

Writing Research Papers

The purpose of a research paper in literary or cultural studies is to convince your reader of your opinion on one or more particular texts, authors, movements, productions, issues, periods, theories, etc. Summarizing the work of other critics or giving biographical background information on a particular author may occasionally be useful, but this can never be the main goal of a research paper. What is most important is your own critical approach to a topic and the persuasive presentation of your own argument, along with proof for the validity of that argument. This genre of writing does not primarily seek to gather information (as an encyclopedia entry might do) but to defend a certain understanding, reading or interpretation of particular texts/issues/events, to uncover aspects that might not be apparent at first sight, or to establish connections that might help your reader see in a new light the material you discuss. The hypothesis, opinion or argument that you set out to prove in a research paper is called your thesis. This thesis is the most important sentence of your research paper; it is usually presented at the end of your introduction. Your thesis should consist of a specific and precise announcement of what it is that you will prove/demonstrate/argue in your essay. A statement like “In the speeches of John Winthrop and Jonathan Edwards there are many similarities but also some differences,” for example, is too vague. A better thesis would be: “While John Winthrop’s speeches use religious doctrines in order to justify a democratic social model, Jonathan Edwards employs Scripture primarily in order to reprimand his listeners and to insist on the necessity of strict religious codes of behavior. Where one concentrates on the common good, the other focuses on individual salvation.”

Remember: it is not your task in a research paper to summarize background information or plot elements! What is crucial is for you to give convincing proof for the point of view that you present in your thesis statement.

I. Before You Start Writing the Paper

1. Read the primary text(s). While you read the text(s), mark passages that you could quote later on.
2. Think of a thesis for your paper and make an outline for how you are going to convince your reader of the validity of your thesis. Do not make the outline too detailed. Sections of less than a page are not advisable. Outline only the major steps of your argumentation.
3. Using our university library search engines, bibliographic databases, and other tools, find secondary material on your topic. Do not use secondary sources as any kind of “ultimate” or “absolute” truth, though. Instead, evaluate them critically and use them to find out what others have written about your topic or related issues. In your research paper you may argue that a critic is right about a particular point or that he/she is wrong about a particular point. Demonstrate that you are familiar with other opinions/arguments/critical assessments and assess those, rather than adopting them uncritically. The most useful bibliography to consult for research topics in our subject is the *MLA International Bibliography* (available via the university library homepage (only from within the library or through a VPN connection to the library). To access this database from <https://www.uni-due.de/ub/index.php> click on “Datenbanken” (in the menu on the left under “Sevices” → “Anglistik, Amerikanistik” → “MLA International Bibliography” → “Hier geht es zum Angebot” → “Proceed”). Materials not available at our library can be ordered via inter-library loan. For finding Internet sources the search engine “Google” is recommended. Be aware, however, that Internet sources have a higher probability than print sources of being unscholarly, unreliable or inaccurate unless they are contained in the online version of academic journals.

II. Parts of a Research Paper

Research papers generally consist of: • title page, • table of contents, • main text, • notes, • works cited.

1. Title page. Other than the title of your paper, its first page should also contain the name of the university, the seminar title, the name of the professor or instructor, the semester, and your own name, matriculation number, and study program (“Studiengang”).

2. Table of contents. The title page is followed by a table of contents. Use either the numbering format A.I.1.a. or 1.1.1.1. For each section of your paper, the table of contents lists the page number on which that section starts. For short papers (of under ten pages) a table of contents and a division into sections may not be necessary. If you decide to use sections, make sure that there is a logical progression from one section to the next. Never use sections to write a series of loosely related “mini papers.” In most cases the subdivision should not exceed two levels, i.e., it should only require the levels A.I. or 1.1. but no additional subdivisions within those levels.

3. Main text. The three principal parts of a research paper’s main text are:

- a. introduction (with the paper’s thesis)
- b. body (containing support or proof for the thesis) and
- c. conclusion (summing up results, mentioning what aspects you were unable to address in more detail, or pointing the way for further research on this or a related topic)

The body of your paper is by far the longest part. It constitutes about 80% of your text; the introduction and conclusion constitute about 10% each.

4. Notes. You may use footnotes or endnotes. If you use endnotes, start a “Notes” section on a new page after the conclusion of your paper. Use notes sparingly. The main purpose of notes is to give related information that would be distracting in the paper’s main text. Notes are also often used to evaluate secondary sources critically or to point out further sources or to refer to debates in scholarship. According to MLA Style, it is not the purpose of footnotes or endnotes to indicate the source of a quotation you used in your main text! (Sources of quotations are indicated in brackets after the end of the quotation.)

5. Works Cited. According to MLA Style, you do not to provide your reader with a bibliography of selected books and articles on the topic of your research paper but instead you list only those books, articles, and other sources from which you quoted in

your paper or which you mentioned. The last section of your paper should therefore be entitled "Works Cited." Start a new page for the "Works Cited." Put the citations in alphabetical order (by last name of the author); indent the second line of a citation and all additional lines of the citation. There is no need to have separate listings for primary and secondary sources. In titles of books, articles, poems, etc. it is customary to start nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs with capital letters. Please remember: Titles of books, journals, films or TV series are given in italics; titles of texts that are shorter than a book (article in a journal; essay, story, poem, etc. in a book) or of individual episodes (of a TV show) are given in quotation marks. Here are some examples:

a. Citation of a Book:

(Please note: "ed." after the name of a person stands for the editor of a book; "eds." stands for editors.)

Elliott, Emory, ed. *Columbia Literary History of the United States*. New York: Columbia UP, 1988. Print.

Fitzgerald, F. Scott. *The Great Gatsby*. 1925. New York: Collier Books, Macmillan Publishing Co., 1980. Print.

Hagenbüchle, Roland, and Josef Raab, eds. *Negotiations of America's National Identity*. Tübingen Stauffenburg Verlag, 2000. Print.

Kant, Immanuel. *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*. 1764. Trans. John T. Goldstein. Berkeley: U of California P, 1960. Print.

Klarer, Mario. *An Introduction to Literary Studies*. London and New York: Routledge, 1999. Print.

b. Citation of an Article, Chapter, Story or Poem in a book collection:

(Please note: "Ed." after the title of a collection of essays stands for "edited by" and is used for cases of one editor as well as for cases of more than one editor. If the author of an essay is also the editor of the volume of essays, "Ed." is followed only by her/his last name.)

Buchenaus, Barbara. "The Captive's Crucible: Haudenosaunee Violence in Early North American Narratives of Christian and Cultural Conversion." *Interculturalism in North America: Canada, the United States, Mexico, and Beyond*. Ed. Josef Raab and Alexander Greiffenstern. Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier & Tempe, AZ: Bilingual P, 2013. 27-55. Print.

Cisneros, Sandra. "Loose Woman." *Loose Woman: Poems*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994. 112-15. Print.

———. "Woman Hollering Creek." *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories*. 1991. New York: Vintage Books, 1992. 43-56. Print.

Kaltmeier, Olaf, Sebastian Thies, and Josef Raab. "Multiculturalism and Beyond: The New Dynamics of Identity Politics in the Americas." *The New Dynamics of Identity Politics in the Americas: Multiculturalism and Beyond*. Ed. Kaltmeier, Thies, and Raab. London & New York: Routledge, 2014. 1-12. Print.

Raab, Josef. "From Spic to Spice: Latinas and Latinos on U.S. Television." *New World Colors: Ethnicity, Belonging, and Difference in the Americas*. Ed. Raab. Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier & Tempe, AZ: Bilingual P, 2014. 49-116. Print.

c. Citation of an Article, Story or Poem in a Journal:

(Please note: Distinguish whether the text was accessed in its print source or whether it was accessed through an online database like JSROR or MUSE.)

Miller, Pete, and John Doe. "Excellent Article: All We Have to Say." *Journal for Learned People* 49.3 (2015): 32-40. Print.

Duvall, John N. "The (Super)Marketplace of Images: Television as Unmediated Mediation in DeLillo's *White Noise*." *Arizona Quarterly* 50.3 (1994): 127-53. Print.

Tolson, Nancy. "Making Books Available: The Role of Early Libraries, Librarians, and Booksellers in the Promotion of African American Children's Literature." *African American Review* 32.1 (1998): 9-16. *JSTOR*. Web. 5 April 2015.

d. Citation of an Internet Source:

(Please note that MLA Style does not require you to indicate URLs, but your instructor may find that information helpful. The date before "Web" indicates when the document was put online; the date after "Web" indicates when you visited the website.)

"Interview with Philip Roth." The Man Booker International Prize 2011. *YouTube*. 19 May 2011. Web. 30 Mar. 2015.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_QeIJ_xO7ns>.

Raab, Josef. "El gran viejo: Walt Whitman in Latin America." *Comparative Literature and Culture* 3.2 (2001): n. pag. Web. 30 Mar. 2015. <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol3/iss2/6/>>.

Turan, Kenneth. "Review: McQueen's '12 Years a Slave' Impressive, and Hard to Watch." *Los Angeles Times*. 17 Oct. 2013. Web. 1 Apr. 2015. <<http://articles.latimes.com/2013/oct/17/entertainment/la-et-mn-12-years-a-slave-movie-review-20131018>>.

e. Citation of a Film:

(Please note: Performers can be named if that information is relevant.)

Unforgiven. Dir. Clint Eastwood. Warner Brothers, 1992. DVD.

Unforgiven. Dir. Clint Eastwood. Perf. Clint Eastwood, Gene Hackman, Morgan Freeman, Richard Harris. Warner Brothers, 1992. DVD.

f. Citation of a TV Series or of an Episode from a TV Series:

The West Wing. Warner Brothers Television. 1999-2006. DVD.

"El Mundo Gira." *The X-Files*. Season 4, episode 11. Twentieth-Century Fox Television. 1997. DVD.

If a source does not indicate an author, use the first significant word in the title (i.e., not articles) to determine where it goes in the alphabetical listing of your works cited. If you list more than one source by the same author, replace the author's name by three dashes for the second listing and all subsequent listings of works by this author (i.e., "———.")

For a variety of examples of how to indicate a source in the "Works Cited" and how to refer to it in the citation that indicates the source of a quotation in your main text, please refer to the appendix on page 5 of these guidelines. Additional examples for citations can be found at <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>, the "MLA Formatting and Style Guide" of Purdue University's Online Writing Lab.

III. Stylistic Aspects of a Research Paper

1. When you refer to plot elements, do so in the present tense. Example: “Gatsby tries to win Daisy’s affection by putting his wealth on display for her.”
2. In the body of your paper, do not give (only) general impressions but be specific. For example, don’t only write “Edwards scares his audience,” but tell your reader what means he uses to scare his listeners. For example: “Edwards scares his audience through a variety of tropes. One of these is the image of God holding people over the fiery pit of hell the way one might hold a spider over a flame.”
3. Avoid very short paragraphs. Paragraphs of one or two sentences are frequent in journalistic writing but not in academic papers. Paragraphs that are more than a page long are also not advisable. Use topic sentences at the beginning of paragraphs.
4. Avoid sentence fragments. Avoid colloquial expressions like “a lot of.” Vary your sentence structure, e.g., don’t start every sentence with “She writes ...,” or “He observes ...,” or “She notices ...” Use the passive voice rarely, if at all. Statements in the active voice are much clearer and stylistically more elegant.
5. Do not chop up your paper into short sections. A section or chapter or subchapter should usually be several pages long. If it isn’t, combine it with other sections into a larger unit.
6. A paper that contains numerous grammar and spelling errors just doesn’t make a good impression. Corrections in handwriting on your final typed/printed paper are much better than no corrections at all.

IV. Formal Aspects of a Research Paper

1. Use a one-and-a-half line spacing when you type/print your paper. Use a 12-point font. Use about 3 cm for the left margin and 2 cm for the three other margins.
2. In your text as well as in your “Works Cited” list and notes, put book titles like *The Scarlet Letter* in italics or underline them (The Scarlet Letter). Titles of films or TV shows should also be in italics (or underlined). Titles of stories, poems, essays, articles, book chapters, or individual episodes of a TV show are indicated by quotation marks (see above).

V. Quotations

1. General. Use quotations from primary and secondary sources in order to illustrate your statements or to give additional support for your argument. But do not overuse quotations. As a rule of thumb, quotations should not constitute more than about twenty per cent of your paper. Especially when you use longer quotations, it is not enough to just give the quotation; you also need to explain to your reader how that quotation illustrates or proves a point you are trying to make, how it supports your thesis and argument.

2. Indicating the source of a quotation. Always give the page number of your quotation. According to MLA Style, this is done in brackets after closing the quotation marks, not in a footnote. When the source of your quotation is apparent from your text, only indicate the page number; otherwise indicate both the source and the page number.

a. If your text makes it clear from which source by which author your quotation is taken, then you put only the page number of the quotation in brackets.

Example: Thoreau believes that most governments are a burden. As he writes in “Civil Disobedience,” he considers them to be as useless as “a sort of wooden gun” (713).

b. If it is not clear from which source your quotation is taken, you need to indicate that source either through the name of the author or through a word from the source’s title or through both. The first method is used when only one text by that particular author appears in your “Works Cited.”

Example: Several Transcendentalists believe that most governments are a burden. One of them writes that governments are as useless as “a sort of wooden gun” (Thoreau 713).

The second method is used when it is clear from your text who the author of the source is, while the title of the source is not clear since more than one source by that particular author appear in the “Works Cited.”

Example: Several Transcendentalists believe that most governments are a burden. Thoreau, for example, considers them to be as useless as “a sort of wooden gun” (“Civil” 713).

The third method is used when neither the author nor the title of your quotation’s source are apparent from your text and there is more than one source by that particular author listed in the “Works Cited.”

Example: Several Transcendentalists believe that most governments are a burden. One of them considers governments to be as useless as “a sort of wooden gun” (Thoreau, “Civil” 713).

3. Indirect quotations. When you quote a passage not from its original source but from someone else who is quoting it in his or her text, you give the latter source after indicating “qtd. in” (for “quoted in”).

Example: As Toni Morrison once said, “a dead language is not only one no longer spoken or written, it is unyielding language content to admire its own paralysis” (qtd. in Harrington 421).

4. Block quotations. If your quotation is longer than three lines, set it off from the rest of the text by indenting it about 1 cm from the left margin and omit the quotations marks. You may change to single-spacing for block quotations or continue using the one-and-a-half line spacing that you use in the rest of your text. Be consistent.

5. Omissions. If you leave one or more words out from your quotation, indicate this omission through three periods with one space in between each period. (Keyboards have a special symbol for those three dots. On an Apple computer, for example, you hold down the “ALT” key and type a period. If you cannot find this special symbol, just use three periods with a space in between each period.)

Example: Thoreau complains that “this government never of itself furthered any enterprise, but by the alacrity with which it got out of its way. . . . The character inherent in the American people has done all that has been accomplished” (714).

6. Additions. If you add anything to your quotation, indicate this addition by putting the words which you are adding and which are not in the original text inside square brackets.

Example: Thoreau complains that “this government never of itself furthered any enterprise, but by the alacrity with which it got out of its way. . . . [Not the government but only the] character inherent in the American people has done all that has been accomplished” (714).

7. Emphasis. If individual words in a quotation are emphasized (by being put in italics), indicate whether you added this emphasis (see Example 1 below) or whether it already appears in the text you are quoting (see Example 2 below).

Example 1: Emily Dickinson admonishes her readers to “Tell all the Truth but tell it *slant*,” thus stressing her belief in the need for an indirect approach (P 1129; my emphasis).

[The “P 1129” here refers to Dickinson’s untitled poem number 1129.]

Example 2: Benjamin Franklin admits that he “took care not only to be in *Reality* Industrious and frugal, but to avoid all *Appearances* of the contrary” (*Autobiography* 266; Franklin’s emphasis).

8. Poetry quotations. If you quote from a poem, indicate the end of a line in the original through a slash (i.e., /) in your quotation.

Example: Phillis Wheatley writes that “‘T’was mercy brought me from my pagan land, / Taught my benighted soul to understand / That there’s a God” (325).

Indicate the end of a stanza through a double slash (i.e. //).

VI. Paraphrases and Citations

When you refer to a source by mentioning or paraphrasing it, mention its source in brackets the way you would with a genuine quotation. In order to indicate that another source disagrees with that approach or opinion, precede the indication of that disagreeing source by “cf.” (which stands for “confer”).

Example: While it has been argued that Faulkner’s disruption of chronology is aimed at disorienting the reader (Brooks 121-26, cf. Miller ch. 2), one can also see it as an illustration of his narrator’s mental state.

VII. Your Audience

Assume that your reader has also read the primary text(s) or seen the film(s) about which you are writing. Plot summaries are therefore unnecessary. Do not give biographical introductions to the primary authors about whom they are writing unless that biographical information is directly relevant for your thesis.

VIII. Further Information

If you have any questions about formal aspects of research papers, consult the

***MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. 7th ed. New York: Modern Language Association, 2009.**

or take a look at any article in a recent issue of the journal *PMLA* (*Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*) and follow the format it uses. You may also want to consult <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>, the “MLA Formatting and Style Guide” of Purdue University’s Online Writing Lab. MLA Style is the standard format for research papers in English and American literary or cultural studies. Other disciplines prefer other formats, however.

Appendix: Bibliographic Format for References

Type of Entry	Listing in “Works Cited”	Citation in Text
Print		
A book by a single author	McConnell, Frank. <i>Storytelling and Mythmaking: Images from Film and Literature</i> . New York: Oxford UP, 1979. Print.	(McConnell 32)
A book by more than one author	Gilbert, Sandra M., and Susan Gubar. <i>The Madwoman in the Attic</i> . New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1979. Print.	(Gilbert and Gubar 9)
A book by multiple authors	Blocker, Clyde E., Robert H. Plummer, and Richard C. Richardson, Jr. <i>The Two-Year College: A Social Synthesis</i> . Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice, 1965. Print.	(Blocker, Plummer, and Richardson 52)
A book in a series	Hinchcliffe, Arnold P. <i>Harold Pinter</i> . Rev. ed. Boston: Twayne, 1981. Print. Twayne's English Author's Series 51.	(Hinchcliffe 62)
An edited collection	Rowe, John Carlos, ed. <i>A Concise Companion to American Studies</i> . Malden, MA: Wiley, 2010. Print.	List and cite individual contributions.
A work in an anthology or collection of essays	Lowe, Lisa. “Reckoning Nation and Empire: Asian American Critique.” <i>A Concise Companion to American Studies</i> . Ed. John Carlos Rowe. Malden, MA: Wiley, 2010. 229-44. Print.	(Lowe 230)
An article in a journal	Sollors, Werner. “W.E.B. Du Bois in Nazi Germany, 1936.” <i>Amerikastudien / American Studies</i> 44.2 (1999): 207-22. Print.	(Sollors 221)
An article from a daily newspaper	Brody, Jane. “Heart Attacks: Turmoil beneath the Calm.” <i>New York Times</i> 21 June 1983, late ed.: C1. Print.	(Brody C1)
A newspaper article (unsigned)	“Give Georgia More HOPE.” <i>Atlanta Journal-Constitution</i> 18 Dec. 1994: G6. Print.	(“Give” G6)
Web		
Please note: Indicating a URL might help your reader locate the source more easily. “If you present a URL, give it immediately following the date of access, a period, and a space” (<i>MLA Handbook</i> 182).		
A scholarly journal	Quellette, Marc. “Theories, Memories, Bodies, and Artists.” Editorial. <i>Reconstruction</i> 7.4 (2007): n. pag. Web. 5 June 2008.	(Quellette)
An article from an online database	Tolson, Nancy. “Making Books Available: The Role of Early Libraries, Librarians, and Booksellers in the Promotion of African American Children's Literature.” <i>African American Review</i> 32.1 (1998): 9-16. <i>JSTOR</i> . Web. 5 June 2008.	(Tolson 12)
An article from a web page	Green, Joshua. “The Rove Presidency.” <i>The Atlantic.com</i> . Atlantic Monthly Group, Sept. 2007. Web. 15 May 2008.	(Green)
	“The Scientists Speak.” Editorial. <i>New York Times</i> . New York Times, 20 Nov. 2007. Web. 15 May 2008.	(“Scientists Speak”)
	“Verb Tenses.” Chart. <i>The OWL at Purdue</i> . Purdue U Online Writing Lab, 2001. Web. 15 May 2008.	(“Verb Tenses”)
...with URL	“Verb Tenses.” Chart. <i>The OWL at Purdue</i> . Purdue U Online Writing Lab, 2001. Web. 15 May 2008. < http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/601/1/ >.	(“Verb Tenses”)
DVD		
Film	<i>Unforgiven</i> . Dir. Clint Eastwood. Warner Brothers, 1992. DVD.	If you like indicate the moment in the film, e.g., “(42:16)”