

How to Write an A Paper

A helpful summary of the material covered in the lecture on bibliography is available on the library's website at: www.campus.arbor.edu:8880/whitelibrary/exegesis.html

The ability to write an acceptable research paper is the most important skill students develop in college. If they can write well, they can think well. If they can think well, they will have mastered this life's most important skill. The goal of a research paper is to train students to think well. This kind of thinking involves a three-step process: discovering, developing, and defending ideas. Students do research to discover ideas, and then will develop and defend those ideas in a written essay.

The discovery process includes determining a problem, developing a working bibliography, gathering information, figuring out what the main issues are, deciding each issue, and finally understanding the solution to the problem.

The development process includes stating the best solution to the problem in one sentence, called the thesis, and then explaining its implications.

The defense process includes showing why the thesis is correct and is better than any other solution.

Beyond these general guidelines the instructor expects an acceptable paper to:

1. Be typed. Double-space the text. Do not include any blank pages or pad the paper with larger than 12-point type. Do not enclose your paper in a folder. Simply write your name and box number in the upper-right corner of the first page.
2. Be 1250-1500 words (5-6 pages) long.
3. Use the English language correctly. Write and proof-read the work as carefully as if it were a resume. The instructor will not read any paper beyond the tenth mistake in spelling, usage, or logic.
4. Be in proper form for an academic paper. Attribute quotations. Cite authorities and sources for new ideas. Use in-text citations. Include a bibliography of no less than ten items for a 200-level class and sixteen for a 300 level-class. Follow the directions in Rosa and Eschholtz, *The Writer's Brief Handbook for the MLA format*. Errors in the prescribed format will be counted as mistakes.
5. Use the Bible as the main source. However, since the paper is a work of scriptural exegesis, do not list the Bible in the bibliography, nor count it as one of the sources.
6. Have at least one of the sources be an article in a theological dictionary or lexicon, and have at least one be a periodical article.
7. Have one clearly identified thesis.
8. Display a clear and logical plan for defending the thesis. Make sure each of the sentences leads on to the next one, and that each paragraph is connected to its neighbors by reasonable transitions.
9. Use specific data or examples to illustrate all generalizations. Do not merely state the conclusions; include the evidence or arguments to convince the reader. Remember, showing is better than telling.
10. Make use of the critical checklist included with the syllabus.
11. Include all the requisite parts of a research paper: introduction, body, conclusion, and bibliography.

A good paper is like a pillar:
It begins with an introduction. The
introduction starts with some
broad generalization, and
then narrows down to
a statement
of the
THESIS.
Next it has a body

which begins with the second-best argument for the thesis.
The body continues with the third-best argument for the thesis.
It ends with the best argument for the thesis.
Finally comes the conclusion which restates the thesis.
It then goes on to broaden the paper by discussing the implications of the thesis or by suggesting further ideas.

Stages in Writing the Paper

1. Choosing the problem
2. Developing the bibliography
3. Identifying the issues.
4. Determining the thesis
5. Planning a rough outline

Each stage must be completed satisfactorily before the next may be undertaken. Because students are sometimes tempted to claim work that is not their own, all students must be ready to hand in with the finished paper evidence of the work in progress to demonstrate that the work is indeed their own. This evidence includes all the required preparatory work as well as research notes made during the research process. Students who do not hand in these materials when requested will be presumed to have cheated and will fail the course.

Critical Checklist

Words

1. Is every word spelled correctly?
2. Is the meaning of every word correct and clear?
3. Are the apostrophes correct?
4. Are any words or phrases redundant, trite, jargon, slang or superfluous?
5. Are idioms used correctly?
6. Do balanced words or phrases have their correct partners?

Sentences

1. Do the subjects and verbs agree in number?
2. Does every pronoun have an antecedent?
3. Do the pronouns agree with their antecedents?
4. Are the sentences free from use of contractions?
5. Are the sentences free from use of the second person?
6. Are the sentences free from use of the passive voice?
7. Are the sentences free from fragments?
8. Are the sentences free from run-on elements?
9. Are the sentences free from dangling modifiers?
10. Are participle phrases near the word they modify?
11. Are the sentences free from ending-prepositions?
12. Are the verb tenses correct?
13. Is every fact correctly documented?
14. Does every sentence contain only one clear idea?

Paragraphs

1. Is there a logical transition between each paragraph?
2. Does each paragraph make only one clear point?
3. Is the point of the paragraph expressed in a topic sentence?
4. Is the first sentence the topic sentence?
5. Is there a logic to the sentence order?
6. Are the sentences all in order?
7. Does every sentence make a unique contribution to the explication of the point of the paragraph?
8. Is the paragraph free from unnecessary sentences?
9. Do the sentences in each paragraph show that the topic sentence is true?

The whole paper

1. Is there one clear thesis with a subject and a predicate?
2. Does the thesis make up the last sentence of the introduction and the first sentence of the conclusion?
3. Is the thesis verifiable and meaningful?
4. Read by themselves do the topic sentences make a good argument for the paper's thesis?
5. Is the argument convincing?
6. Are quotations used only when necessary, leaving summaries and paraphrases to convey most of the cited information?
7. Does the paper have an introduction, body, and conclusion?
8. Is there a bibliography in the proper form?

Paper grades

A D paper will contain a bibliography in proper form showing that the required research has been carried out.

A C paper will fulfill the requirements for a D and will state the problem and its solution.

A B paper will fulfill the requirements for a C and will provide good arguments for the validity of the solution.

An A paper will fulfill the requirements for a B and will argue the case clearly without stylistic mistakes.