21

Writing the Research Essay

Using Outside Sources

This chapter will guide you through the process of writing a research essay. Throughout the chapter, we show how one student, Messelina Hernandez, worked through key steps in the process. Messelina’s completed research essay on mandatory school uniforms appears on pages 376–79.

STEPS TO WRITING A GOOD RESEARCH ESSAY

1. Make a schedule.
2. Choose a topic.
3. Find sources.
4. Evaluate sources.
5. Avoid plagiarism by taking careful notes.
7. Make an outline.
8. Write your essay.
9. Cite and document your sources.
10. Revise and edit your essay.
Make a Schedule

After you receive your assignment, make a schedule that divides your research assignment into small, manageable tasks. There is no way that you can do every step the day (or even a few days) before the assignment is due, so give yourself a reasonable amount of time.

You can use the following schedule as a model for making your own:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SAMPLE RESEARCH ESSAY SCHEDULE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assignment: __________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Write out what your instructor has assigned.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length: ____________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Draft due date: _____________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final due date: ___________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My general topic: ____________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My narrowed topic: ____________</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STEP</th>
<th>DO BY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Choose a topic.</td>
<td>______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Find and evaluate sources.</td>
<td>______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take notes, keeping publication information for each source.</td>
<td>______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write a working thesis statement by answering a research question.</td>
<td>______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review all notes; choose the best support for your working thesis.</td>
<td>______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make an outline that includes your thesis and support.</td>
<td>______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write a draft, including a title.</td>
<td>______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review the draft; get feedback; add more support if needed.</td>
<td>______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revise the draft.</td>
<td>______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepare a list of Works Cited using correct documentation form.</td>
<td>______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edit the revised draft.</td>
<td>______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submit the final copy.</td>
<td>______</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Choose a Topic

Your instructor may assign a topic, or you might be expected to think of your own. If you are free to choose your own topic, find a subject that you are personally interested in or curious about. If you need help, try asking yourself some of the following questions:

1. What is going on in my own life that I want to know more about?
2. What have I heard about lately that I’d like to know more about?
3. What am I interested in doing in the future, either personally or professionally, that I could investigate?
4. What famous person—living or deceased—most interests me?
5. What do I daydream about? What frightens me? What do I see as a threat to me or my family? What inspires or encourages me?
6. Is there something I do in my spare time (sports, music, computer games) that I’d like to know more about?

POSSIBLE TOPICS FOR A RESEARCH ESSAY

| Assisted suicide | Marijuana for medical purposes |
| Causes of stress | Medical insurance |
| Childhood obesity | The minimum wage |
| Date rape | Music downloading |
| Dieting/eating disorders | Online dating services |
| Ethics: business/political/personal | Outsourcing jobs to foreign countries |
| Executive salaries | Patients’ rights |
| The family in America | Pets and mental health |
| Gambling | Presidential campaigns |
| Gay/lesbian marriage/adoption | Reality television programs |
| Global warming | Rights of children of illegal immigrants |
| Gun control | Road rage |
| Identity theft | Sexual harassment |
| An illness | Standardized testing |
| Internet games | Violence in cities |
| Limiting cell phone use | Violence in the media |
| Mandatory drug testing | Women in military combat |
| Mandatory school uniforms | |

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When you have a general topic, jot down some answers to these questions:

1. Why is this topic interesting to me? How does it affect me? What do I hope to gain by exploring it?
2. What do I know about the topic? What do I want to find out?

Although a research essay may be longer than some of the other writing you have done, the topic still needs to be narrow enough to write about in the assigned length. It would be impossible, for example, to write a good five-page essay on the general topic “crime.” A more specific topic—something like “neighborhood watch programs as crime deterrents”—is more manageable.

Before writing a working thesis statement, you need to learn more about your topic. It helps to come up with a **guiding research question** about your narrowed topic. This question—often a variation of “What do I want to find out?”—will help to guide and focus your research.

**MESSELINA HERNANDEZ’S GUIDING RESEARCH QUESTION**

Messelina chose school uniforms as her topic. She used the following research question to guide her research: *What are the effects of school uniforms?*

**Find Sources**

With both libraries and the Internet available to you, finding information is not a problem. Knowing how to find good, reliable sources of information, however, can be a challenge. The following strategies will help you.

**Consult a Reference Librarian**

Reference librarians are essential resources in helping to find appropriate information in both print and electronic forms. If your library allows it, schedule an appointment with the librarian. Before your appointment, jot down some questions to ask, such as those on the following list. Begin your conversation by telling the librarian your research topic.
QUESTIONS FOR THE LIBRARIAN

• How do I use the library’s catalog? What information will it give me?
• Can I access the library catalog and article databases from home?
• What other reference tools would you recommend for research on my topic?
• Once I identify a source that might be useful, how do I find it?
• Can you recommend an Internet search engine that will help me find information on my topic? Can you recommend some useful key words to use?
• How can I tell whether a Web site is reliable?
• I’ve already found some articles related to my topic. Can you suggest some other places to look?

Use the Online Catalog or Card Catalog

Most libraries now list their holdings online rather than in a card catalog, but both systems give the same information—titles, authors, subjects, publication data, and call numbers. If you are working with a librarian, he or she may offer step-by-step instructions for using the online catalog. If you are working on your own, the Help menu is usually easy to find and easy to follow. Catalogs allow you to search by author, title, subject, or key word. If you are just beginning your research, you will probably use the keyword search because you may not know specific authors or titles.

Messelina Hernandez, whose research essay on mandatory school uniforms appears on pages 376–79, searched her library’s online catalog using the key words mandatory school uniforms. Here is one book she found:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author:</th>
<th>Hudson, David L., 1969-</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title:</td>
<td>Rights of Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Published:</td>
<td>Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, c2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location:</td>
<td>Briggs Nonfiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call #:</td>
<td>344.73/BRI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status:</td>
<td>Available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description:</td>
<td>120 p.; 23 cm./Part of “Point-Counterpoint” series</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contents:</td>
<td>Discusses constitutional rights in schools. Includes point/counterpoint discussion of mandatory school uniforms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISBN:</td>
<td>0-7910-7920-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OCLC #:</td>
<td>ocm53376048</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A call number is a book’s library identification number. Knowing the call number will help you to locate a source in the library. Once you do locate the source, browse the shelves around it. Since a library’s holdings are organized by subject, you may find other sources related to your topic nearby.

If the book is available only at another library, you can ask a librarian to have the book sent to your library.

**Look at Your Library’s Web Site**

Many libraries have Web sites that can help researchers find useful information. The library’s home page may have links to electronic research sources that it subscribes to and that are free to library users. It will also list the library’s hours and resources, and it may offer research tips and other valuable information. It is a good idea to bookmark this site for future use.

**Use Other Reference Materials**

The reference section of the library has many resources that will help you find information on your topic. Here is a sampling of common reference sources. Most are available online or on CD-ROM.

**Periodical Indexes and Databases**

Magazines, journals, and newspapers are called *periodicals*. Periodical indexes help you locate information published in these sources. Online periodical indexes are called *periodical databases* and often include the full text of magazine, journal, or newspaper articles. If your topic is a current one, such as Messelina Hernandez’s on mandatory school uniforms, you may find more information in periodicals than in books. Following are some of the most popular periodical indexes and databases:

- InfoTrac
- LexisNexis
- NewsBank
- *New York Times Index*
- ProQuest
- *Readers’ Guide to Periodical Literature*
Specialized Indexes

Specialized indexes—in book form, online, or on CD-ROM—direct you to resources in various broad subject areas. A few of the many indexes are the following:

- *America: History and Life*
- *Biological Abstracts*
- Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)
- *MLA International Bibliography* (language and literature)
- PsychLIT

Encyclopedias

While most instructors will want you to use more specialized sources, encyclopedias can be a good place to start your research because they give you an overview of a subject. You might also consult the bibliography that concludes most encyclopedia entries. Some encyclopedias, like the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, are available in print, online, and on CD-ROM.

In addition to general encyclopedias, your library may have specialized encyclopedias that give more detailed information on your topic. For instance, you might consult the *Encyclopedia of Psychology* for a research paper in a psychology course.

Statistical Sources

Statistical data, or facts and figures, that are directly related to your thesis can provide sound support. As one example, the *Statistical Abstract of the United States* (published annually by the U.S. Census Bureau) can help you locate useful statistics related to social issues, population trends, economics, and other topics.

Use the Internet

The Internet, a vast global computer network, provides access to all kinds of information. The biggest part of the Internet is called the World Wide Web, which allows users to jump from site to site using hyperlinks. If you are new to using the Web, this section will offer some basics. You might also want to work with a librarian, a writing-center tutor, or a knowledgeable friend to help you navigate the Web. To get started, you can go to
some sites that categorize information on the Web, such as the Internet Public Library (www.ipl.org) or the Librarians’ Internet Index (www.lii.org).

**NOTE:** Some Internet sites charge fees for information (such as archived newspaper or magazine articles). Before using any of these, check to see if the sources are available free through your library.

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**Uniform Resource Locator (URL)**

Every Web site has an address, called a **uniform resource locator** (URL). You may already be familiar with some frequently advertised URLs, such as www.amazon.com (the Internet address for bookseller Amazon.com) or the URL for your college’s Web site. If you know the URL of a Web site that you think would be helpful to your research, enter it into the address field of your Web browser. (**Web browsers**, like Microsoft Internet Explorer and Netscape Navigator, are software programs that allow a computer to read Web pages.)

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**Search Engines and Searching with Key Words**

If you do not know the URL of a particular site you want to visit or if you want to look at multiple Web sites related to your topic, you will need to use a search engine. Of the following commonly used search engines, Google is the most popular.

- Google (www.google.com)
- Yahoo (www.yahoo.com)
- America Online (www.aol.com)
- Ask.com (www.ask.com)
- MSN.com (www.msn.com)

To use a search engine, type in key words from your subject. Because the Web is large, adding specific key words or phrases and using an advanced-search option may reduce the number of entries (called **hits**) you have to sift through to find relevant information. Search engines typically have a Help feature that offers guidance in using the engine, selecting key words, and refining your search.
Refined Google search (phrase in quotes plus additional term—mandatory—and plus signs)

Google search using phrase in quotes

Google search using phrase in quotes plus additional term—mandatory—and plus signs
When Messelina Hernandez entered school uniforms as a search term in Google, her search netted about 9,710,000 hits. (She put quotation marks around school uniforms to tell Google she wanted items related to this phrase only, not to school and uniforms separately, which would have returned many more results not related to her research topic.) She immediately saw some irrelevant entries, such as those related to purchasing school uniforms.

Messelina then refined her search by adding the word mandatory to the phrase school uniforms. She added “+” signs before each term to indicate that both terms had to appear in every result. This strategy reduced the number of hits to about 58,000 and produced results more relevant to Messelina’s research question.

Messelina’s search helped her refine her research question:

MESSELINA HERNANDEZ’S REFINED RESEARCH QUESTION: What are the effects of mandatory school uniforms?

Adding additional search terms can narrow a search even more.

When you discover a Web site that you might want to return to, save the URL so that you don’t have to remember it each time you want to go to the site. Different browsers have different ways of saving URLs; choose “Bookmarks” in Netscape or Firefox, or choose “Favorites” in Internet Explorer.

Online Research Sites

Online research sites constitute another valuable source of information on how to do research. At www.bedfordstmartins.com/researchroom (see p. 356), the publisher of this book hosts the Bedford Research Room, which includes guided tutorials on research processes; advice on finding, evaluating, and documenting sources; tips on avoiding plagiarism; and more. Other useful sites include Purdue University’s Online Writing Lab (OWL) at http://owl.english.purdue.edu. This site offers a variety of materials and resources for writers, including research information.

Interview People

Personal interviews can be excellent sources of information. Before interviewing anyone, however, plan carefully. First, consider what kind of person to interview. Do you want information from an expert on the subject or from someone directly affected by the issue? How would the experience or comments of each person help support your points? The person should be knowledgeable about the subject and have firsthand experience. When you have decided whom to interview, schedule an appointment.
Next, to get ready for the interview, prepare a list of five to ten questions. Ask open-ended questions (What is your position on regulating cell-phone use by drivers?) rather than questions that require only a simple yes-or-no response (Do you favor regulating cell-phone use by drivers?). Leave space for notes about the person’s responses and for additional questions that may occur to you during the interview. Include in your notes the person’s full name and qualifications and the date of the interview.

As you conduct the interview, listen carefully, and write down any important ideas. If you plan to use any of the interviewee’s exact words, put them in quotation marks in your notes. (For more on using direct quotes, see page 363 of this chapter and Chapter 39).

**NOTE:** If you plan to record an interview, get your subject’s permission first. Recording what a person says without being granted permission is unethical and, in some states, against the law.

**Evaluate Sources**

Evaluating sources means judging them to determine how reliable and appropriate for your topic they are. Reliable sources present accurate, up-to-date information written by authors with appropriate credentials for the subject matter. Reliable sources support claims with evidence and
use objective, reasonable language. Research materials found in a college library (books, journals, and newspapers, for example) are generally considered reliable sources.

Don’t assume that an Internet source is reliable just because it exists. Anyone can create a Web site and put whatever he or she wants on it. When you’re viewing a Web site, try to determine its purpose. A Web site set up solely to provide information may be more reliable than an online product advertisement. If you are searching the Web for information about the psychological benefits of weight loss, for example, you will find sources ranging from articles published by the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (reliable) to advertisements for miraculous weight-loss products (questionable). Whether you are doing research for a college course, a work assignment, or personal use, make sure that the sources you draw on are reliable and appropriate for your purpose.

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**PRACTICE EVALUATING WEB SITES**

A keyword search for attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) would point a researcher to thousands of sites; the ones shown below and on page 358 are just samples. Which do you think contains more reliable information? Why?

1. Site is sponsored by the makers of the ADHD drug Concerta.
2. Links offer ADHD-related information and “success stories” supportive of the drug’s use.
3. No specific publication date or date of last update is given.
Site is sponsored by the Centers for Disease Control, a U.S. government agency dedicated to protecting the health of American citizens.

1. Objective presentation of information
2. Links to current information
3. Clear contact information
4. Date of last update, showing that information is current
5. Links to related information, including “ADHD references,” with full information on the sources cited

Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is one of the most common childhood behavioral disorders and can persist through adolescence and into adulthood. The causes are currently unknown.

What is ADHD?

According to the 2020 American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, Text Revision, of Mental Disorders-IV (DSM-IV-TR), ADHD is a Developmental Disorder characterized by ongoing inattention and/or hyperactivity/impulsivity occurring in several settings and more frequently and severely than is typical for individuals in the same stage of development. Symptoms begin before age 7 years and can cause serious difficulties in home, school or work life. ADHD can be managed through behavioral or medical interventions, or a combination of the two.

The National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities has developed a research agenda in ADHD for CDC and other public agencies (click here for research agenda).

[ADHD References]

[Return to Top]

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Here are some questions you can ask to evaluate a source. If you answer “no” to any of these questions, think twice about using the source.

**QUESTIONS FOR EVALUATING A PRINT OR ELECTRONIC SOURCE**

- Is the source up-to-date?
- Is the source reliable? Is it from a reputable publisher or Web site? (For Web sites, consider the URL extension; see the box below.)
- Is the information appropriate for your research topic?
- Is the author qualified to write reliably about the subject? If there is no information on the author, try an online search using the author’s name.
- Who sponsored the publication or Web site? Be aware of the sponsor’s motives (for example, to market a product) and the ways that they might affect the type of information presented.
- Does the information seem fair and objective? If there is a bias, does the author state his or her position up front?
- Does the author provide adequate support for key points, and does he or she cite the sources of this support?

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**Guide to URL Extensions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EXTENSION</th>
<th>TYPE OF SITE</th>
<th>HOW RELIABLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>.com</td>
<td>A commercial or business organization or a personal site</td>
<td>Varies. Consider whether you have heard of the organization, and be sure to read its home page or “About us” link carefully.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.edu</td>
<td>An educational institution</td>
<td>Varies. It may include student home pages and course materials of variable quality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.gov</td>
<td>A government agency</td>
<td>Generally reliable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.net</td>
<td>A commercial or business organization or a personal site</td>
<td>Varies. This extension indicates just the provider, not anything about the source. Go to the source’s home page to find out what you can about the author or the sponsor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.org</td>
<td>A nonprofit organization</td>
<td>Generally reliable. Each volunteer or professional group promotes its own view or interests, however.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For more information on evaluating online sources, visit bedfordstmartins.com/researchroom.
Avoid Plagiarism

Plagiarism is passing off someone else’s ideas and information as your own. Turning in a paper written by someone else, whether it is from the Internet or written by a friend or family member who gives you permission, is deliberate plagiarism. Sometimes, however, students plagiarize by mistake because they have taken notes that do not distinguish a source’s ideas from their own or that do not fully record source information, including publication data. As you find information for your research essay, do not rely on your memory to recall details about your sources; take good notes from the start. For more on how to avoid plagiarism, visit the Bedford Research Room at bedfordstmartins.com/researchroom.

NOTE: This section’s advice on recording, citing, and documenting sources reflects Modern Language Association (MLA) style, the preferred style for the humanities.

Keep a Running Bibliography

A bibliography is a complete list, alphabetized by author, of the outside sources you consult. A list of works cited is a complete list, alphabetized by author, of the outside sources that you actually use in your essay. Most instructors require a list of works cited at the end of a research essay. Some may require a bibliography as well.

You can keep information for your bibliography and list of works cited on notecards or on your computer. Whatever method you use, be sure to record complete publication information for each source at the time you consult it; this will save you from having to look up this information again when you are preparing your list of works cited.

The following is a list of information to record for each source. For Messelina Hernandez’s list of works cited, see page 379.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BOOKS</th>
<th>ARTICLES</th>
<th>WEB PAGES/OTHER ELECTRONIC SOURCES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Author name(s)</td>
<td>Author name(s)</td>
<td>Author name(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title and subtitle</td>
<td>Title of article</td>
<td>Title of Web page/online material</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>—</td>
<td>Title of magazine, journal, or newspaper</td>
<td>Title of site/larger work (e.g., online periodical)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City of publication and publisher</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>Name of sponsoring organization OR database, provider, and subscribing institution (if any)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
You will probably integrate source material by summary, paraphrase, and direct quotation. As you take notes, record the method you are using so that you don’t accidentally plagiarize.

Indirect Quotation: Summary

A summary puts the main point of a piece of writing in your own words. When you summarize, follow these guidelines:

- Make sure to identify the outside source clearly.
- Include in parentheses the page number(s), if available, of the entire section you have summarized. (You will need to provide full publication information later, in a list of works cited.)

**SUMMARY OF AN ARTICLE**

In “Effects of Student Uniforms on Attendance, Behavior Problems, Substance Abuse, and Academic Achievement,” David L. Brunsma and Kerry A. Rockquemore report that mandatory school uniforms have no direct positive effects on substance abuse, behavior, or attendance. In fact, they claim that uniforms may have a negative effect on academic achievement (53–62).

Indirect Quotation: Paraphrase

Paraphrasing is restating another’s ideas in your own words. Be careful when you paraphrase because it is easy to think you are using your own words when you are actually mixing your own and the source’s. These guidelines can help:

- Don’t look at the source while you are writing the paraphrase.
- Check your paraphrase against the original source to make sure you have not used the author’s words or copied the author’s sentence structure.
• Make sure to introduce the outside source—for example, “Marie Winn says that...”
• Include in parentheses the page number(s), if available, of the section you have paraphrased. (You will need to provide full publication information later, in a list of works cited.)

Read the examples that follow to see acceptable and unacceptable paraphrases.

ORIGINAL SOURCE

Not unlike drugs or alcohol, the television experience allows the participant to blot out the real world and enter into a pleasurable and passive mental state. To be sure, other experiences, notably reading, also provide a temporary respite from reality. But it’s much easier to stop reading and return to reality than to stop watching television. The entry into another world offered by reading includes an easily accessible return ticket. The entry via television does not. In this way television viewing, for those vulnerable to addiction, is more like drinking or taking drugs—once you start, it’s hard to stop.

— from Marie Winn, The Plug-In Drug

UNACCEPTABLE PARAPHRASE (TOO CLOSE TO ORIGINAL)

Marie Winn says that like drugs or alcohol, television allows people to blot out reality and escape into the passive world of television. Reading also provides a break from the real world, but it’s easier to put down a book than to turn off the television. Therefore, in people susceptible to addiction, television viewing is more like drinking or taking drugs than reading: It’s much harder to stop once you’ve started.

This paraphrase is unacceptable for several reasons:

• The paraphrase too closely follows the wording of the original. (The writer has written the paraphrase while looking at the original source rather than expressing the ideas in his or her own words.)
• The writer hasn’t included the page numbers of the source.

ACCEPTABLE PARAPHRASE

Marie Winn says that although television and reading both offer a break from reality, television watching is harder to stop and can therefore be considered “addictive” in a way that reading cannot (32).
The acceptable paraphrase presents Winn’s basic ideas but in the writer’s own words and structures. It also includes a parenthetical reference. The writer read Winn’s paragraph but then wrote the paraphrase without looking at the original. Then, the writer checked the original again to make sure she hadn’t missed any ideas or repeated words or sentence structures.

**Direct Quotation**

Use these guidelines when you write direct quotations:

- Record the exact words of the source.
- Include the name of the writer or speaker. If there is more than one writer or speaker, record all names.
- Enclose the writer’s or speaker’s words in quotation marks.
- For print sources, include the page number, if available, on which the quote appeared in the original source. The page number should go in parentheses after the end quotation mark but *before* the period. If the person quoted is not the author of the book or the article, give the author’s name in parentheses along with the page number. If there are two or three authors, give all names.
- If a direct quotation is more than four typed lines or forty words, indent the whole quotation, and do not use quotation marks. Place the page number, in parentheses, *after* the final punctuation.

**DIRECT QUOTATION**

According to Dr. Min Xiao, “The psychological benefits of a well-lit workspace are significant” (28).

According to Dr. Min Xiao,

The psychological benefits of a well-lit workspace are significant. Workers can see what they are doing better and don’t have to squint or lean over their work to see it. Moreover, the light can provide a sense of well-being, simulating daylight. This is particularly important when workers are in cubicles in the middle of a floor with no natural light. (28)

On the next two pages, you can see one of Messelina Hernandez’s original sources, a newspaper editorial she found online, with illustrations of how she summarized, paraphrased, quoted from it, and recorded publication information in her final paper.
Dressed for success

Study shows high-school graduation rates rise when kids wear uniforms

Monday, January 16, 2006

If wearing uniforms increases high school graduation rates, as a new study indicates, more school administrators should adopt this option. Even though the study was unable to link any improvements in test scores with students’ attire, more diplomas will translate into increased job and training opportunities for the young people involved.

A high-school diploma is a key to success beyond the classroom.

Most significant, this particular study examined data in 64 high schools within eight of Ohio’s largest urban public-school districts, where keeping kids in school is a real challenge. These districts — Akron, Canton, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, Toledo and Youngstown — face a constant struggle to raise graduation rates.

But within these districts, the study of data from 1994 to 2002, comparing six high schools where students wore uniforms with similar schools without such standards, showed remarkable differences in students’ attitudes.

While the mean graduation rates at the five schools where before- and after-uniform data could be analyzed rose 10.9 percentage points, rates at schools without uniforms fell 4.6 percentage points.

Suspensions dropped dramatically after students began wearing uniforms, and attendance generally improved, rising in four schools but dipping in two.

One school in Cleveland, three in Youngstown, one in Dayton and East High School in Columbus all began requiring uniforms in the 1997-98 school year and made up the group analyzed by Virginia Draa, assistant professor of human ecology at Youngstown State University.

Draa noted that East no longer requires uniforms but that it did throughout the study period and also showed some improvement in academics, as measured by proficiency test scores.

She conducted the research in connection with her dissertation for a doctorate in educational leadership.

She looked closely at schools with similar demographics and similar programs, making every effort to establish controls for other factors, such as tutoring, that could affect students’ behavior and performance.

Her complete lack of any preconceived notion as to what the results would be adds credibly to the study. In fact, as a former teacher in the Youngstown and Toledo public schools, she said she was “skeptical that they would have any impact,” but now, she said, “I’m a convert to school uniforms.”

She concluded that uniforms “do help in addressing problems with discipline and attendance,” but added, “People should not expect miraculous improvements overnight in the school climate or even in one year.”

As a professor of fashion and interiors merchandising, Draa has studied the social psychology of appearance and clothing, which shows that how people dress can influence how they behave and how they treat others.

Clearly, wearing uniforms at school can help create a more businesslike atmosphere that fosters learning. And, without the peer pressure to wear certain clothing, students apparently have less incentive to skip classes or drop out.

Columbus Public Schools established a dress code in the fall. That’s a step in the right direction, but requiring uniforms might bring better results and be easier to administer.
Messelina’s Thesis: Mandatory school uniforms offer extraordinary benefits to students and school systems, including improvements in students’ self-esteem, attendance, academic performance, graduation rates, and safety.

Indirect Quotation: Summary

- **TYPICAL USE:** A summary briefly notes major evidence that supports your thesis.
- **EXAMPLE:** Messelina focuses on the major evidence in the editorial that supports her thesis—in this case, research that shows the benefits of school uniforms. Her introduction of this evidence and its source—the “glue” connecting the source information to the thesis—is underlined.

   “Dressed for Success,” a pro-uniform editorial in the Columbus Dispatch, highlights Virginia Draa’s 2006 study showing that graduation rates at sixty-four Ohio high schools improved after they implemented mandatory uniforms.

Indirect Quotation: Paraphrase

- **TYPICAL USE:** A paraphrase focuses on details that support your thesis, not on major evidence or overarching ideas.
- **EXAMPLE:** Messelina focuses on details that give specific examples and evidence. The words she uses to connect the paraphrase to her essay are underlined.

   As noted in “Dressed for Success,” Draa’s study found that graduation rates at the schools rose by 10.9 percent between 1994 and 2002, while graduation rates at similar high schools dropped by 4.6 percent.

Direct Quotation

- **TYPICAL USE:** A direct quotation is used when the author’s or speaker’s words strongly support the thesis.
- **EXAMPLE:** Messelina uses quotations that support her thesis but avoids overquoting. Her connecting words are underlined.

   The editorial concludes that “more diplomas will translate into increased job and training opportunities for the young people. A high school diploma is a key to success beyond the classroom” (“Dressed for Success”).

Works Cited Entry (MLA style)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of article</th>
<th>Publication</th>
<th>Publisher</th>
<th>Date published</th>
<th>Medium of Publication</th>
<th>Date visited</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Write a Thesis Statement

After you have taken notes on the sources you gathered, you should be ready to write a thesis statement, which states the main idea of your research essay. You can start by turning your guiding research question into a statement that answers the question, as Messelina does below. Note how she revises her thesis to make it more forceful and concrete.

MESSELINA HERNANDEZ’S GUIDING RESEARCH QUESTION: What are the effects of mandatory school uniforms?

THESIS STATEMENT: Mandatory school uniforms have positive effects on students.

REVISED THESIS STATEMENT: Mandatory school uniforms offer extraordinary benefits to students and school systems, including improvements in students’ self-esteem, attendance, academic performance, graduation rates, and safety.

As you write and revise your essay, your thesis statement may change, but having a good working one helps you focus your writing and see where you might need to do additional research.

Make an Outline

To organize your notes, you need to make an outline that supports your thesis. First, write down your thesis statement. Then, review your notes to decide what your three or four major support points will be. Write these under your thesis statement and number them. Under each major support point, write two or three supporting details, and number them.

Many students, like Messelina, use complete sentences in their outlines to help them remember what they want to say when they write a draft. As they write and revise their drafts, they can change the sentences and add further details.
MESSELINA HERNANDEZ’S OUTLINE

I. **Thesis statement for introduction:** Mandatory school uniforms offer extraordinary benefits to students and school systems, including improvements in students’ self-esteem, attendance, academic performance, graduation rates, and safety.

II. **Self-esteem:** Wearing uniforms improves students’ self-esteem.
   A. When everyone wears the same clothing, poor students do not stand out from rich ones.
   B. No one wears gang colors or other clothing that shows they are part of a special group.
   C. School uniforms enhance students’ sense of belonging and increase morale.
   D. Peer pressure and competition are reduced, allowing the attention of students to be directed to learning and growing.

III. **Attendance and academic performance:** In addition to enhancing self-esteem, wearing uniforms improves academic performance and attendance.
   A. Students aren’t distracted by clothes and treat school as a job.
   B. A survey of school principals indicated that 62 percent reported an increase in academic achievement that they attributed to the sense of community created by school uniforms.

IV. **Graduation rates:** Mandatory school uniforms can also improve students’ graduation rates, which would have positive effects on society as a whole.
   A. A research study done by Virginia Draa shows that graduation rates at sixty-four Ohio high schools improved by 10.9 percent, while rates at similar schools dropped by 4.6 percent.
   B. More graduating students should translate into more adults with good jobs.

V. **Safety:** The most important benefit of mandatory school uniforms is the reduction of violence in schools and the overall increase in safety.
   A. A 1996 study found a sharp drop in crime in Long Beach, California, schools since they made uniforms mandatory.

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B. New York City schools have seen a 76 percent drop in crime since 1994, when students at most elementary schools started wearing uniforms.

C. In response to violence in schools, former president Bill Clinton came out strongly in favor of uniforms in his 1996 State of the Union address.

VI. Opposition: Some people believe that school uniforms are not a good thing, but their objections are not convincing.

A. Some experts have found no relationship between wearing uniforms and reductions in violence or improvements in academic achievement. In fact, some say uniforms can have negative effects on academic performance. However, these findings have been challenged.

B. Others say that dress codes violate students’ right to free speech under the First Amendment. However, the courts allow dress codes.

VII. Conclusion: There is convincing evidence that mandatory school uniforms have significant benefits.

Write Your Essay

Using your outline, write a draft of your research essay. (For more information on writing a draft, see Chapter 8.)

Your introduction should include your thesis statement and a preview of the support you will provide in the body of the essay. If you are taking a stand on an issue, the introduction should let your readers know what your position is. The body of the essay will present your major support points for your thesis backed by supporting details from your research. The conclusion will remind readers of your main point and make a further observation based on the information you have presented.

For Messelina Hernandez’s completed research paper, see pages 376–79.

Cite and Document Your Sources

As discussed on page 360, you need to include in-text citations of sources as you use them in the essay. You also need to document, or give credit to, your sources at the end of your research essay in a list of works cited.
Few people can remember the specifics of correct citation and documentation, so be sure to refer to this section or the reference text that your instructor prefers. Be sure to include all of the correct information, and pay attention to where punctuation marks such as commas, periods, and quotation marks should go.

There are several different systems of documentation. Most English professors prefer the Modern Language Association (MLA) system, which is used in this chapter. However, when you are writing a research paper in another course, you may be required to use another system. When in doubt, always ask your instructor.

**Use In-Text Citations within Your Essay**

In-text citations like the ones shown in this section are used for books and periodicals. For Web sites and other electronic sources, you typically will not be able to include page numbers, although you should note screen or paragraph numbers if these are used in the source.

When you refer to the author(s) in an introductory phrase, write just the relevant page number(s), if available, in parentheses at the end of the quotation.

**DIRECT QUOTATION:** In her book *Born to Buy*, Juliet B. Schor notes, “The world of children’s marketing is filled with variants of the us-versus-them message” (53).

**INDIRECT QUOTATION:** In her book *Born to Buy*, Juliet B. Schor notes that marketing aimed at youth often sets children against adults (53).

When you do not refer to the author(s) in an introductory phrase, write the author’s name followed by the page number(s), if available, at the end of the quotation. If an author is not named, use the title of the source.

**DIRECT QUOTATION:** “The world of children’s marketing is filled with variants of the us-versus-them message” (Schor 53).

**INDIRECT QUOTATION:** Marketing aimed at youth often sets children against adults (Schor 53).

**Use a List of Works Cited at the End of Your Essay**

**Books**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title (italicized)</th>
<th>Publisher’s city</th>
<th>Publisher’s name, shortened</th>
<th>Publication date</th>
<th>Medium of Publication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

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WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A BOOK

Title page
(Publication city and date are sometimes on the copyright page.)

TWO OR MORE ENTRIES BY THE SAME AUTHOR


BOOK BY TWO OR THREE AUTHORS


BOOK WITH FOUR OR MORE AUTHORS


NOTE: *Et al.* means “and others.”
BOOK WITH AN EDITOR


WORK IN AN ANTHOLOGY


ENCYCLOPEDIA ARTICLE


**Periodicals**

**MAGAZINE ARTICLE**


**WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A MAGAZINE ARTICLE**

*Brazil’s New Dinosaur*

During his daily walk seven years ago, retired refrigerator repairman Rolento Marafiga spotted some unusual bones poking out of a road construction site in southern Brazil. It was a major find, paleontologists say: a new dinosaur species, one of the most primitive ever found.

The reptile walked on Earth 200 million to 225 million years ago, in the late Triassic, when dinosaurs were rare and new. Eight feet long and only 155 pounds, the little forest dweller was a delicate ancestor of the sauropods, the largest land animals that ever lived.

Like the most famous sauropod giant, *Brontosaurus*, the new dinosaur fed on plants, says Artemio Leal of Brazil’s National Museum in Rio de Janeiro and lead author of the paper describing the find. A biped, it probably moved through conifer forests in a herd, shearing off bits of ferns and palmlike cycads with its serrated, spathulate teeth, suggests Leal.

The biggest surprise is that *Unaysaurus tolentinoi*, named for its discoverer, was a close cousin of dinosaurs found in what is now Germany. This bolsters the prevailing concept that all the world’s continents were once jammed together as a single giant landmass called Pangaea.

Also intriguing is the dinosaur’s well-preserved skull, with depressions and protrusions not seen before. The novel features helped paleontologists determine that the dinosaur was a new species but raised other questions in the process, says Alexander Kellner, the paper’s coauthor. “Sometimes paleontologists observe anatomic differences but cannot explain what their purposes were.”

—Jessa Forte Netting

*DISCOVER MARCH 2005, 13*
NEWSPAPER ARTICLE

Fox, Maggie. “Scientists Report Experiment Creating Immune Cells.”

EDITORIAL IN A MAGAZINE OR NEWSPAPER (author’s name given)


EDITORIAL IN A MAGAZINE OR NEWSPAPER (author’s name not given)


LETTER TO THE EDITOR IN A MAGAZINE OR NEWSPAPER (author’s name given)


Electronic Sources

Electronic sources include Web sites; databases or subscription services such as ERIC, InfoTrac, LexisNexis, and ProQuest; and electronic communications such as e-mail. Because electronic sources change often, always note the date you accessed or read the source as well as the date on which the source was posted or updated online, if this information is available.

PART OF A LARGER WEB SITE


NOTE: If no publisher is given, use “N.p.” If no date is given, use “n.d.”

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A WEB SITE
### ARTICLE FROM A DATABASE


### WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A DATABASE

The image shows the interface of a database search result with the following fields highlighted:
- Database title
- Article title
- Volume number
- Issue number
- Date
- Inclusive pages
- Author
- Publication title
- Medium of Access

The search result includes the following information:

**Database:** ILLUMINA

**Article title:** Secrets of Successful Homeschooling.

**Author:** Rivero, Lisa

**Publication:** Understanding Our Gifted

**Volume number:** 15

**Issue number:** 4

**Date:** 2003

**Inclusive pages:** 8-11

**Medium of Access:** ERIC

**Access date:** 3 Jan. 2005

**Abstract:** This article offers the following advice for parents of gifted students who wish to home school: have patience with the children and with yourself; practice the arts of home schooling and parenting; and persist in the face of complexity. Parents are urged to be flexible in accommodating changing learning style preferences. (Contains 2 references) (CA)
WRITING ESSAYS

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ARTICLE FROM AN ONLINE SCHOLARLY JOURNAL


Other Sources

PERSONAL INTERVIEW

Okayo, Margaret. Personal interview. 16 Apr. 2005.

SPEECH


FILM, VIDEO, OR DVD


TELEVISION OR RADIO PROGRAM


RECORDING


For online exercises on documenting sources in MLA style, visit Exercise Central at bedfordstmartins.com/realessays.
Revise and Edit Your Essay

After a break, reread your draft with fresh eyes and an open mind. Then, ask yourself these questions:

- Does my introduction state my thesis?
- Does each of the body paragraphs contain a topic sentence that directly supports my thesis? Do the supporting details in each paragraph relate to and explain the topic sentence?
- Do I provide a conclusion that reminds readers of my main point and makes a further observation?
- Have I included enough support for the thesis that readers are likely to see my topic the way I do? Is there anything else I could add to make my point?
- Do transitions help readers move from one idea to the next?
- Have I integrated source material smoothly into the essay? Do I need to smooth out anything that seems to be just dumped in?
- Have I reread the essay carefully, looking for errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation?
- Have I cited and documented my sources?
- Are all of my citations and Works Cited entries in correct form (MLA or whatever style the instructor specifies)?
- Is this the best I can do?

For more on revising, see Chapter 9. When checking for grammar, spelling, and punctuation errors, consult Parts Four through Seven of this book. Look first at Chapter 22 beginning on page 385.

After reading the annotated student essay that follows, use the Writing Guide on page 380 to write your research essay.

Sample Student Research Essay

The student essay that follows is annotated to show both typical features of research essays (such as references to sources) and elements of good writing (such as the thesis statement and topic sentences). The paper also shows formatting (such as margins, spacing between lines, and placement of the title). Your instructor may specify different or additional formatting in class or in your syllabus.
School Uniforms Boost Education

In the past decade, many cities—New York, Houston, Dallas, Detroit, Atlanta, and Los Angeles/Long Beach, among others—have made school uniforms mandatory (“Information and Resources”). Although many critics of mandatory-uniform policies remain, the evidence of positive effects is substantial. Mandatory school uniforms offer extraordinary benefits to students and school systems, including improvements in students’ self-esteem, attendance, academic performance, graduation rates, and safety.

Wearing uniforms improves students’ self-esteem. When everyone wears the same clothing, poor students do not stand out from rich ones. No one wears expensive jewelry or designer labels, and no one wears gang colors or other clothing that shows they are part of a special group. Uniforms can enhance students’ sense of belonging and increase morale (Stacey A11). Also, peer pressure and competition are reduced. In a letter to the Long Beach Press-Telegram, Karin Polacheck, board president of the Long Beach Unified School District, wrote, “Uniforms help to create unity amid diversity by easing ethnic and cultural tensions and encouraging values of tolerance and civility. Uniforms eliminate the pressure to conform and allow the attention of students to be directed to learning and growing” (15).

In addition to enhancing self-esteem, wearing uniforms improves academic performance and attendance. It seems that when students don’t have to worry about what to wear, what’s in style, and how to wear it, they focus more on their schoolwork. According to a USA Today article by John Ritter, “some educators . . . think uniforms contribute to higher academic achievement because students aren’t distracted by clothes—theirs or classmates’—and...
they treat school as their job” (1A). Uniforms also improve students’ test scores and attendance. A survey of school principals indicated that 62 percent reported an increase in academic achievement that they attributed to the sense of community created by school uniforms (“Information and Resources”). Apparently, when students feel more a part of the school community, they are more likely to attend school in the first place and are more likely to concentrate on learning when they are there.

Mandatory school uniforms can also improve students’ graduation rates, which would have positive effects on society as a whole. “Dressed for Success,” a pro-uniform editorial in the Columbus Dispatch, highlights Virginia Draa’s 2006 study showing that graduation rates at sixty-four Ohio high schools improved after they implemented mandatory uniforms. As noted in “Dressed for Success,” Draa’s study found that graduation rates at the schools rose by 10.9 percent between 1994 and 2002, while graduation rates at similar high schools dropped by 4.6 percent. The editorial concludes that “more diplomas will translate into increased job and training opportunities for the young people. A high school diploma is a key to success beyond the classroom” (“Dressed for Success”).

The most important benefit of mandatory school uniforms, however, is the reduction of violence in schools and the overall increase in safety. For example, in 1994, the Long Beach, California, school district became the first large urban system to adopt school uniforms. It drew extensive national attention and generated a good deal of controversy; however, the results were overwhelmingly positive. In a 1996 study of data from the Long Beach schools, the U.S. Department of Education found a 36 percent decline in overall crime in elementary and middle schools, a 50 percent decrease in weapons offenses, a 34 percent drop in assaults, and a 19 percent decline in vandalism (“School Uniformity” 40). Similarly, New York City schools have seen a
76 percent drop in crime since 1994, when students in most elementary schools started wearing uniforms (Fanning). In a 1996 State of the Union Address, former president Bill Clinton drew more national attention to the issue when he said, “And if that means teenagers will stop killing each other over designer jackets, then public schools should be able to require school uniforms.” Since then, many more schools have made school uniforms mandatory.

Some people believe that school uniforms are not a good thing, but their objections are not convincing. For instance, in a 1998 study, David L. Brunsma and Kerry A. Rockquemore found no relationship between wearing uniforms and reductions in violence or improvements in academic achievement; in fact, they reported that uniforms could be correlated with reduced academic performance (53-62). However, their analysis has since been challenged (Bodine 69). Other experts say that dress codes violate students’ right to free speech under the First Amendment and their liberty interest under the due process clause of the Fourteenth Amendment (Hudson 87; West 22). The courts have ruled, however, that schools may regulate what students wear. Others claim that most of the evidence of benefits of wearing school uniforms is not scientific. I would direct those opponents to the many studies that have found that there are direct benefits, starting with a bibliography that the National Association of Elementary School Principals provides on its Web site (“Information”).

There is convincing evidence that mandatory school uniforms have significant benefits. If such a small change in policy can improve students’ self-esteem, attendance, academic performance, graduation rates, and safety, why would anyone question it? The potential for positive change is well worth a try.
Works Cited


After you have taken notes, found outside sources, and written a draft thesis statement, use the writing guide that follows to help you write your research essay.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STEPS IN WRITING THE RESEARCH ESSAY</th>
<th>HOW TO DO THE STEPS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Focus.</strong></td>
<td>□ Reread your guiding research question.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Reread your working thesis, and revise it if it has changed based on your reading of outside sources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Review your sources.</strong></td>
<td>□ Evaluate the support from outside sources: Are they strong sources? Do they support your thesis?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Make sure that you have all the information to cite your sources accurately.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Review the range of your support.</strong></td>
<td>□ Consider if you have enough facts, examples, and expert opinions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>See Chapter 6 for more on supporting a thesis.</td>
<td>□ Find more kinds of support if you need it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Add your own thoughts to support your thesis based on what you have found out.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Make an outline.</strong></td>
<td>□ Write your thesis statement, and note what else you might say in your introductory paragraph.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>See Chapter 7 for more on making an outline.</td>
<td>□ Write the main point you want to make in each of your support paragraphs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Decide what outside sources to use for each paragraph.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Decide the order of paragraphs, saving what you believe is your strongest support for last.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Write a draft.</strong></td>
<td>□ Write an introductory paragraph that describes your topic and includes your main point about that topic. If your essay is presenting your position on an issue, state your position clearly and with energy. (For more on argument, see Chapter 18.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>See Chapter 8 for more on drafting.</td>
<td>□ Write topic sentences for each of your support paragraphs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Use your outside sources in your support paragraphs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Write a concluding paragraph that reviews the information you have provided, reviews your main point, and makes a final observation based on your findings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Title the essay.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Steps in Writing the Research Essay**

- **Work your outside sources into the essay.**
  - Indirect quotations (summary and paraphrase)
    
    Ex: In their article “Effects of Student Uniforms on Attendance . . .,” David L. Brunsma and Kerry A. Rockquemore state . . . (53–62).
  - Direct Quotation
    
    Ex: In a letter to the Long Beach Press-Telegram, Karin Polacheck wrote, “Uniforms help to create unity” (15).

- **Revise your draft.**
  
  See Chapter 9 for more on revising.

- **Prepare a Works Cited list.**
  
  See pages 368–74.

**How to Do the Steps**

- Use your own words. For more on summarizing, see Chapter 20.
- Introduce and identify the writer(s) or speaker(s) as in the example.
- Do **not** use quotation marks for indirect quotations.
- Give the page number(s) or the whole section you have summarized or paraphrased. The page numbers are in parentheses **before** the period.
- Use the exact words that are in the source.
- Introduce and identify the writer(s) or speaker(s).
- Use quotation marks before and after the speaker’s or writer’s exact words. For more on using quotation marks, see Chapter 39.
- Give the page number(s) where you found your quote. The page numbers are in parentheses after the last quotation mark but **before** the period.
- If the direct quotation is more than four typed lines or forty words, indent the whole quotation, and do **not** use quotation marks. Write the page number in parentheses **after** the period.
- Ask another person to read and comment on your draft.
- Review your support, and delete any points that don’t relate directly to your thesis.
- If you feel your support is weak, find more, or expand on what you have.
- Add transitions to move your readers smoothly from one point to another.
- Rewrite your thesis statement to make it more concrete and forceful.
- Reread your introduction to be sure that it sets up your essay and makes readers want to continue.
- Reread your conclusion to be sure that it reminds your readers of your main point and support and makes a strong final observation.
- List all of your outside sources, and be sure that they are formatted correctly.
### STEPS IN WRITING THE RESEARCH ESSAY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HOW TO DO THE STEPS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>□ Use the spell checker and grammar checker on your computer, but also reread your essay carefully to catch any errors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Reread your in-text citations and works cited list to be sure they are documented correctly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Find and correct errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Ask yourself: Is this the best I can do?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>