9 Steps to Writing a Research Paper at Concordia University

Step 1: Understand your assignment

Make sure you understand the assignment given in class. No matter how brilliant your paper ends up being, it will not count if it is written on the wrong topic.

Step 2: Identify your interest

Sitting in class, or reading an assignment, did you come across and idea or example that sparked an interest? However small or fleeting that interest may have been, run with it! You will be more interested in writing your paper, and it will show in your work!

Step 3: Explore your topic

Before you investigate scholarly journal articles and in-depth books on your topic, make sure you understand the topic as a whole. A great place to start is by visiting the Encyclopedias in the Concordia University Texas Library Reference section.

Step 4: Narrow your topic

While you may be passionate about or at least mildly interested in the Victorian Era or the Revolutionary War, these topics are much too broad to write any paper on (unless you plan on writing 3,000+ pages). Narrow your topic, and if possible, narrow again. An easy (and essential) way of doing this is by making sure your paper has an argument. Are you merely stating facts? If so, choose a side! Take a stand!

Step 5: Find resources

Concordia University offers both print and digital materials. Databases and ebooks are available on our website at http://www.concordia.edu/library. If you have never used a database before, or want a refresher, ask a librarian! We’re here to help!

Step 6: Outline

Before sitting down to write your paper, outline the major points you wish to make. This will ease you into writing your paper, and will often make it more coherent.
Step 7: Write

Sometimes the scariest part of writing a research paper is actually writing it! If you get stuck, just keep writing, no matter if you do not like it. You can (and should) edit later.

Remember, have fun with your writing. While your paper should be clear, concise and academic, writing should not feel like a punishment. Express your take on the subject!

Step 8: Edit, edit, edit

Think your first draft is the perfect draft? More often than not, you’d be wrong! Always edit (and re-edit) your work!

Step 9: Citations

Don’t forget to properly cite your work. Ask your professor what style of citation (MLA, APA, et al) they wish you to use.

Remember that research is not a linear process. This list is in something of an order, but it’s not meant to be taken as a strict procedure. Research is a matter of trying something, evaluating and learning from the results, refining your strategy, trying something else, and exploring lots of possibilities. Research should be fun!

Need Help? Just Ask!
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