

Surviving a Research Project: A Thirteen-Step Program

1. Pick a topic and start reading about it. Make notes of all of the interesting facts and issues you discover.
2. Based on what you have discovered, generate one or more level-three questions on your topic.
3. Keep reading, this time with your questions in mind.
4. When you find information that might partially answer your question(s), write it down and copy the source. Include complete citation information. At the top of the first page of the selection, briefly summarize its main idea(s) and relevance to your topic/ question. Repeat this step many times.
5. When you have learned enough about your topic that you are starting to feel confused by the weight of information you have collected, stop and reflect on what you have found. Write or type some pages of commentary on your ideas.
6. Narrow and/or modify your topic and question to better reflect the information you have gathered.
7. Repeat steps 3-6 until you *have* to start writing your paper. (Give yourself at least two weeks.)
8. Write down the tentative answer to your research question. This is your working thesis.
9. Sort all of your notes, printouts, photocopies, and so forth by topic or category of evidence. Arrange the categories in the order that will be most effective in arguing your thesis. (Some conventions: strongest point goes last, second strongest point goes first, everything else goes in the middle; similar topics go together.)
10. Start writing a rough draft. Incorporate your written summaries, notes and reflections into your paper. Insert quoted and paraphrased material (properly cited) as needed to support the points you make.
11. Print out your rough draft and put it away for a while. After several days, read and revise your rough draft for organization, clarity, and explanation of evidence. Delete any unnecessary sections. If necessary, do more research and provide more support to the weaker parts of your paper. Make sure that you have cited all of your sources and that the “works cited” page is complete.
12. Repeat the components of step 11 until the night before the paper is due.
13. Revise your paper for spelling, punctuation, grammar and other sentence-level concerns. Print it out. Sleep until it’s time to turn in the paper. (Note: Do not oversleep!) Congratulations: you have just successfully written a research paper.