

# RESEARCH ESSAYS

**A style guide for research writing**

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## What is it?

A basic definition of a research essay is: **Written evidence of research and critical thinking guided by a particular research question.** One of the most important aspects of research writing is its flexibility. As the writer/researcher learns new things about their topic of interest, the paper and even the research question will often evolve or change. Using and evaluating primary and secondary sources is key to the creation of a strong research essay.

Rather than simply synthesizing others' thoughts, the goal of a research paper is to delve into research and write as though you are engaging other researchers in thoughtful conversation.

## Types of Research Essays:

### ***Argumentative research paper:***

Also known as a **persuasive research project**, the argumentative research paper shows that you have done extensive research to prove a theory or thesis. Use credible research and evidence to support your theory or argument. This is very similar to the Argumentative Essay, however, it is more grounded in research, and the thesis should be generated **after researching your topic of choice and developing a research question.** However, instead of simply utilizing other secondary sources to support your thesis, you will often need **primary sources or empirical data/research results** from interviews surveys, or experiments as support.

For more information on the Argumentative Essay (not argumentative research) and its style requirements see our resource [here](#).

### ***Analytical research paper:***

The analytical research paper relies on your ability to gather data from reliable sources. It is important to have a clear and deep understanding of your topic since it is most common to paraphrase your sources rather than quote them. The main idea of the analytical essay is to utilize current research and data to provide your reader a clear and comprehensive idea of your topic. **The goal** of the analytical paper is to **present a conclusion based on research**, not just an opinion or thesis.

**Note:** Both types usually require a literature review section. See our [Literature Review](#) resource for information on writing Literature Reviews!

## **What is it for?**

There are many applications for research writing in a variety of careers. Research writing skills are relevant for developing new products or learning new programs or techniques. Any career that requires a written report on that research work is asking you for a research paper.

## **How is it different from other styles of writing?**

Research Writing focuses on the general knowledge base of experts that is narrowed down into either a common perspective or a place where knowledge hasn't been explored yet. While some research writing may contain an argument, the main goal is to provide your perspective and understanding of the topic along with the ideas from the sources you researched.

## **Writing a Research Essay:**

### ***Step 1: Topic***

Selecting a topic sounds easy – you just work on something you're interested in, however it's usually a little more complicated than that. While you should always start with something that interests you, it is important to also let the preliminary research help inform and shape your final topic, focus, and research question. It is also important to narrow your topic to something specific so that you can narrow your field of research.

### **For example:**

***Broad Topic of Interest:*** How video games affect attention span.

***Narrow Topic:*** How phone games affect attention span in children.

**Note:** It is possible to continue narrowing the topic into something very specific or keep a broader topic. This depends on the requirements of your field, your particular topic of study, or your assignment. However, no matter how narrow you choose to go, remember to allow the trends you find in your research to help with the narrowing process.

## **Step 2: Research Question**

**Do the research:** One of the best ways to get started with research writing is to begin by researching your topic of interest. Remember, seeing what kind of questions others are asking (and answering) will help guide you toward a strong research question.

**What kind of sources?** It is important to use a variety of sources both peer-reviewed and otherwise. This might include books, periodicals, or even video presentations and in-person interviews. These sources will also include types called Primary and Secondary Sources. Primary sources are those which offer firsthand accounts or raw data, whereas Secondary sources will usually provide second-hand information or analysis of raw data.

### For example:

**Primary Sources:** historical documents written at the time you are studying, interviews done in person, or statistical surveys.

**Secondary Sources:** biographies, literary reviews, or magazine articles.

It is important to evaluate how each source fits in. Consider some of the following questions when examining your sources: Is it from a trustworthy source (a peer-reviewed journal, reliable news outlet, or publishing house)? How does it relate to the other sources on the same topic?

**Formulate a question based on your findings:** The final step before creating a research thesis is to create a research question. Using the research that you've done, you will be able to narrow your topic of interest down to a very specific question that you want to explore.

### For Example:

**Broad Topic of Interest:** How video games affect attention span.

**Narrow Topic:** How phone games affect attention span in children.

**Research Question:** What causes phone games to affect attention spans in children?

**Remember,** as you continue researching you may need to adjust/change your research question. Always be ready to incorporate new information that you find while you continue the research process during the draft.

### **Step 3: Research Thesis**

Create a one-sentence answer: Finally, with the research question selected, you will be able to create a research thesis. The research thesis should be an answer to your research question that is based on the data of primary and secondary sources.

#### For Example:

**Research Question:** What causes phone games to affect attention spans in children?

**Research Thesis:** The music in phone games is the key factor in affecting attention spans in children.

### **Step 4: What a good Research Essay Looks Like**

This is just an example outline. Your actual research paper may need a different group of requirements depending on your particular field. However, this does show all of the main elements that often appear in research writing.

**Note:** if you are doing an analytical research essay, you do not need the Thesis Statement

#### **Introduction:**

- Background/General Interest hook
- Research question
- Thesis statement (For argumentative research)
- Literature Review
- Methodology

#### **Body paragraphs:**

- Methods
- Data
- Findings
- Discussion

#### **Conclusion:**

- Recap your body and intro.
- Provide Conclusion on Findings (for analytical essay)
- Think forward – what next?

#### **Step 4: Final Checklist**

- Have you narrowed your topic to something clear and specific?
- Have you read and evaluated your primary and secondary sources?
- Have you crafted a clear research question based on your research?
- Have you answered your research question with a thesis statement?

#### **Resources:**

Lumen. “What is Research Writing?” English Composition II: Rhetorical Methods – Based. Lumen. 2021.

Purdue Owl. “Genre and the Research Paper.” Purdue Owl Online Writing Lab. 2021.

University of Minnesota Libraries. “The Purpose of Research Writing.” Writing For Success. University of Minnesota. 2021.

The Tutoring &  
Writing Center

Olin Library

