

Guidelines for Writing a Research Paper in Literature (August 2026) (valid as of Autumn Semester 2026)

University of Fribourg
English, American, and Medieval Literature Section
(approved by Profs. Boyden, Dutton, Schindler, and Straub)

NB for Medieval/Philology essays, see also supplementary document 'Writing an Essay about Old and Middle English Literature'

A research paper is a piece of textual analysis that adds your critical voice to an ongoing conversation. It combines your own ideas with those you have gained from reading the work of previous scholars. Writing a paper develops your critical and discursive skills.

1. Management of Ideas

- Formulate a **thesis statement** that sums up your principal idea and appears near the beginning of your paper.
- Organize your ideas and develop an **outline**. To guide your readers through your paper, your argument should be developed in logical steps. An argument must contain an **introduction**, a **body**, and a **conclusion**. Structure your paper, if necessary, by creating chapters (introduction, main analysis, conclusion) as well as subchapters.
 - Your **introduction** should introduce your topic and research question(s), define key terms and concepts, describe your methodology, and present your thesis statement to your readers. It should also, where relevant (e.g. medieval papers), provide basic context such as the date a text was written.
 - Your **body/main analysis** section provides your close reading and analysis of your primary text, here you provide the evidence that supports your thesis statement. This should be the bulk of your paper, as this is where you do your “own” work and literary analysis.
 - The **conclusion** summarizes your overall findings while also explaining why your findings matter (“so what?”)
- As you write your paper in several drafts, you will find that the arrangement of your ideas, the focus of your thesis, and the emphasis of your conclusion may change as a result of what you discover. Be flexible.
- Always support your argument with **evidence** (e.g. quotations, references). In literary studies, your evidence consists of your own close reading of the primary text(s), as well

as references to scholars and critics that are credible in their field of study. Showcase that your argument is grounded in academic research by citing secondary sources from trusted scholarly publications (i.e. peer-reviewed publications and NOT Wikipedia, SparkNotes, ChatGPT, etc. BA/MA theses and graduate articles published online are also not suitable sources). When quoting from the text, **comment on the quotations** and do not pile up quotations. Avoid the mistake of thinking the text speaks for itself.

- **Use secondary material to support** your argument. Do not allow it to overshadow your own ideas. If you make general statements that cannot be supported by your primary text, use a secondary source to support it; e.g. if you write that women had different legal status in the 14th century than now, cite work by a medieval historian that establishes this as fact.
- Do not summarize or retell the plot if your audience should be expected to know it (avoid plot-summary syndrome). **A research paper thrives on analysis, not summary.**

2. General Style and Formal Considerations

- Create a **title page** that includes the following information: your name and university e-mail address, matriculation number, instructor's name, course type and title, title of your paper, and date of submission.
- Write in an engaging, objective prose style. Avoid the passive wherever possible. Also avoid colloquial language and do not use contracted speech forms (instead of *don't*, *can't*, *haven't*, *she'll* write *do not*, *cannot*, *have not*, *she will*)
- Keep your sentences short. Use the **present tense** for critical discourse.
- **Format:** double-space throughout (2.0-line spacing), with a 2.5 cm margin all around, in 12-point Times New Roman font or similar. Justify the right margin (full alignment).
- Include page numbers and a table of contents (if your paper is structured in chapters).
- Do not use space between paragraphs. Instead, indent the first line of each paragraph by 1.25 cm.
- **Notes:** use **endnotes** OR **footnotes** (double-spaced) for material that is not directly relevant to your thesis and that does not belong in the works cited list. Put endnotes/footnotes after the punctuation mark of the sentence they refer to. When in doubt, ask your instructor what they prefer.
- Titles of independent publications (monographs, novels, dramatic texts, collections, etc.) are always put in **italics**, e.g. Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads*.

- Titles of texts published within larger works (poems, short stories, articles, book chapters, etc.) are put in **double quotation marks**, e.g. Dickens' "The Signal-Man."
When you refer to a critic/author in the flow-text for the first time, always give their full name (first and last name). Afterwards, you can just use their last name. Similarly, when referencing your primary text or an important secondary text for the first time, indicate when the text was published. Unless there is a very good reason to refer to the editor, e.g. where you are discussing more than one edition of a text in an essay, please use the AUTHOR, not the editor, as the reference in the flow-text.

3. Quotations

- Quotations of **less** than four lines (in the original): incorporate into your text using quotation marks. Insert partial quotations smoothly into your own syntax.
- For quotations of four lines or **more** (three lines in case of poetry), create a block quotation: indent 2.5 cm (or hit the "Tab" key twice) from the left-hand margin, do not add quotation marks, use the same 12pt font size, and leave one empty line each before and after the quotation.
- For quotations-within-a-quotation, e.g. when citing dialogue, use single quotation marks within double quotation marks.
- To cite several lines of verse (not as a block quotation), indicate line breaks with a slash, e.g. "Holy Writ, / And seem a saint" (Shakespeare, *Richard III* 1.3.336-337)
- Alterations to direct quotations:
 - Altered words: put changes within square brackets, e.g. Watson claims "[t]hat such issues occur" (44).
 - Errors in the original text: indicate by adding [sic], e.g. Watson claims that "such issues occur [sic]" (44).
 - Original emphasis (italics): add "emphasis in the original" after a semicolon, e.g. "Such *issues* occur" (Watson 44; emphasis in the original).
 - Your own, added emphasis: add "emphasis added" after a semicolon, e.g. "*such* issues occur" (Watson 44; emphasis added).
- Paraphrases: When using an author's ideas but not the same wording, you still have to reference your source.

Direct Quotation: "Wines drunk at Greek tables did not always come from Greece itself. The wine snobbery of the time extolled the merits of wines from

the slopes of Mount Lebanon, from Palestine, Egypt and Magna Graecia-Greater Greece, i.e., southern Italy” (Toussaint-Samat 263).

Paraphrase: Upstanding Greeks, although picky about their wine, enjoyed wine from many of Greece’s trading partners outside of their own country, including Palestine, Egypt, and southern Italy (Toussaint-Samat 263).

- The source of any material, whether cited directly, paraphrased, or extensively summarized, must be acknowledged by in-text references. Examples for the most common cases are listed below. If you do not properly reference your sources, you are committing **plagiarism**, which is a **serious offence**. Whenever you use someone else’s arguments, ideas, material, you have to give them credit via in-text citations and a works cited list.

4. **MLA Style for In-Text References**

The English and American literature section uses the international norms set out in the MLA Handbook (at our library or [online](#), always use the most recent edition, currently the **9th edition, published in 2021**).

- Use in-text references after a quote or a paraphrase, including author and page number in parentheses, e.g. “xyz” (Suleiri 295).
- If the author's name is clearly identified in the same sentence, the name can be omitted in the in-text reference, e.g. Suleiri states that “xyz” (295).
- In-text references follow directly after the quotation and before the next punctuation, e.g.: “Such issues occur” (Watson 44).
 - As an **exception** to the rule, in block quotations, in-text references follow the punctuation mark at the end, e.g.: [...] occur. (Watson 44)
- Give the full bibliographic information about all of your quoted and paraphrased sources in your **WORKS CITED** section.

4.1. Common In-Text References

- For one or two authors: Surname and Surname page number, e.g. (Watson and Holmes 43).
- Three or more authors: Surname et al. page number, e.g. (Watson et al. 43).

- More than one work by the same author: Add a short version of the title to the reference (italics for monographs, in quotation marks for articles) preceded by a comma, e.g. (Watson, "Life" 43) or (Watson, *House* 43).
- **Plays:** if available, indicate act, scene, and line numbers (act.scene.lines) instead of page numbers, e.g. "With odd old ends, stol'n forth of Holy Writ, / And seem a saint when most I play the devil" (Shakespeare, *Richard III* 3.336-337). If no line numbers are available, you may just indicate act and scene; if act and scene numbers are also not available, you may use page numbers.
- **Poetry:** indicate line numbers (in addition to page numbers if taken from a collection or similar), e.g. (Watson lines 3-5). Use "line" for a singular line and "lines" for multiple.
- **Online sources:** the in-text reference is based on what appears first in the works cited entry for the source, e.g. author name, article name, website name, etc. There is no need to give page or paragraph numbers if none are available.
- If in one sentence, you reference more than one source, use semicolons in your in-text citation to separate the sources (Miller 40; Jones et al. 14).

5. MLA Style for Works Cited

- Create a works cited list at the end of your paper, referencing all primary and secondary sources from which you are quoting or paraphrasing.
- Arrange your sources alphabetically by author and observe the different formats for referencing books, articles, etc. (see below).
- For several works by the same author, list them in alphabetical order of the first word of the title.
- If an author appears as the single author of a work and as the first author of a work by several authors/editors, the single-author entry should come first.
- All lines after the first line of each entry are indented ("hanging indentation") by 1.25 cm.
- Do not forget to capitalize each word in titles, with the exception of prepositions, conjunctions, and articles (unless one is the first word of the title or subtitle such as in *The Great Gatsby*)

5.1.Common Works Cited Entries

- Monographs

- Single author: Surname, First Name. *Title: Subtitle*. Publisher, Year.
Stewart, Susan. *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*. Duke University Press, 2007.
- Two authors: Surname, First Name, and First Name Surname. *Title: Subtitle*. Publisher, Year.
Gilbert, Sandra, and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. Yale University Press, 2020.
- Three or more authors: Surname, First Name, et al. *Title: Subtitle*. Publisher, Year.
Bartke, Anke, et al. *Postcolonial Literatures in English: An Introduction*. Springer Nature, 2019.
- Two or more books by the same author: Provide author's name in the normal format for the first entry only. For subsequent entries replace the name by three hyphens and a period ---.
Palmer, William J. *Dickens and New Historicism*. St. Martin's, 1997.
---. *The Films of the Eighties: A Social History*. Southern Illinois University Press, 1993.
- Book with no author: *Title: Subtitle*. Publisher, Year.
Encyclopedia of Indiana. Somerset, 1993.

- Edited Collections

- Single editor: Surname, First Name, editor. *Title: Subtitle*. Publisher, Year.
Saluman, Jack, editor. *American Studies: An Annotated Bibliography*. Cambridge University Press, 1986.
- Two editors: Surname, First Name, and Name Surname, editors. *Title: Subtitle*. Publisher, Year.
Toth, Josh, and Neil Brooks, editors. *The Mourning After: Attending the Wake of Postmodernism*. Rodopi, 2007.
- Three or more editors: Surname, First Name, et al., editors. *Title: Subtitle*. Publisher, Year.
Hubble, Nick, et al., editors. *London in Contemporary British Fiction: The City Beyond the City*. Bloomsbury, 2018.

- Translated Work

- If you focus on the content of the work: Surname, Name. *Title: Subtitle*. Translated by Name Surname, Publisher, Year.

Foucault Michel. *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*. Translated by Richard Howard, Vintage-Random House, 1988.

- If you want to focus on the translation e.g. to compare different translations: Surname, Name, translator. *Title: Subtitle*. By Name Surname, Publisher, Year

Howard, Richard, translator. *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*. By Michel Foucault, Vintage-Random House, 1988.

- Book Chapter, Short Story or Poem in an Anthology/Collection, etc.

- Surname, First Name. "Title of Chapter: Subtitle." *Title of Book: Subtitle*, edited by Editors' Name(s), Publisher, Year, Page Range.

Harris, Muriel. "Talk to Me: Engaging Reluctant Writers." *A Tutor's Guide: Helping Writers One to One*, edited by Ben Rafoth, Heinemann, 2000, pp. 24-34.

White, Jessica. "Edges and Extremes in Ecobiography: Amy Liptrot's The Outrun." *Life Writing in the Posthuman Anthropocene*, edited by Ina Batzke, et al., Palgrave Macmillan, 2021, pp. 97-121.

Burns, Robert. "Red, Red Rose." *100 Best-Loved Poems*, edited by Philip Smith, Dover, 1995, p. 26.

- Journal Article

- Surname, First Name. "Title of Article: Subtitle." *Journal Title*, vol. Volume, no. Issue, Year, Page Range.

Eskin, Michael. "Literature and Ethics." *Poetics Today*, vol. 25, no. 4, 2004, pp. 557-752.

- Article in a special issue: Surname, First Name. "Title of Article: Subtitle." *Title of Special Issue*, special issue of *Journal Title*, vol. Volume, no. Issue, Year, Page Range.

Burgess, Anthony. "Politics in the Novels of Graham Greene." *Literature and Society*, special issue of *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 2, no. 2, 1967, pp. 93-99.

- Online Sources

- **Website:** Author or Compiler name (if available). *Title of Site*. Version number (if available), Name of Institution/Organization affiliated, Date of Creation (if available), DOI/URL/Permalink. Date of access (optional, should only be included for sources without a publication date and/or that are likely to change, e.g. a wiki entry).

The Purdue OWL Family of Sites. The Writing Lab and OWL at Purdue and Purdue University, 2008, owl.english.purdue.edu/owl.

Felluga, Dino. *Guide to Literary and Critical Theory*. Purdue University, 28 Nov. 2003, www.cla.purdue.edu/academic/english/theory. 31.07.2026.

- **Article in web magazine:** Surname, Name of Author. "Article Name." *Title of Web Magazine*, Publisher, Publication Date, URL.
Bernstein, Mark. "10 Tips on Writing the Living Web." *A List Apart: For People Who Make Websites*, 16 Aug. 2002, alistapart.com/article/writeliving/.
- **Entry in online resource** (e.g. an online dictionary): Surname, Name of Author (if available). "Title of Entry." *Title of Source*, Date of Publication, URL.
"Leech." Oxford English Dictionary, last edited March 2025, www.oed.com/dictionary/leech_n5?tl=true&tab=factsheet.
- **YouTube Video:** Surname, Name (if available). "Title of Video." *YouTube*, uploaded by Screen Name, Date of Publication, URL.
McGonigal, Jane. "Gaming and Productivity." *YouTube*, uploaded by Big Think, 3 July 2012, www.youtube.com/watch?v=mkdzy9bWW3e.

- For other entries **OWL Purdue** provides an excellent resource to consult the proper citation style for MLA. [MLA Formatting and Style Guide - Purdue OWL® - Purdue University](http://www.purdue.edu/owl)

The departmental council has determined parameters for the length of seminar papers. BA seminar papers: approximately 3000 words; MA seminar papers: approximately 4000 words.

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