A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO

Research & Research Papers

From picking a topic to standing at the podium

What is research?

An intensive search with the purpose of becoming certain.

What is a research paper?

Taking and combining the information you find through research with your own ideas to prove a thesis statement.

"Relevance and meaningful contribution is paramount in crafting a research paper."
— Arushi Garg

Why a research paper matters

Writing a research paper isn't just a course requirement — it builds skills and knowledge you'll carry into your career.

- It strengthens your written communication skills — a quality many employers actively look for in candidates.
- It deepens your knowledge on a specific subject. If the paper relates to your intended career, it gives you a head start on the field.

What you need before you start writing

Gather these before drafting — having them ready will save you from rewrites later.

- A clear understanding of your topic and the assignment
- Reliable and credible resources
- Your overall thesis statement
- A well-structured outline
- The rubric or assignment guidelines sheet

The process at a glance

Most research papers move through five broad stages. Treat them as a loop, not a straight line — you'll revisit earlier stages as your thinking sharpens.

01	02	03	04	05
Topic	**Research**	**Outline**	**Draft**	**Revise**
Choose & narrow	*Find sources*	*Build structure*	*Write it out*	*Edit & polish*

1. Select your topic

- Find a topic relevant to the assignment that has enough material for you to research and build a strong discussion around.
- Shortlist a few possible topics and look them up online — see what has already been written and where the gaps are.

2. Conduct your research

- Once you've picked a topic, dig deeper into it.
- Check the assignment's resource guidelines for any restrictions on the kinds of sources you can use.
- Prioritise credible sources with substantial information on your topic.
- After surveying the broad landscape, narrow in on sources that help you form an opinion and an argument.

Where to access research papers for free

A handful of platforms host open-access and freely available scholarly material. A few worth knowing:

- **Sci-Hub**
- **Z-Library**
- **Library Genesis**
- **Unpaywall**
- **GetTheResearch.org**
- **Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ)**
- **Researcher**
- **Science Open**

Structure of a research paper

A standard research paper moves logically through these sections. Each one answers a specific question for the reader.

Section	What it covers
Abstract	Briefly introduces the aim, methodology, results and findings. Goal: grab the reader's interest.
Introduction	States the topic and why it's worth studying. Summarises prior research, identifies unresolved issues, and previews what's coming.
Literature Review	A survey of scholarly sources on the topic — themes, debates, and gaps in existing work.
Methodology	What you did. Participants, study design, materials and procedure. Multiple experiments may need their own Methods section.
Results	What you found. The data collected and any statistical tests, often with a brief description of the analysis used.
Discussion	What it means. Summarises results, connects them to the research question, and addresses limitations and future directions.
Conclusion	Restates the topic, thesis, and importance. Addresses opposing views and ends with a call to action or future research.
References	Alphabetised list of cited sources (by first author's last name), formatted to a style guide such as APA.

A note on the Literature Review

A literature review is a survey of scholarly sources on a specific topic. There are five key steps:

1. Search for relevant literature
2. Evaluate sources
3. Identify themes, debates, and gaps
4. Outline the structure
5. Write your literature review

A note on the Conclusion

A strong conclusion should:

- Restate your topic and why it is important
- Restate your thesis or claim
- Address opposing viewpoints and explain why readers should align with your position
- Include a call to action or an overview of future research possibilities

Edit and revise

- Re-read and proofread the whole paper. Read through the guidelines once more to make sure you've met each one.
- Examine the writing for clarity — does every sentence make sense and add value for the reader?
- Take a break. Step away for a few hours or, ideally, a day. Returning with fresh eyes catches what tired eyes miss.

Tips for writing a paper

✓ **Ask your instructor for input or clarification**

When in doubt, ask. It's cheaper than rewriting.

✓ **Skim resources for important information**

You don't need to read every source cover to cover.

✓ **Keep your paper relevant**

Every paragraph should serve your thesis.

✓ **Review guidelines**

Re-check the rubric before, during, and after writing.

Conferences

A conference is a place where established researchers physically come together to discuss and present work from their field. Researchers submit their papers according to specific guidelines and timelines set by each conference. Submissions are sent to reviewers, the result is communicated back to the author, and accepted papers are invited for presentation.

Presenting your paper at a conference

Organise your talk

- Begin by stating the purpose or goal of your research. Tell the audience why your work matters.
- Provide a very brief literature review to give the audience some context.
- Move on to the main points of your own research.
- Conclude by reiterating the importance of your research and emphasising the key points.

Design your slides

Slides are meant to illustrate your work, not explain it entirely.

- Use graphics wherever possible. Keep text to phrases and bullet points, not full sentences.
- Once your slides are drafted, record yourself rehearsing the talk and identify rough spots.
- Stay within your time limit and leave room for audience questions.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is essentially 'borrowing' pieces of text published elsewhere and incorporating them into your work without any indication that you've done so. It comes in several forms — and avoiding it is both an ethical obligation and a practical skill.

How to avoid plagiarism

- Allow ample time for writing and revision.
- Use quotation marks and credit the source whenever you quote directly.
- Paraphrase the original text in your own words — and still cite the source.
- Read widely on many topics, and read good writers. The more voices you absorb, the easier your own becomes.
- Record the bibliographic details of your sources accurately as you go (not at the end).
- Run a plagiarism check on your manuscript before submission.

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