

The Ten-Step Research Assignment—For First Year Studies

The point is to break the research process into discrete steps that together will help your students to produce good scholarship and give you multiple opportunities to give meaningful feedback and support. This process also provides a meaningful role for the librarian to play in the paper process.

RESEARCH PAPER STEP ONE: INITIAL PROPOSAL

The topic for this paper, loosely defined, is Christianity. You may approach the topic from any perspective and through any discipline. Your first task is to focus the topic more sharply. Below are examples of paper topics that have yielded good papers in the past. Remember: "topics" are broad. Use this list as a starting point as you look for a topic that interests you. **Your initial proposal** will declare your topic and list some preliminary questions that you hope to investigate.

General Topics: The Historical Jesus/ An Examination of Jesus' Times: Christianity and Its Revision of/Conversation with Judaism: The Role of Women in Christianity: The Rise of the Cult of Mary: Christian Faith and Its Relationship to Reason (A look at the works of Aquinas): Fate vs. Free Will: Christianity and the Problem of Predestination: God is Dead: Nietzsche's Attack on Christianity: From Joan of Arc to Suicide Bombers: The Psychology of Martyrdom

Internal Disputes: The Great Schism: Orthodoxy vs. Catholicism: Luther & Protestantism: Christianity and the Colonizing of America (Puritans, Pilgrims, Quakers, etc.): The Book of Mormon: America's Revision of the Gospels

Politics: Islam vs. Christianity: The Early Conflicts (A Look at the Crusades): Missionizing: The Fate of Christianity in _____ (fill in the country): The Fate of the Church in _____ (example: the Soviet Union; Nazi Germany, etc.): Christianity, The Slave's Religion: The Rise of the Nation of Islam: The Christian Right in American Politics: Christian Terrorism (The Bombing of Abortion Clinics, Gay Bars, etc.)

Science: Galileo and the Church: Darwin's Attack on Creationism: Christianity and the Environment

Art and Literature: Images of Christ Through the Ages: Representations of Christ in Film: Christian Influences on _____ (fill in any author/novel/poem)

STEP TWO: LIBRARY SESSION (OR RESEARCHING TO FORMULATE YOUR QUESTIONS)

We'll be sharing your topics and question with a librarian, who will illustrate research strategies that will help you to refine your questions. Different topics suggest different strategies, including consulting special subject encyclopedias, referring to peer-reviewed journals, and even using Google. As we talk about how to use sources to refine your thinking, you will also learn how to find the information that you need.

STEP THREE: LIBRARY SESSION #2 (OR EVALUATING SOURCES AND USING THEM RESPONSIBLY)

Still working with your proposals and questions, the librarian will offer a variety of sources on a topic and ask you to evaluate them. We will also talk about **what to do when, for instance, you find material that undermines your initial premise, or sources that are at odds with each other. We will discuss how to use sources responsibly.**

STEP FOUR: PROPOSAL, ROUND TWO (OR RESEARCHING TO REFINE YOUR QUESTIONS)

Research requires the continual refinement of a topic and a set of research questions. Accordingly, you are **likely to challenge your initial premises and arrive at various conclusions as you work.** For this assignment, you should present a refined proposal and a set of focused questions that reflect your current thinking about your research. Your classmates will be responding to this question with a brief comment and additional questions on Moodle. Post your best work.

STEP FIVE: RESEARCH PITCH SESSION (OR HOW TO NUTSHELL YOUR TOPIC AND OUTLINE A RESEARCH PLAN OF ACTION)

We'll invite a librarian to come to class and hear your pitch sessions. The sessions should include a succinct statement of your proposed argument, the questions you intend to address, and some plan for addressing/researching these questions. The librarian will give advice regarding sources, databases, and so on. Your classmates' responses will help you to see the strengths and weaknesses of your research plan.

STEP SIX: ABSTRACT AND ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY (OR CONSIDERING SOURCES IN THE LIGHT OF YOUR ARGUMENT)

Write a 75 word abstract summarizing the paper you think you're going to write. Attach a draft of your bibliography. This bibliography should identify a list of sources that includes books, journals, and on-line resources. You must annotate these sources—in other words, provide a brief commentary of what the sources contain, assess their academic quality, and address the ways that they appear to be useful to your topic.

STEP SEVEN: CRAFTING AN INTRODUCTION AND AN OUTLINE (OR FINDING FOCUS, STRUCTURE, AND AN ARGUMENT)

By now, you should have a working thesis and introduction for your research paper. Your introduction should contextualize your thesis and should engage your reader. It should also offer the reader a suggestion of your paper's structure.

STEP EIGHT: WRITING BODY PARAGRAPHS: USING/ANALYZING/CITING SOURCES (OR WORKING WITH YOUR SOURCES/MAKING THEM WORK FOR YOU)

Post a couple of body paragraphs on Moodle. We'll review them in class to determine how well you've set up, employed, analyzed, and cited your sources. A thorough discussion of plagiarism is included here.

STEP NINE: DRAFTING THE RESEARCH PAPER!

Expect this to be a long and arduous process. You'll produce at least two complete drafts and will receive copious feedback from me, your classmates, and Writing Center tutors.

STEP TEN: YOUR RESEARCH PRESENTATION (OR, RETHINKING AND RE-MEDIATING YOUR RESEARCH)

Your research presentations should NOT be a simple "replay" of your topic but should be re-designed so that you 1) spend some time talking *ex tempore*, 2) employ more than one medium, and 3) engage your classmates in discussion. A successful presentation will reconsider your topic and may focus on one part of the research, or elaborate on some aspect of the research that you didn't focus on in your paper. You will have 15 minutes to make your presentation; this will include any Q & A. Your presentation will be graded separately from your paper.

Adapted from Dartmouth's Writing Programs website: Karen Gocsik used this research process in her two-term Writing 2-3.