

Guidelines for Writing a Research Paper in Literature (May 2017)

Valid as of September 1, 2017

**University of Fribourg
English, American, and Medieval Literature Section
(approved by Austenfeld, Daphinoff, Dutton, and Ghose)**

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**. Your argument should be developed in logical steps. An argument must contain **an introduction**, a **body**, and a **conclusion**.
- 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 arguments with **evidence** (e.g. quotations, references).
- 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** only in **support** of your arguments. Do not allow it to overshadow your own ideas.

2. Style and formal considerations

- Write in an engaging, objective prose style. Avoid the passive wherever possible. Keep your sentences short. Use the present tense for critical discourse.
- Do not summarize or retell the plot if your audience should be expected to know it. **A research paper thrives on analysis, not summary.**
- **Format:** double-space throughout, with a 2.5 cm margin all around, in 12-point Times New Roman font or similar. Do **not** justify the right margin.
- Place your name, date of submission, intended reader, and title of course on a title page.
- Quotations:
 - of less than 4 lines: incorporate into your text using quotation marks.
 - of more than 4 lines: indent 10 spaces from the left-hand margin without quotation marks.
 - within quotations: use single quotation marks within double quotation marks.
- When you paraphrase instead of quoting, you must give the source and page numbers, too.
- Insert partial quotations smoothly into your own syntax. If you wish to skip part of a lengthy quotation, indicate this by three spaced dots . . .

Notes: use endnotes (double-spaced) for material that is not directly relevant to your thesis and that does not belong in the bibliographical record.

3. MLA Style for documentation

The English and American literature section uses the international norms set out in the *MLA Handbook* (at our library, always use the most recent edition, currently the **8th edition, published in 2016**).

- Use in-text references after a quote or a paraphrase: (Suleiri 295). If the author's name is clearly identified in sentence, the name can be omitted in the in-text reference.
- Give full bibliographic information about all of your quoted and paraphrased sources in your **WORKS CITED**. Arrange your sources alphabetically by author and observe the different formats for referencing books, articles, etc., using this format:

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 12, no. 1, 1985, pp. 69-88. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/1343469.



Important changes from the 7th version of MLA: In the example above, note the period after the author's name, the period at the end of the essay's title, and the period at the end of the reference. A period also concludes the description of the first "container" – the journal of publication – and separates it from the second "container" – the database which houses the journal. By contrast, note the commas separating all other parts. The reference is set in the "hanging indent" format.

Suleiri, Sara. *The Rhetoric of English India*. U of Chicago P, 1992.



Important changes from the 7th version of MLA: The place of publication is no longer mentioned, neither is the notation "print" or "web." University Press publishers may be abbreviated as shown above. Other publishers' names must be written out in full.

- For sources other than journal articles or single-author books as well as general further information, please consult:
 - "What's New in the Eighth Edition" at the MLA website: <https://www.mla.org/MLA-Style/What-s-New-in-the-Eighth-Edition> . This site explains the fundamental changes in documentation and the use of terms like "container" for the source of a text.
 - The carefully prepared Online Writing Lab at Purdue University: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/22/> . On this page, you will also find helpful comparisons of 8th edition and 7th edition citations.

4. Criteria for assessing papers

- Grammatical accuracy and linguistic appropriateness
- **Analysis:** close reading of the primary text, engagement with/discussion of/relation to existing scholarship (secondary sources)
- **Argument:** logical structure, coherence, persuasiveness, lucidity of argument, independence of thought
- **Presentation:** adherence to academic norms, e.g. documentation, substantiating assertions, acknowledging sources

5. Caveats

- The cardinal sin of a researcher is **plagiarism!** Always acknowledge your sources.
- Proofread your paper carefully and repeatedly.

* 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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