space
2. The informal “working bibliography” (alphabetized and numbered)
1. Aronson, Thomas. *Mars in Fact and Fiction*.
 2. Brownlow, Frank. *Why Life on Mars?*
 3. Daniels, Mary. *The U.S. and Mars*.
 4. Halstrom, Jim. “A Joint U.S./Russian Flight to Mars?”
Journal of the Scientific Age.
 5. Vanstalling, Brett. *Mars: The Mystery Planet*.