

Selecting a Topic

Selecting a topic for a research paper can be very challenging and for some students a tedious and fearsome task. The trick in writing a good paper is to have an order in what you do and your thinking process.

- First you will want to choose a topic that is of interest to you. In other words write about something that you like and want to learn more about it. This will make the research, writing and reading process an interesting and learning event.
- Choose a topic for which you can find sufficient material to learn from. If you need to write a long term paper and you choose an event that just happened chances are you will not find enough material to draw your information from.

Thesis Statement

A common mistake that students make is to choose a too broad of a topic. This has as a result an abundance of information that the student cannot manage and at the end she/he gets “lost” in. As an example, instead of choosing **rock music** as a topic for your paper, develop a thesis statement about rock music. Examples are:

- Rock music and its effect on the relations between parents and teenage children in the 60s. (This can be a topic for a sociology class)
- The Music Industry: How has online downloading of music affected the music industry: Are record companies hurting financially or is this just a case of less profit? (This can be a business topic)
- Rock music played loud and long has a negative effect on hearing (This can be a topic for a science class)

A thesis statement will help you concentrate on more specific sources and will provide you a focus to your work. By doing your research in time you will be in position to support or prove or disprove your initial statement.

Creating an Outline

The secret in doing a good research paper is to have your thoughts organized by creating an outline that will give a structure to your paper. An outline includes headings and sub-headings for each section of the paper.

Over → → →

An example of an outline:

Rock Music's Effect on Hearing

1. Introduction
2. Background
 - 2.1 How hearing works
 - 2.2 Decibels
 - 2.2.1 Decibel levels of various noises
3. Rock Music and decibels
 - Concert/Home/Car levels
 - Room Size
 - Speaker Size
4. Scientific Studies
 - 4.1 Those supporting hearing loss due to rock music
 - 4.2 Those seeing no connection between rock music and hearing loss
5. Summary and Conclusions

Writing a Draft

The next step is to write a draft version of your paper based on the outline. Even if you do not develop an outline first (a mistake), you should still write a draft. The first version of the paper will not be your last. You should consider asking your professor, a friend or a roommate to read the draft. They will be able to tell you what they did or did not understand, where you need more information or you contradict yourself.

Final Version

It is a good idea to set aside your draft for a day before working on the final version. This way you will think about it with a fresh mind and catch problems you might otherwise miss.

Proofread your paper not only for spelling and grammar mistakes but also for logic and flow.

- Did you develop your central idea adequately?
- Are the transitions between paragraphs and sections logical?
- Are you assuming knowledge on the part of your reader?
- Do you need to explain concepts or theories?

Bibliography

Do not forget to cite your sources. When you quote or paraphrase an author, you must credit the source. Citing all sources does not hurt your final grade. Not citing does. When in doubt better CITE! Follow the style suggested by your instructor such as APA or MLA.

Plagiarizing is considered an academic offense and a violation of the University's Rules
