

writing research papers

preparatory stage:

1. Choose your topic
2. Do some preparatory reading and note taking
3. Narrow the subject down
4. Develop a preliminary thesis sentence
5. Develop a preliminary outline
6. Compile a working bibliography
7. Do extensive reading and note taking

First, don't go to the library to search through the databases. Take the time to be alone with the topic. This will help you create your own view, so that when you do begin your search to see what experts say, you won't be overly influenced by them. Stimulate yourself by getting in touch with what you think about the topic, connecting what you have stored in your memory with new ideas. Ask yourself questions of purpose and how you are going to achieve it. Brainstorm by jotting down ideas as they come. Engage with your classmates and friends in discussions about your ideas. Ask whether what you're saying and the direction in which you're going makes sense; get them to question you.

writing stage:

1. Rework the outline and thesis if necessary
2. Write the first draft

Writing the first draft can be a liberating experience. Trust that the preparatory work you've done will come to you as you proceed. Consider writing the paper as you would an essay; don't worry about when and where to bring in this point or that data, how to integrate this literature or that author. These issues can be addressed later. Now is the time to let yourself be as creative as possible; your critical, judging side is shut off because you're engaging with and presenting your ideas.

revision stage:

There is a positive relationship between revision and quality of writing. When you finish a draft, put it aside and return to it another day. If this is not possible, take a break, take a walk, then read it—in printout form. Remember, editing on the computer is quite different than editing on paper. We tend to be merged, at one, with what we see on the monitor, and the closeness doesn't foster objectivity and discrimination, which are needed at this point and which paper allows. Also, reading a paper copy will let you better address questions of structure and organization. Other questions may be asked as well:

- 1) Do you need to clarify a point?
- 2) Do you need to include more information?
- 3) Do you have sufficient material to support your thesis?