

RESEARCH PAPER CHECK LIST

1. Proper title page or heading, as required by the discipline.
2. Formal **outline** or abstract if required by the professor. Check proper format for an outline. An Academic Resources Center handout on outline format is available. Grammar handbooks and documentation manuals also contain outline format guidelines. Check proper format for an abstract if one is needed. See model abstracts in reference articles that you have used.
3. An effective **introduction paragraph** or section is needed for most research papers. Use an opening that attracts your readers' attention and that is appropriate to the discipline. In most cases, an introduction should contain a thesis statement, which might do one or both of the following: give the central idea of the paper and give the main parts of the paper. Often, an introduction or abstract is like a mini-outline.
4. Logical **organization** of major ideas in the paper is important. Also, provide smooth transitions between paragraphs. Connect ideas throughout. Make sure all parts of the paper are relevant to the thesis. Headings and subheadings are appropriate for some disciplines and are often used for longer papers, especially ones written in the APA style.
5. Select the **best material**. Do not overload the paper with all material researched. Use only a small part of the research, and use only what effectively supports your thesis. Dismiss references that are weak and inaccurate. Often, students overload their papers, making their papers seem disorganized. Sharp critical thinking skills will help you avoid this tendency.
6. Make sure you include **original, well-conceived ideas** in the paper. This originality may be reflected in the way you organize ideas and relate ideas to support your thesis. Your paper needs to reflect a synthesis of material, and to a large extent your grade will be based on your critical thinking skills. Few research assignments required a mere summary, and even those that do should show some originality in how you synthesize ideas in the introduction and conclusion section.
7. Make sure you **integrate quotations** and paraphrases into the paper by using effective signal phrases. Try to vary your verb selection; for instance, do not consistently use the verb "states" to introduce all or most of your quotations. Be sure to cite the sources of all quotations, paraphrases, statistics, and highly specific information. All documentation styles require that page numbers be given for the quotations; of course, this is not possible if you use an electronic medium. Some disciplines shy away from the use of quotations in research writing; summaries are preferred for these styles. Among the common styles that avoid quotations is the APA style. The use of quotations is common for the MLA style, where a close textual reading of a primary source and quotation from a critic or experts in a field are common.

8. Write an effective **conclusion**. This part of your paper significantly affects the overall quality of your paper and needs to clarify the main point you want to leave your reader with based on your research effort. Often a shortcoming of college research papers is a weak conclusion. Students sometimes tire at the paper's end and leave conclusions for last minute. Be aware of this tendency, and try writing drafts of your conclusion prior to the last minute.
9. Use **correct bibliographical form** for the reference list. Most documentation styles do not have writers include in the reference list any reference that was not included as a source within the context of a paper. It is assumed that you would have consulted more references than you actually used; this principle is part of good research. Some students feel compelled to list all sources consulted so it will impress their professors; however, your professors will assume that you might have read more sources that you might list. Some documentation styles do permit for using a separate page to list sources that were not used in the paper; check with your professor about this.

APA and MLA require that you only list on your reference page what was actually used in your paper. Check to make sure that every source given in your reference list or works cited page actually appears in the text of your paper, and eliminate from your list any source that is not used in the body of your paper. Your professors will be checking for this exact correspondence, and it is your obligation as a serious researcher to do this checking before you submit your paper.

10. Proofread for mechanics: punctuation, spelling, word choice, subject-verb agreement, pronoun-antecedent agreement, vague pronouns (e.g., *this* used as the subject of a sentence), awkward phrasing, shifts in pronoun case, misplaced modifiers, parallel construction, and so on. Do not make errors that distract a reader, such as confusing "effect" and "affect." Consult a grammar handbook when you are not sure of the rules.
11. Allow time for final editing to improve the overall style of your paper. At this point, check for wordiness and accurate word choice as well as correct grammar and mechanics. Good editing at this stage can improve the overall readability of your paper. A proofreader can help you with last-minute style changes and fixing mistakes that you might not be able to see. Often it is difficult to see minor errors in your own text or to see how to change text to make it less wordy. In addition to having your final draft read by a skilled proofreader, you should make a conscientious effort to learn what kinds of mistakes you of work to perfect your own editing skills, particularly for cutting extraneous words and unnecessary repetition of ideas. Notice common errors in your writing and any tendency you have for wordiness, and when you proofread a paper, keep in mind what you need to look for based on past experiences with editing your work.