

Research Log

Purpose

Organization and academic integrity are two essential features of academic research. It is easy to include these in the initial stages of research by keeping a research log. By using a standardized system of keeping track of details, you can avoid the frustration of trying to figure out where information came from the night before a paper is due, being worried that you are misquoting or plagiarizing someone else's work, and becoming overwhelmed by the number of sources you have to look through.

Content

In essence, a research log organizes information according to source, type of information, and the categories that you designate for a given research paper or project. Standard entries include all necessary reference information such as authors' and editors' names, titles of works, publication dates, places and companies, and so on. In addition, the log would include the search method used to find the material, the topic, the usefulness of the material for your particular paper and the date (especially when using Internet sources) that you got the material. Finally, specific notes including paraphrased points, select quotations with page numbers, and your own comments would be added to the standard entry.

Format

Research logs can take varied formats. Many researchers still prefer using note cards (or index cards; see reference notecards for an abbreviated example). They may use different colors of cards for different subject areas (Jim Blanchard, personal communication). Other researchers enter data directly into a computerized journal, for example in Microsoft Word, so that notes can be cut and pasted into categorical sections and eventually rewritten into essay format. Still others enter all the information related to one particular subject into a blank book (Miriam Unruh, personal communication). Whatever the format, being consistent with your own system in terms of content and layout on the page is essential. If you get used to putting certain information in specific spots on the page, it will be much easier for you to write it in future entries and to find it when you are skimming for specific data.

Time savers

- Create your reference page as you go along and then delete references you haven't used for that paper when you are proofreading the paper
- Use the citation style you will use for the paper in your log rather than entering information haphazardly
- Scan your source thoroughly first to make sure it is credible and useful