

Research Elements Guide

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GUIDE TO BASIC ACADEMIC RESEARCH

WHY RESEARCH MATTERS

- **Informed Decisions:** Research helps you understand different perspectives and make informed choices.
- **Critical Thinking:** Research sharpens your ability to evaluate information and form your own opinions.
- **Credible Writing:** Research gives your writing authority and credibility.

Learning how to research is an essential skill, especially for college students, for a variety of reasons:

- **Academic Success:** Research is the foundation of academic work. It enables you to gather information, analyze different perspectives, and develop your own informed arguments. This skill is crucial for writing papers, completing projects, and participating in class discussions.
- **Informed Decision-Making:** In your personal and professional life, you'll constantly encounter situations where you need to make decisions. Knowing how to research allows you to gather reliable information and evaluate different options, leading to better choices.
- **Critical Thinking:** Research is not just about finding information; it's about critically evaluating the quality and relevance of that information. By learning how to research, you develop the ability to think critically, analyze evidence, and identify biases or flaws in arguments.
- **Problem-Solving:** Research often involves tackling complex problems. By learning research skills, you develop a systematic approach to identifying problems, gathering information, analyzing data, and developing solutions.
- **Lifelong Learning:** The world is constantly changing, and new information is constantly emerging. Research skills empower you to stay informed, continue learning throughout your life, and adapt to new challenges.
- **Career Advancement:** Research skills are highly valued in the workplace. Many professions require the ability to gather, analyze, and interpret information. Strong research skills can make you a more competitive job candidate and open new career opportunities.
- **Civic Engagement:** Research enables you to understand complex social issues and participate in informed discussions about important topics. This empowers you to engage in civic life and contribute to your community.
- **Personal Growth:** Research can be a fascinating and rewarding process. It allows you to explore new ideas, challenge your assumptions, and expand your knowledge in areas that interest you.

By mastering research skills, you'll be well-equipped to succeed in college and beyond, make informed decisions, think critically, solve problems, and continue learning throughout your life.

THE RESEARCH PROCESS

Consult the research resources provided in Brightspace. You will find handouts on how to research, videos on using Ebsco and Google, links to free online databases with scholarly/academic content, and information on citing databases in MLA.

1. TOPIC SELECTION:

- Choose a topic that interests you and meets the essay assignment requirements, which might include picking a specific video to react to or choosing from a list of prompts.

2. INITIAL RESEARCH & BRAINSTORMING:

- Begin by exploring what you already know about the topic (freewriting).
- Brainstorm potential arguments about and audiences for your topic.
- Start looking for reliable sources (textbooks, library databases, credible websites) to get an overview.

3. THESIS DEVELOPMENT:

- Formulate a clear thesis statement that identifies your topic, provides an argument on the issue, and lists the three points you will use to convince your reader.
 - Example:
- Create a basic outline to organize your thoughts and research.

4. IN-DEPTH RESEARCH & NOTE-TAKING:

- Dive deeper into your research, using the TRAAP test to evaluate the reliability and usefulness of each source:
 - **Timeliness:** How recent is the information?
 - **Relevance:** Does the information relate to your topic?
 - **Authority:** Who is the author or source? Are they qualified?
 - **Accuracy:** Is the information supported by evidence?
 - **Purpose:** Why was this information created? Is it biased?
- Take detailed notes, including quotes, statistics, and key points.
- Remember to record the source information for proper citation.

5. FILL OUT THE TRAAP TEST RUBRIC:

- As you find reliable sources, start creating your Works Cited page.
- Use MLA format and follow the layout in the instructions and example.
- Include the full citation information for each source.
- Print out each source and fill out the TRAAP Test Rubric Form and submit all sources to my by the deadline.

6. DRAFTING YOUR PAPER:

- Create the outline for feedback.
- Introduction: Introduce your topic, provide background information, and present your thesis statement.

- Body Paragraphs: Each paragraph focuses on one category, starting with a topic sentence and providing supporting evidence from your research.
- Conclusion: Summarize your main points and restate your thesis. End with a reflective statement that expresses why the target audience should care about this issue/topic.

7. REVISING & EDITING:

- Review your draft for content, clarity, and style.
- Check for grammar, punctuation, and spelling errors.
- Get feedback from Tutor.com

8. FINAL SUBMISSION:

- Proofread one last time.
- Format your paper according to the instructions.
- Submit your paper on time.

ADDITIONAL TIPS:

- Library Resources: Take advantage of your college library's resources (note: with your SSC student ID, you can also use other college libraries, such as ECU's Lindschied, if they are closer to your location).
- Time Management: Create a research schedule to stay on track and meet deadlines.
- Ask Questions: Don't hesitate to ask me for help or clarification.

Remember: Research is a process of discovery! Enjoy exploring your topic and sharing your findings in your paper.

GUIDE TO SYNTHESIZING RESEARCH & ORIGINAL THOUGHT

WHAT IS SYNTHESIS?

Synthesis isn't just summarizing what you've read. It's about:

- **Connecting Ideas:** Finding how diverse sources relate to each other, whether they agree, disagree, or offer unique perspectives.
- **Building on Research:** Using the evidence you find as a foundation for your own arguments and insights.
- **Creating Something New:** Developing your own original perspective based on the information you've gathered.

WHY SYNTHESIZE?

- **Stronger Arguments:** Backing up your ideas with credible sources makes your writing more persuasive.
- **Deeper Understanding:** Exploring multiple viewpoints leads to a more nuanced understanding of your topic.
- **Critical Thinking:** Analyzing and evaluating research helps you develop your critical thinking skills.
- **Original Contributions:** Adding your own insights shows you've thought deeply about the topic.

HOW TO SYNTHESIZE RESEARCH

READ ACTIVELY:

- **Highlight & Annotate:** Mark key points, interesting quotes, and any questions you have.
- **Look for Connections:** How do various sources support or challenge each other?
- **Identify Gaps:** What questions are left unanswered? What areas could be explored further?

ORGANIZE YOUR NOTES:

- **Summarize:** Briefly summarize each source's main points.
- **Categorize:** Group sources by themes, arguments, or perspectives.
- **Connect:** Draw lines between sources that relate to each other.

DEVELOP YOUR THESIS:

- **Take a Stance:** Based on your research, what is your main argument or claim?
- **Be Specific:** Your thesis should be clear, concise, and arguable.

INCORPORATE RESEARCH INTO YOUR WRITING:

- **Introduce Sources:** Clearly identify the author and source before presenting their ideas.
- **Quote & Paraphrase:** Use a mix of direct quotes and paraphrasing to incorporate evidence.

- **Cite Properly:** Always give credit to the original source using the appropriate citation style (MLA).
- **Analyze & Interpret:** Don't just drop in a quote; explain its significance and how it relates to your thesis.

ADD YOUR VOICE:

- **Agree/Disagree:** State whether you agree or disagree with the sources, and why.
- **Offer New Insights:** Share your own original thoughts and interpretations.
- **Connect to Personal Experience:** (If appropriate) Use personal examples to illustrate your points.

EXAMPLE:

TED TALK VIDEO:

Barnett, Mac. "Why a Good Book Is a Secret Door." *TED*, June 2014,

www.ted.com/talks/mac_barnett_why_a_good_book_is_a_secret_door.

In your paper, you should:

- Summarize the key findings from both sides of the debate.
- Analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the research.
- Offer your own perspective.
- Support your argument with evidence from the research and your own observations.

THESIS:

Preschool reading programs should move beyond the limitations of Accelerated Reader-type programs and embrace a more holistic approach that cultivates wonder, curiosity, and visualization to foster deeper engagement with literature and a lifelong love of reading.

BODY PARAGRAPH:

Below is a breakdown of the sample paragraph by function:

TOPIC SENTENCE:

- Cultivating a child's ability to create vivid mental images while reading is crucial for enhancing comprehension and deepening engagement. *This clearly states the main idea of the paragraph.*

EXPLANATION OF THE ARGUMENT:

- When children actively visualize, they are not merely passively decoding words but actively constructing meaning and stepping into the world of the story (Gambrell and Jawitz 21). *This explains why visualization is important for comprehension.*

SUPPORT FOR THE ARGUMENT:

- Imagine a child reading about a majestic lion prowling the savanna; if they can vividly picture the lion's golden mane, the tall grasses swaying in the breeze, and the intense gaze of its amber eyes, the story transcends the page and becomes a multi-sensory

experience. This process strengthens their understanding, improves recall, and fosters a profound emotional connection with the text. *This provides a concrete example of how visualization enhances the reading experience.*

- Research by Sadoski and Paivio demonstrates that students encouraged to use visual imagery showed significantly higher levels of comprehension and recall (65). They argue that mental imagery “enriches the reading experience by creating a more elaborate and memorable representation of the text (72).” *This provides further evidence from research to support the argument. **Synthesis:** Notice how the writer combines a vivid, concrete example with research findings to create a more persuasive argument for the importance of visualization.*

COUNTERARGUMENT:

- However, programs like Accelerated Reader, with their emphasis on quizzes and quantifiable measures, may inadvertently undermine this crucial element. *This acknowledges a potential opposing viewpoint that some reading programs might hinder visualization.*

REBUTTAL:

- While AR can be a useful tool for monitoring progress, its focus on extrinsic rewards can shift the focus away from the intrinsic joys of reading (Krashen). The emphasis on literal comprehension in AR quizzes can also discourage children from actively constructing mental images. *This addresses the counterargument by explaining how AR can negatively impact visualization. **Synthesis:** Here, the writer is synthesizing their argument by acknowledging a counterpoint (the potential benefits of AR) and then rebutting it with further explanation. This creates a more nuanced and comprehensive discussion.*

SIGNIFICANCE:

- While acknowledging the potential benefits of AR, educators should prioritize practices that encourage active visualization, such as reading aloud with expression, providing opportunities for dramatic play, and facilitating discussions that prompt visualization. By nurturing the ability to create vivid mental images, educators can unlock a richer reading experience for young learners, encouraging them to connect with texts on a deeper level and develop a lifelong appreciation for the power of stories. *This emphasizes the importance of prioritizing visualization and provides suggestions for how educators can foster it. **Synthesis:** This section synthesizes theory and practice by offering concrete strategies for educators based on the arguments presented.*

Overall, this paragraph effectively presents a well-supported argument in favor of cultivating visualization in young readers. It anticipates potential objections and offers practical solutions, making it a persuasive piece of writing.

REMEMBER:

- Synthesis is an ongoing process. As you write and revise, you'll continue to refine your ideas and integrate research in more nuanced ways.

GUIDE TO FINDING CREDIBLE SOURCES

I have provided videos in Brightspace about using Ebsco (including how to get there and where to find log-in credentials) and using Google features.

GOOGLE BOOKS:

- **Strengths:** Offers previews of books, often including relevant sections for your research.
- **Weaknesses:** May not have access to full texts. Primarily focused on books, not articles.
- **How to Use:**
 - Search by keyword, title, or author.
 - Use the "Preview" feature to access relevant sections.
 - Check for author credentials and publication date.
 - Consider using Google Books to find leads for further research in other sources (e.g., library catalogs).

GOOGLE SCHOLAR:

- **Strengths:** Indexes scholarly literature (articles, theses, books, abstracts). Offers citation information.
- **Weaknesses:** Can be difficult to navigate for beginners. Not all results are free to access.
- **How to Use:**
 - Search by keyword, title, or author.
 - Look for articles from reputable journals in the field.
 - Use the "Cited by" feature to find related articles.
 - Check for author affiliations and publication dates.

EBSCO

- **Strengths:** Powerful research database with access to scholarly journals, magazines, and newspapers.
- **Weaknesses:** Can be overwhelming with its vast collection. Requires access through the college (See the announcement in Brightspace for the sign-in credentials).
- **How to Use:**
 - Log in through the link on the library web site.
 - Search by keyword, title, or author.
 - Use the filters to narrow your results (e.g., by date, publication type, subject).
 - Look for peer-reviewed articles when available.

GOOGLE CHROME (OR ANY SEARCH ENGINE)

- **Strengths:** Easy to use, provides a broad range of information.
- **Weaknesses:** Results are not always reliable or scholarly. Requires careful evaluation of sources.
- **How to Use:**
 - Use specific search terms.

- Evaluate the top results with the TRAAP test.
- Look for websites ending in .edu, .gov, or .org (often more reliable than .com).
- Be skeptical of blogs, personal websites, and sites with excessive advertising.

EVALUATING SOURCES WITH THE TRAAP TEST:

No matter which search tool you use, always evaluate sources with the TRAAP test:

- **Timeliness:** How recent is the information?
- **Relevance:** Does the information relate to your topic?
- **Authority:** Who is the author or source? Are they qualified?
- **Accuracy:** Is the information supported by evidence?
- **Purpose:** Why was this information created? Is it biased?

ADDITIONAL TIPS:

- **Use Multiple Sources:** Don't rely on a sole source. Gather information from a variety of perspectives.
- **Look for Citations:** Credible sources will cite their own sources, allowing you to verify their information.
- **Ask a Librarian:** Librarians are experts in research and can help you find and evaluate sources.

By following these guidelines, you'll be well on your way to finding credible sources for your research paper!

EXAMPLE

Let's use the TRAAP test to assess the credibility of an article:

- Article: "Zoos Are Prisons for Animals: No One Needs to See a Depressed Penguin in the Flesh"
- Source: *The Guardian* (online) - <https://www.theguardian.com/world/commentisfree/2017/mar/13/zoos-are-prisons-for-animals-no-one-needs-to-see-a-depressed-penguin-in-the-flesh>
- Author: Romesh Ranganathan, Comedian and TV Presenter
- Published: March 13, 2017

TRAAP TEST RUBRIC SCORES WITH ANALYSIS

TIMELINESS:

- Needs Improvement (1 pt): The article was published in 2017, making it over 7 years old. This significantly impacts its timeliness, especially concerning the ongoing debate around zoos and animal welfare. Zoos may have evolved their practices, and new research on animal captivity may be available.

RELEVANCE:

- Excellent (5 pts): The article directly addresses the ethical concerns surrounding zoos and the practice of keeping animals in captivity. It's highly relevant to discussions about animal welfare and conservation.

AUTHORITY:

- Needs Improvement (1 pt): Romesh Ranganathan is a comedian and TV presenter. While he's entitled to his opinion, he lacks expertise in zoology, animal welfare, or

conservation. This weakens the article's authority on the subject. Although published in The Guardian, a generally reputable source, it's crucial to note that this article is in the "Comment is Free" section, signifying an opinion piece, not investigative journalism.

ACCURACY:

- Needs Improvement (1 pt): The article relies heavily on personal anecdotes and observations, which are subjective and may not accurately represent the conditions in all zoos. While Ranganathan mentions some general facts (like the Cumbria zoo incident), he doesn't provide in-depth research or data to support his claims. This lack of evidence and potential for bias weakens the article's accuracy.

PURPOSE:

- Needs Improvement (1 pt): The purpose is clearly to persuade the reader to adopt the author's anti-zoo stance. The language is highly emotive ("animals in prison," "enslaved," "depressed penguins") and uses humor to sway the reader. While persuasive writing can be valid, the strong bias and lack of counterarguments limit the article's objectivity.

TOTAL SCORE: 9/25 = 36%

OVERALL ASSESSMENT:

This article has low credibility as a source for factual information about zoos and animal welfare. Its age, lack of expertise from the author, reliance on anecdotal evidence, and strong bias significantly detract from its trustworthiness.

IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS:

- It's an opinion piece: It's crucial to remember this article is designed to express a viewpoint, not necessarily present a balanced overview of the topic.
- Seek out expert voices: To get a more complete understanding of zoo practices and animal welfare, readers should consult sources from zoologists, conservationists, and researchers in relevant fields.
- Look for updated information: Zoos and animal welfare standards are constantly evolving. More recent articles and research will likely provide a more accurate picture of the current situation.

While this article might be a good starting point for sparking discussion and raising awareness, it's essential to approach it critically and seek out additional information from more authoritative sources before forming a solid opinion on the complex topic of zoos and animal welfare.