

Your Research Paper, Step by Step

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____ **Orient yourself to the assignment**

- Identify the purpose (audience?) and logistics of the paper
- Ask any immediate questions about the assignment and the required material
- Break the work into steps and give yourself deadlines for each step
- Budget time for unexpected roadblocks, and, if possible, outside perspectives

____ **Develop an initial research topic**

- Take the time to find a topic, angle, or approach that excites you
- Narrow the topic to a manageable yet flexible scope; hone ideas into research question(s)

____ **Research**

- Meet with a reference librarian
- Consider the spectrum of source materials—primary and secondary sources, holdings beyond the New School library system, New York Public Library, original research, etc.
- Be conscious of time allocation
 - Avoid the trap of researching for weeks and writing for days by giving yourself a reasonable research time/source gathering limit
 - Know when you need more info vs. when you're procrastinating

____ **Take notes on source materials in a way fits your writing process**

- Notecard system—one fact per card, matching numbered bibliography cards
- Word document—color coding by source
- Sticky note system
- Ruled notepaper—page numbers in margins

Consider recording reactions and ideas in response papers: brief, informal; rehearsals for drafts

____ **Develop an initial draft**

- Review response papers and notes to see how your ideas are stacking up
- Embrace contradictions, surprises in your research; they probably mean you've your job well, and are often the source of the best theses

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- Develop a thesis that:
 - Makes a claim, warrants debate; may answer your research question
 - Usually interprets rather than merely reports your research
- Draw up an outline in a way that's most useful to you (in a doc? printed out?)
- If you're stuck getting started:
 - Don't start at the beginning; write what you're eager to write/ what you most want to get out of the way
 - Return to the idea that inspired you; approach the material from another medium
- Double-check that you've included all the paper's requisite parts: bibliography, endnotes/footnotes, cover page, page numbers, etc.

___ **Ask for feedback from professors, peers, ULC tutors, folks outside the field**

___ **Revise...and revise again. Use printed copies to help revise decisively**

___ **Proofread after taking time away from the paper**

___ **Turn in the paper with confidence and go celebrate!**