

# 9 Steps to Writing a Research Paper at Concordia University Texas

## Step 1: Understand your assignment.

Make sure you understand the assignment given to the class by your instructor. No matter how brilliant your paper ends up, it will not earn you the grade you want if it is written on the wrong topic or fails to follow instructions. Read it twice before you start and again before you turn the paper in.

## Step 2: Identify your interest(s)

Up until now in the class, or while reading an assignment, did you come across an idea or example that sparked your interest? However small or fleeting that interest may have been, run with it! You will be more engaged in the process of 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 Wikipedia or other general reference sources to make sure you understand your topic. Even AI tools like ChatGPT can be a helpful resource to find and explore writing topics. Think of it as a smart assistant that can quickly provide information and suggestions on various subjects, making it easier for you to discover and develop your interests for writing assignments. Before using AI tools, though, make sure to closely read your class syllabus to **know your professor's AI policy** and whether or not you are allowed to use AI tools in the writing process.

Don't know where to start? Reach out to a librarian via phone 512.313.5050, email [library@concordia.edu](mailto:library@concordia.edu), or chat (available 24/7) via the box at the lower right of the CTX Library main page: [www.concordia.edu/library](http://www.concordia.edu/library). We love this part of the process and have lots of tools to help you.

## Step 4: Narrow your topic

While you may be passionate about or at least mildly interested in the Victorian Era or Global Warming, these topics are much too broad to write on (unless you plan on writing 1,000+ pages). Narrow your topic, and if possible, narrow it 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 Texas offers a wide variety of materials. Databases and ebooks are available on our website; print sources can be found via online tools, but you have to come to the library to get them. Most students begin with **“Jump Start”** (a discovery search that pulls articles from a variety of databases) and try the **Advanced Search link**. Select the discipline of the course you for which you are doing the research (English, Business, Computer Science, etc.) to help focus the results. Then enter some search terms above. Let the suggested terms you see there help you. We also can direct you to some print books in our collection if your instructor requires that. If you have never used a database before, or want a refresher, or need help finding books ask a librarian! We’re here to help! See Step 3 above for ways to connect.

## Step 6: Outline (Plan but be flexible)

Before sitting down to write your paper, try to make a basic outline of the major points you wish to make. This will ease you into writing your paper, and will often make it more coherent (make the parts seem related to each other or evolving toward a final observation). Don't feel this plan is a straightjacket – as you write feel free to update or tweak the outline. It is mostly just a road map or plan, a general idea of what you want to talk about first, then next, then after that and how and with what you want to end. It will help you make sure you cover everything. Some writers make very minimal outlines and then when the paper is done, they make a more detailed outline of what they have in order to revise (re-see and update) that first draft.

## 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 like it or not. You can (and should) revise later.

Remember, have fun with your writing. Express your take on the subject. As one professor told me, **“Don't get it right, get it written!”** After you write, leave time for revising and editing – that's when you clean it up. Eventually with good revision (re-seeing) and clean editing (fixing errors) your final paper should be clear, concise and academic, but writing the first draft is a looser process.

## Step 8: REVISE first and then Edit, edit, edit

A few people once or twice write a perfect first draft, but that is by far the exception. **Start by revising:** Does this paragraph go before or after this one? Does this sentence belong in this paragraph or over in this other paragraph? Can I completely throw out this paragraph? Don't edit before you revise, or you may waste time on a paragraph that is getting dumped anyway. **Then -- when the beginning, middle, and end all feel about right -- edit.** Go into the sentences and get rid of words you don't need, tighten ideas, and fix spelling and punctuation errors. Add transitions for coherence.

## 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. At the Library we support APA (check out APA Academic Writer), Chicago, MLA, and Turabian Styles.

The final version should have in-text citations (or footnotes or both) and bibliographic entries in the Works Cited (MLA), References (APA), or Bibliography (Chicago & Turabian) page(s) with hanging indents and alphabetical order (ascending A-Z).

You can print the final version in one of Concordia's computer labs or submit it electronically as your instructor requests.

**Remember** that research is not a linear process. This list is 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!

*Lastly, Need Help? Just Ask!*

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