



## Writing an Academic Paper

Listed below are the steps required to write an academic paper. These steps do not have to be done in the order listed; in fact, they may be repeated many times during the process. Repeating steps most often happens during the research, reading, and first draft stage of writing. Writing and learning is a fluid process, so a thesis statement or viewpoints in the paper might change as you do your research. Or, an outline might be more easily written after completing the first draft rather than before. In addition, it is not unusual to go back to do further research or to revise a thesis statement when editing the rough draft.

### Select a Topic

- choose, if possible, a topic that interests you
- follow directions given by your professor
- consult with the TA or professor if you are uncertain about the assignment

### Create a time schedule with deadlines for each step

- research
- read & take notes
- outline/organize information
- write the first draft
- revise for completeness, conciseness & clarity
- edit & proofread

### Find sources

- remember that one source can lead to other useful information
- gather several different viewpoints to appreciate the topic's complexity
- search the BISON catalogue for books, journals and other material in the UM Libraries' collections and search NETDOC databases for journal citations, full-text resources, abstracts
- make a complete reference notecard for each source

### **Prepare preliminary questions to guide your reading & note-taking**

- what information is needed to develop the topic?
- what are the important issues related to this subject?
- who has contributed significantly to this area?
- what conclusions can be drawn?

### **Formulate a working thesis statement**

A thesis statement is a declarative sentence that expands your topic into a scholarly proposal, one that you will prove, defend, or expand on in your paper.

### **Design a system to organize and take notes**

- Identify topic headings on each note card or loose leaf.
- indicate whether the information is a quote, a paraphrase, or a summary of the source
- add your original thoughts about the reading
- on all cards or pages, identify title, author, and page reference in an abbreviated form

### **Outline your paper**

- list, classify, group, and number all discussion points
- Write your rough draft
- write sections of the paper, following your outline
- craft an introduction which includes the thesis statement and sufficient background information
- write a brief conclusion

### **Develop your thesis statement to:**

- fit at the beginning or end of the introductory paragraph
- anticipate your conclusion and set in motion the presentation of supporting points
- control, focus, or direct the entire paper
- plainly state your position for the reader

## Revise

- set the paper aside for a few days
- read the paper aloud to detect any weaknesses in reasoning and structure
- add or delete content to strengthen arguments and make connections
- make certain everything in the paper relates back to your thesis statement
- have someone read and comment on your paper

## Edit

### *content & organization*

- does each paragraph have one main idea expressed in a topic sentence?
- do succeeding paragraph sentences relate to their topic sentence?
- does sentence structure vary?
- have irrelevant or repeated words or phrases been deleted?
- is word choice precise, vivid, varied?

### *grammar*

- are appropriate verb tenses used?
- are there any contractions e.g. 'don't' or 'can't'? If so, rewrite in full 'do not' or cannot.
- have you run a spell-check? Have you searched for homonyms (their/there)?
- are prepositions and modifiers in the correct places?

## Check documentation according to your particular discipline

- ask your professor which style should be used for your paper, for example, typically:
  - humanities subjects use either MLA or the Chicago/Turabian (footnote) styles
  - social-science subjects use APA style
  - science subjects use CBE style
- study a style manual for the appropriate system you will use