



**Knowledge/Growth  
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**Tips on Writing an Academic Paper**

**A Guide from [www.kgsupport.com](http://www.kgsupport.com)**

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English language document review and editing specialists.**

# Tips on Writing an Academic Paper

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- Tips on Writing an Academic Paper .....2
- STEP 1. Begin early.....3
- STEP 2. Create a budget of pages.....3
- STEP 3. Gather resource materials. ....4
- STEP 4. Make a first reading of gathered resource materials.....5
- STEP 5. Draft a research statement. ....5
- STEP 6. Read the selected references a second time around.....6
- STEP 7. Create the “backbone” of the document with a word processor.....6
- STEP 8. Type in the marked quotations, ensuring each has a comment regarding its relation to the research statement. ....7
- STEP 9. Develop the thoughts of the content, ensuring each is supported by quotes. ....7
- STEP 10. Write the Introduction and Conclusion of the research paper. ....8
- STEP 11. Write the Abstract of the research paper. ....8
- STEP 12. Have the paper go through a final English review by a professional editor.....8

## Tips on Writing an Academic Paper

Writing an academic paper remains a difficult, trying, and intimidating task for many students. This is unfortunate because much of the course subjects a student will take while in a university requires paper writing as an academic exercise. In the same manner, expressing one's self well in writing is frequently a critical ability in the professional community. Although eloquence and knowledge in composition are prized skills in any industry, writing an academic paper demands even more expertise. With academic writing, one need not only develop the ability to express one's self in words, but also the ability to conduct research from a continuously widening range of sources in order to select and decide which among the relevant morsels of data are actually the most relevant. The writer must be able to properly provide his/her own observations, discussions, and conclusions. Nonetheless, academic writing does not simply constitute the expression of a person's own opinions alone, but more importantly, it likewise calls for the expression of facts already established by others juxtaposed with one's logical opinions and conclusions based on the research. Sometimes, a course may require more than writing one's observations in contrast to ideas from other writers. Subjects such as Philosophy, Literature, Humanities, History, and Politics often require students to develop a claim through a thesis statement based on an idea which is not readily apparent but would need critical analyses and even the use of assumptions that do not have wide acceptance.

Why does writing an academic paper fill many students with dread? Our observation following our exposure to the most common (and even the most uncommon) problems in the course of our work where we review thousands of papers is quite simple. The fear stems from not knowing much about the technical aspects of writing a paper. There are no clear-cut rules or, in a manner of speaking, no black and white method to guide scholars on how to compose an effective academic paper.

There are multitudes of references on formatting bibliographic entries, using search engines, creating outlines, and using word processors, among other things. However, in most likelihood, one cannot find a correct, concise, and simple description of the modern method of research, which includes building a paper from scratch and into its varied stages of composition, and scaling efforts to the needs of the assignment. We have searched and have not found any material focused on this subject, presenting us with the realization that such literature is greatly needed by aspiring (and even seasoned) academicians. With this document we have written, we aim to address this deficiency. We present to you a supplemental tool to writing academic papers, arranged in easy and numbered steps, beginning with Step 1 and continuing through to Step 12.

## STEP 1. Begin early.

If you are currently busy and thinking there will be more time later, you might do better to think again. The future may only seem in order because it is yet to arrive. When it does, it will be as chaotic as the current situation is. So how do you end up being late? It all happens a day at a time. It is impossible to know when you will have a clear chunk of time later, so proceed to the next step as soon as a paper is assigned. Not doing so immediately lands authors, and yourself, on the road to being late—and it all happens a little as each day passes.

## STEP 2. Create a budget of pages.

Let us assume that the assignment is a descriptive essay or, alternatively, a common “compare/contrast” paper. For matters of example, let us take the latter:

Compare and contrast the roles played by Freedom Park and Liberation Field in immigrants’ lives in America in the 1800s. (***Please note that Freedom Park and Liberation Field are fictitious places and are only used as examples in our white paper.***)

Let us say that the paper is intended to be around 2500 words (about six pages) in length when it has a margin of 1” all around and single-spaced. Let us further suppose that the paper will not have a cover page. We also have to remember that the bibliography is never included in the page count.

The page budget for the paper also serves as the outline of your paper. You would have to decide what the elements of the paper would be, and the allocation of the necessary number of words/pages for each element. In the sample assignment, the logical page budget is established as follows:

- 1/2 page      **Opening statement.** What is the paper all about? What are the subjects that will be presented? What are the paper’s objectives?
- One page      **Facts about Freedom Park.** Where is it located? When was it built? Who uses it? Are there noteworthy events that it has hosted?
- One page      **Facts about Liberation Field.** Where is it located? When was it built? Who uses it? Are there noteworthy events that it has hosted?
- One page      **Immigration to New York, in general.** What immigrant groups arrived during the time period specified? Are there interesting and relevant facts that may be cited for each group?
- Two pages      **The meat of the paper; addressing the topic.** What are the similarities and/or differences between the immigrant groups

concerned, their respective involvement in their field/park, and the reason for their involvement?

1/2 page **Summary and conclusion.** How was the topic explored? What was determined / proven?

Page outlines provide authors with an overview of the appropriate coverage of each element of the paper. Without this outline, it is very easy to write excessively about issues you are already greatly familiar with, and much easier to write too little of issues you are not very familiar with. Moreover, you may not be able to address all issues involved. With a page outline, you can focus on addressing all issues within the corresponding amount of space coverage. More often than not, we find that with page outlines, we tend to edit down (lessen page coverage) than drag word count up with redundancies and/or generalizations. This is always a far much better position to have as an author.

Some professors specify page limits, while others do not. Thus, it is of extreme importance that you be able to plan your paper properly with the aid of a page outline. Writing is not about simply setting down on ink what comes to your mind, and then extending the words/phrases to meet page length limits. More than anything, it involves careful development of the proposed research statement or position on any given issue.

### **STEP 3. Gather resource materials.**

Begin the paper with the assigned text if such is supplied. Academic textbooks usually contain bibliographies and/or footnote citations in reference to other books/articles. Hard copy publications remain excellent sources as the first set of resource materials to look for. When there is no assigned textbook relating to the assignment, you can begin with a search in an online library and with a subject search. The bibliographies and citations in this first batch of sources, if researched correctly, guarantee that much of the task will already be accomplished.

Next, build a list of the resources the first source of references point to. If the research task is small (less than 25 pages output, less than 15 sources), then a handwritten/typewritten breakdown is normally sufficient. However, if the research effort is greater (not too many undergraduate papers are, or will ever be), putting together the list in a spreadsheet and/or a Word document should be considered. Larger lists need search capabilities of the journal sources/references for better tracking of the subjects in each journal against subjects that cannot be found.

Once you obtain titles of books or journals that may be useful, it is then time to check if the local or university library has these materials. It would be helpful to be familiar not only with the book index but with the journal index of your library. Many universities have subscription to e-journals. Make it a point to know how to access



these journals as e-journals usually save time and energy. They may be downloaded and saved on your computer without the inconvenience of photocopying hard copies.

After locating the references/resources, prepare them for mark-up (always remember to do this only to photocopied/printed out copies and not to the original documents):

- For journals, always remember to photocopy journal covers and content tables because these pages usually contain the citation information for the articles that will be used.
- For Internet sources, print out the article/source and ensure that the URL (Web address of the source) is printed.
- Treat journal sources as you would your book sources.

Always remember that sources with their own bibliographies are the best references. As such, journals remain the most credible academic sources as opposed to ordinary publications like magazines. Unless your source is an acknowledged staple (or unless the paper's subject is historical) in your field of study, try to find the most recent references as they more often prove to be more credible than earlier literature; this is especially true in the areas of science/technology.

## **STEP 4. Make a first reading of gathered resource materials.**

A first reading is a quick browse through your references. You would need a general concept of the subject matter at hand to help form your own ideas regarding the topic. Mark the references that appear important and/or related to the concepts and/or facts of the task. Do not hope to gain in-depth knowledge at this time, but try to form a specific judgment regarding the references.

First readings should be conducted even while the resources are still being gathered. This saves much time. Always have some journals available for a quick read at any given time; this may be between classes, while in a bus, on a train ride, during lunch, and practically anywhere else. Always remember where you left off reading so no time is wasted when the material is picked up again.

At this stage of research writing, you will find seemingly essential materials/information that may prove worthless in the end. Cull liberally. It is best to differentiate the mash from the real grain at this point. Once the first read is done, ensure that the selected references are properly marked within one's source sheet.

## **STEP 5. Draft a research statement.**

After the first read, one should be ready to draft a thesis statement, which will be the core of the research paper. It is a simple statement with specific points that will form



the coverage of the paper. Ideally, it is a sentence embedded in a paragraph and is composed of three to four sentences. Using our sample, the suggested research statement reads as follows:

*The Irish were among the first big immigrant groups to land in New York. Through the years, these groups also came: the Swedes, the Germans, the Italians, the eastern Europeans, the Chinese, the Greeks, the Koreans, and more. The first generation of settlers often brought with them games that they played in their places of origin, but their second generations chose to adopt “American” sports, particularly baseball. Immigrant groups with access to venues such as Freedom Park and Liberation Field are most likely to develop skills needed to become sports professionals.*

## **STEP 6. Read the selected references a second time around.**

After having formed the research statement, one should read each of the selected sources a second time and in a more in-depth fashion, specifically searching for quotable passages that can support the research statement. Ensure that each potential quotable passage is marked for convenient reference, and that each of the reference sources is properly marked once the second reading is done for them.

## **STEP 7. Create the “backbone” of the document with a word processor.**

First, set up the margins to 1” on all sides (or to what is specified by the professor/publisher). Next, create a header including page numbers, and footers with file name and path. Form a first page with name and title lines, and insert a page break to create a second page. Finally, label the second page as the “Bibliography.” Note that there are no entries to be typed into the Bibliography at this stage, but citations will be added as quotes/references are typed in while the paper is written. Therefore, the paper now has pages: a start page with paper title, plus a blank Bibliography page.

Our Web site, [www.kgsupport.com](http://www.kgsupport.com) provides an excellent how-to for the Chicago style of writing and citing. The Chicago style is arguably the most popular style of writing and citing. In our Web site, we also have the MLA style sheet.

Two points to keep in mind:

The bibliography documents whole books/articles.

Notes (these may be footnotes at the bottom of each page, or endnotes at the end of the research) link quoted phrases/sentences/concepts in the paper to a specific page in the bibliography.



Footnotes may be made in an MS Word document from the menu bar: Insert > Reference > Footnote

## **STEP 8. Type in the marked quotations, ensuring each has a comment regarding its relation to the research statement.**

At this point in the paper, only typing is required. Transfer/type in all quotes that have been marked in the sources into the Bibliography page. Ensure that each entry is indented half an inch from the margin, and the entries are listed in alphabetical order. As each entry is typed in, form the citation footnote for the entry. These footnotes should be page specific to the reference being cited. Using this method, a credible citation list is created with minimized ambiguity, addressing imprecise citations that may be suspect.

As this step is largely mechanical, it may be started, paused, and re-initiated. With this stage, two significant aspects of the paper are remembered: the bulk of the paper is built with academically sound content and it completes the bibliography as well.

Once this step is completed, roughly 80% of the paper is also completed, given that proper care and attention have been placed in selecting the passages that are typed in.

## **STEP 9. Develop the thoughts of the content, ensuring each is supported by quotes.**

Insert several blanks at the beginning of the paper before the first quote that will be used, and begin the draft of the paper's content. Note that this starting point will ultimately fall into the middle part of the paper, but writing begins here because it is the most significant content of the paper.

Next, introduce another point, and then cut and paste quotations from the list completed in Step 8. Explore (by adding supporting sentences), support (by citing/quoting the author/s of the reference), or simply elaborate on the idea. Following this, cite two or more powerful quotations from the completed list in Step 8, citing different sources, and finally restating and summing up the idea with one's original thoughts on the matter.

This pattern of writing should be followed until all the concepts of the core statement are addressed.

A nearly finished paper will emerge from this step.





## **STEP 10. Write the Introduction and Conclusion of the research paper.**

In the example used, the Introduction would discuss details about Freedom Park and Liberation Field. This section does not form the heart of the paper, but ensure that quotes are still used to anchor the content to facts from the resources.

Make the conclusion concise and succinct. Re-state the major concepts explored by the paper, highlighting what has been “proven” using quotes and facts derived from the paper’s main body (constructed in Step 8). Avoid redundancy in terms of word use and sentence structure, a common mistake committed by less experienced authors worried about word count. Trust that a careful execution of Step 8 guarantees that word count limits are met for the paper.

## **STEP 11. Write the Abstract of the research paper.**

It may seem strange that writing the Abstract of the paper is reserved toward the final stages of drafting a paper, but this is the best time to introduce what is going to be discussed in the paper – after the actual paper has already been actually written.

At this step, there is clarity in purpose to present what has already been presented (once due consideration has been given to the content that has been drafted).

## **STEP 12. Have the paper go through a final English review by a professional editor.**

This step presents the final opportunity to find any spelling, grammar, or comprehension lapses in the paper that has just been drafted. At KGSsupport, we have reviewed thousands of papers that have consequently seen publication in numerous journals worldwide following our professional review.

This booklet has been provided to you free of charge by  
**Knowledge Growth Support**  
[www.kgsupport.com](http://www.kgsupport.com)

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