

A Guide for Writing Research Papers

St. Michael Lutheran School

Grades 4 - 8

A research paper is a formal composition that results from a student's investigation of a specific topic. It is a unique creation that is essentially a summary of the information that has been gathered from a variety of sources. A research project consists of several steps:

- 1) Choosing a topic that is neither too broad nor too narrow
- 2) Deciding what information needs to be included (listing questions to be answered)
- 3) Gathering resources
- 4) Taking notes and citing sources (bibliography)
- 5) Organizing information and constructing an outline from notes
- 6) Drafting (includes first draft, revisions, second draft, and proofreading)
- 7) Publishing (includes title page, outline, text, and bibliography page)

The specific requirements for length, number of sources, additional information (such as maps, pictures, graphs, etc.), and due dates will be determined by the teacher.

There are many different styles and methods of research and reporting. The purpose of this tool is to provide the fourth through eighth grade students of St. Michael Lutheran School with a guide displaying the written format for research reports in conjunction with what is taught in class. Models for questioning, note-taking, and outlining are included. The technical requirements for the research paper's components are also noted with examples. This form follows the current guidelines given by the Modern Language Association (MLA) for in-text citations and bibliographies.

QUESTIONING

Once a student has chosen a topic that is neither too broad nor too narrow, he or she will then compile a list of questions (ten to fifteen) to research about that topic. The questions should be general in nature, not “yes” or “no” questions. These questions will be written or typed on a paper with the school-wide heading at the top. The questions do not need to be in any particular order, but they do need to be numbered. Once written, these questions will serve as a guide for note taking.

History

Cornelia Husker

Research Questions - Missouri

Jan. 1, 1999

- 1) How and when did the United States acquire the land that would become Missouri?
- 2) What are the major industries of Missouri?
- 3) What major historical events took place there?
- 4) What occurred in the Civil War battles fought there?
- 5) What geographical regions are in Missouri?
- 6) What geographical landforms are in Missouri?
- 7) How and when did Missouri become a state?
- 8) What problems is Missouri facing now?
- 9) What places of interest are there in Missouri for sportsmen?
- 10) What places of interest are there in Missouri for those interested in American literature?
- 11) What places of interest are there in Missouri for those interested in the fine arts?
- 12) What places of interest are there in Missouri for those interested in live entertainment?

NOTE-TAKING

Once a student has gathered his or her resources, the next step is to research them to find answers to the questions that were asked. The student will prepare a “works cited” card for each source. Each card will have a letter (beginning with A) in the upper left-hand corner which will be used for referencing the notes taken from a particular source. See the section titled “Works Cited” for guidelines when writing the bibliography cards.

A

Jordan, Robert Paul. The Civil War. 3rd ed.

New York: National Geographic Society,

1975.

B

Vance, Joel M. “Pandora’s Box.” Missouri

Conservationist June 1981: 24-27.

C

Simmons, Marc, et al. Trails West. New
York: National Geographic Society,
1979.

As a student finds information relating to one of the questions asked, a note card will be written. On the top line (usually red) of the card on the left side, the student will write the question number that the information relates to followed by a dash and the letter of the corresponding bibliography card for the source.

On the next line (usually blue), the student will write the page number or numbers of the source from which the information was taken, followed by a colon. Then the student will write the notes. He or she must put the information into his or her own words on the note card unless a specific quote set off by quotation marks is used. If a quotation is used, the student must write the name of the person being quoted and the page number on which the quote was found. This will allow the student to give credit to the speaker for the quote in the written paper. Plagiarism (using someone else's ideas or words as one's own without proper citation) will not be acceptable and may result in a failing grade for the assignment. The information on the cards does not need to be in complete sentences.

8-B

25: "The Environmental Protection Agency listed nearly one hundred known or suspected hazardous waste dumps in Missouri in Aug. 1980, with more being found almost weekly." (Gov. Kit Bond)

26-27: has passed a hazardous waste act that provides for funding & procedures to clean up the dumps

3-A

33: *Dred Scott* decision - Negro slave

from Missouri sued for freedom and
lost in Supreme Court ruling
(Congress didn't have right to
limit the spread of slavery in
MO Compromise)

4-A

58,62: Wilson's Creek - Confederates
camped there (corn was ripe-food);
Yankees gave surprise attack on
Aug. 10, 1861 (now Wilson's Creek
Battlefield National Park where
fight is re-enacted)

3-C

45: Lewis and Clark expedition began
in MO (now St. Charles)

57: Oregon Trail had some beginnings
near KCMO and Independence

OUTLINING

Creating an outline helps the student organize notes that have been taken before he or she begins writing a paper. A carefully planned outline provides a “map” for the student to follow as the rough draft is composed. (See the following page for a partial outline.)

The first step when preparing to write an outline is to rephrase the original questions into statements for main ideas, which will be the “main topics” in the outline. These main ideas should then be arranged in a sensible order using Roman numerals. Sometimes related questions are combined under one main idea. If no information was found about a particular question, that question should be omitted from the outline.

The next step is to organize the notes that were taken. The student should sort the note cards into groups according to the question that each one answered. The following step would be to decide which facts on the cards support the main topics. To write “subtopics,” the student groups similar details together. Then he or she would create a heading that describes each set of details. Subtopics are placed after capital letters under the corresponding main topics. There must be at least two subtopics under each main topic.

The examples and facts that tell about the subtopics would be used as “details” in the outline. They would be placed under the corresponding subtopics and should be numbered. A subtopic must have at least two details.

“Show-Me” Missouri

- I. Introduction
- II. The acquisition of the land that would become Missouri
 - A. Originally settled by French explorers
 - 1. Joliet and Marquette in 1673
 - 2. Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac in 1715
 - 3. First permanent settlement at Ste. Genevieve in 1735
 - 4. Pierre Laclede (St. Louis) in 1764
 - B. Obtained by the U.S. in the Louisiana Purchase
- III. Becoming a state
 - A. Territory of Missouri
 - 1. Organized by Congress
 - 2. Organized in 1812
 - 3. Lewis and Clark begin expedition from St. Charles
 - B. State of Missouri
 - 1. Asked Congress for permission to frame a constitution in 1818
 - 2. Nationwide debate over slavery started – Missouri Compromise
 - 3. Admitted as slave state - August 10, 1821
- IV. Notable events in Missouri’s history
 - A. Pre-Civil War
 - 1. Capt. William Becknell opens Missouri-Santa Fe trade – 1821
 - 2. Platte Purchase ends Indian claims to Missouri – 1837
 - B. Civil War Era
 - 1. Missouri-Kansas war over slavery
 - 2. *Dred Scott* decision
 - 3. Missouri votes against secession
 - 4. Pony Express begins in St. Joseph
 - 5. Battle of Wilson’s Creek
 - 6. Battle of Lexington
 - 7. Battle of Springfield
 - C. Post-Civil War
 - 1. Jesse James killed – 1882
 - 2. First American skyscraper constructed in St. Louis - 1891
 - 3. World’s Fair held in St. Louis – 1904
 - 4. Gateway Arch completed 1965
- V. Places of interest in Missouri
 - A. Sports
 - 1. Competitive
 - 2. Recreational
 - B. Live entertainment
 - 1. Theatrical
 - 2. Musical

DRAFTING

Once the outline has been completed, the student is ready to work on the rough draft of the paper. The student should begin with an introduction. It has two jobs. The first is to capture the reader's interest. Beginning with an interesting anecdote or quote is one way to do this. The second purpose of an introduction is to inform the reader what the paper will be about. Usually this is stated in a topic sentence located near the end of the introduction.

The body of the paper will follow the outline. There should be one or more paragraphs for each main topic. Often, the student will have gathered enough information to write a paragraph about each subtopic. Occasionally, a paragraph may be about only one detail on the outline. As the student writes, he or she should connect sentences and paragraphs using transitional words or phrases so the report flows smoothly and clearly. Students should remember to use quotation marks around statements that are direct quotations. Credit should be given to the author using the format assigned by the teacher.

Finally, after the student has reported his or her research findings, a conclusion must be written. The conclusion serves several purposes. It should restate the thesis of the report. It also summarizes the main ideas that were presented in the paper. Often, the conclusive paragraph will include a meaningful quote or a statement regarding the student's greatest learning.

Once the first draft has been completed, the student must go back through what was written to make revisions. He or she will check the structure of the paper, making sure the information was presented completely and clearly. The student will check that each paragraph focuses on one idea that was clearly stated. Revising also includes

changing what was written to use exact words, add further detail when necessary, and make sure transitions between sentences and paragraphs make sense.

Once the student has finished revising, the next step is to proofread the draft. Proofreading involves correcting grammatical and mechanical errors to perfect the paper. Spelling, capitalization, punctuation, paragraphing, and sentence structure should all be checked and corrected. Then the student is ready to complete his or her final draft.

DOCUMENTATION

Documentation refers to the acknowledgement given in a paper wherever the author uses someone else's words (quotations), facts, or ideas. When a student uses such information in his or her paper, parenthetical documentation will be used. Following the quoted material, the student will identify the author and page number from which it came. Note the following examples: (A student should speak to his or her teacher about specific situations that are not included in these examples.)

- 1) QUOTE WITHIN A SOURCE: Give credit to speaker in text and to author in documentation.

State officials recognize the number of toxic waste sites is increasing. Governor Kit Bond stated, "The Environmental Protection Agency listed nearly one hundred known or suspected hazardous waste dumps in Missouri in August 1980, with more being found almost weekly (Vance 25)."

- 2) WHEN THE AUTHOR IS NAMED IN THE TEXT: List the page/pages from which information came.

Missouri's government is actively pursuing new legislation. In his article in the *Missouri Conservationist*, Joel Vance recognized that the state's legislature has passed a hazardous waste act that provides for funding and procedures to clean up the dumps (26-27).

- 3) WHEN THE AUTHOR IS NOT NAMED IN THE TEXT: List the author and page/pages.

Missouri's government is actively pursuing new legislation. The state's legislature has passed a hazardous waste act that provides for funding and procedures to clean up the dumps (Vance 26-27).

- 4) WHEN THE AUTHOR IS NOT KNOWN: This often happens in a reference from an encyclopedia; list the title and the page reference.

The issue of slavery in the United States came to a head in 1819. A compromise had to be found if the young country was to survive ("Missouri Compromise" 507).

- 5) QUOTE FROM A VISUAL SOURCE: List the title of the film or video in which the quote occurs.

Rev. Tim Bellman said that the real tragedy is what the contaminants have done to the children. "Many of them have no chance for a normal life. Even if they are not personally affected, someone in their family has been (*Life Is Not a Beach*)."

WORKS CITED

All the sources a student uses must be acknowledged in a list that appears at the end of the paper. The list will be arranged alphabetically according to the first word of each entry. Reverse indentation is used. That means the first line of the entry is *not* indented. If the entry takes more than one line, all other lines in that entry *are* indented. As the student begins each new source, he or she will create one bibliography card for that source. The following examples show what information should be included from each type of source and what the written format must be.

PRINTED MATERIAL

A BOOK OR A PAMPHLET BY ONE AUTHOR

Author's last name, first name. *Title of the Book (in italics if using computer, underlined if hand written)*.
Place of publication: Name of Publishing Company, Year Published.

Here are two examples:

Gibaldi, Joseph. *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. 4th ed. New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1995.

Handlin, Oscar. *Statue of Liberty*. New York: Newsweek Book Division, 1971.

A BOOK OR A PAMPHLET BY TWO AUTHORS

First author's last name, first name, and Second author's first name last name. *Title of the Book (in italics if using computer, underlined if hand written)*. Place of publication: Name of Publishing Company, Year Published.

Here is an example:

Zeman, Anne, and Kate Kelly. *Everything You Need to Know about American History Homework*. New York: Irving Place Press, 1994.

A BOOK OR A PAMPHLET BY MORE THAN TWO AUTHORS

First author's last name, first name, et al. *Title of the Book (in italics if using computer, underlined if hand written)*. Place of publication: Name of Publishing Company, Year Published.

Here is an example:

Simmons, Marc, et al. *Trails West*. New York: National Geographic Society, 1979.

AN ARTICLE IN AN ENCYCLOPEDIA

Author's last name, first name (if one is listed). "Title of Article." *Title of the Encyclopedia* (in italics if using computer, underlined if hand written). Number of edition Year Published.

Here are two examples:

"Missouri Compromise." *Compton's Encyclopedia*. 67th ed. 1988.

Welsch, Frank. "Toxin." *The World Book Encyclopedia*. 1995 ed.

AN ARTICLE IN A MAGAZINE

Author's last name, first name. "Title of Article." *Title of the Magazine* (in italics if using computer, underlined if hand written) Date of publication: page/pages of article.

Here are two examples:

Thompson, Mark. "The Battle for Poison." *Time* 22 May 1995: 13+.

Vance, Joel M. "Pandora's Box..." *Missouri Conservationist* June 1981: 24-27.

AN ARTICLE IN A NEWSPAPER

Author's last name, first name. "Title of Article." *Title of the Newspaper* (in italics if using computer, underlined if hand written) [City of Publication if not included in title] Date of publication: page/pages of article (including section).

Here are two examples:

"A Key to Tracing the Oregon Trail?" Editorial. *Seward County Independent* 8 July 1994: A6.

Stelzer, C. D. "Venting Anger." *Riverfront Times* [St. Louis] 15 May 1996: A1+.

ELECTRONIC SOURCES

MATERIAL ON CD-ROM

Author's last name, first name. "Title of Article." *Title of the Database*. Publication medium (CD-ROM). City of publication: Producer of CD-ROM, year published.

Here is an example:

Quarles, Benjamin. "Dred Scott Case." *Encarta '97*. CD-ROM. Redmond: Microsoft, 1997.

ONLINE MATERIAL

Author's last name, first name. "Title of Article." *Title of original publication (if available)* original date of print (if available). Publication medium (Online). Name of Computer Service or Network. Date of access. Available Electronic address used to access document.

Here are several examples:

Magazine article online

Gleick, Elizabeth. "The Road to Ruin." *Time* 17 July 1995. Online. Internet. 15 Jan. 1999. Available <http://cgi.pathfinder.com/time/magazine/archive/1995/950717/950717.crime.html>.

Newspaper article online

Kleiman, Carol. "Footing the Bill for Reform." *Chicago Tribune* 13 Dec. 1995. Online. Internet. 10 Jan. 1996. Available http://www.chicago.tribune.com/articles/kleiman/yourjob/yourjob_1213.

World Wide Web Site (Author. *Site title*. Last update of the site. Publication medium (Online). Name of Computer Service or Network. Date of access. Available Electronic address used to access document.

Swofford, Jennifer. *The Complete Guide to Keeping Green Iguanas in Captivity*. 28 July 1995. Online. Internet. 5 Jan. 1996. Available <http://gto.ncsa.uiuc.edu/pingleto/herps/iguanacare.html>.

OTHER SOURCES

MATERIAL FROM A FILM OR VIDEO

Title of the film. Name of director. Name of the distributor, year of distribution.

Here is an example:

Times Beach, Missouri. Dir. Bruce Lixey. Media Process Educational Films, 1993.

MATERIAL FROM AN INTERVIEW

Last name of person interviewed, first name. Kind of interview (Personal interview, Telephone interview), date of interview.

Here is an example:

Griffith, Daniel. Telephone interview, 30 Jan. 1999.

TITLE PAGE

The title page of the research paper will include the title, the student's name, the name of the class, the teacher's name, and the date.

"Show-Me" Missouri

Cornelia Husker

History

Mr. Schlotterbeck

March 1, 1999

TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

The following guidelines must be followed:

- 1) Text will be double-spaced on white paper.
- 2) Use one inch margins all around the text of the paper (left and right sides, top and bottom). Paragraphs should be indented five spaces or one-half inch. Longer quotations that are set-off should be indented ten spaces or one inch from the left margin.
- 3) Text will be numbered in either the upper right-hand corner of each page (one-half inch from the top) or centered one-half inch from the bottom.
- 4) Make sure that all pages are neat with no more than two corrections.
- 5) Check for correct grammar, mechanics, and spelling.
- 6) Follow the correct forms for the title page and outline as shown in this guide.
- 7) Use the correct format for citing sources within the text and for the bibliography (works cited) as taught.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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