



Writing a Research Paper in 15 Easy Steps

- ___1. Choose a topic and learn about it
- ___2. Write a research question
- ___3. Write an informal outline to guide your note taking
- ___4. List sources
- ___5. Take notes
- ___6. Write a thesis statement
- ___7. Organize notes and write a formal outline with topic sentences
- ___8. Write the introductory paragraph
- ___9. Write the body paragraphs
- ___10. Write a concluding paragraph
- ___11. Add a title
- ___12. Complete a works cited page
- ___13. Type the rough draft
- ___14. Review, revise and edit your paper
- ___15. Submit the final paper with all notes and drafts



1. Choose a topic and learn about it

- Make sure that you choose a topic which can be argued. For example: Stanley "Tookie" Williams death sentence, global warming, videogames and their effects, cell phones in classrooms, pit bulls as pets.
- Before you put your pencil to the paper, familiarize yourself with the topic.



View a website...



Read a book...

Ask someone...



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2. Write a research question

Once you've selected a topic and learned something about it, write a *research question*. This is a broad question on which your research will be based. At a later time, you will turn the *research question* into a statement.

Here are some examples:

Who was Stanley "Tookie" Williams and did he deserve the death penalty?

Should pit bulls be banned as pets?

Who was Princess Diana and how is she remembered?

You Try It:

(Biography)

Who is/was _____,

and what/how did he/she

contribute to/influence

?

(Controversial Issue)

Why should the government/school _____

(other)

place/not place restrictions on _____?

(any topic)

(Design your own question)

_____?

3. Write an informal outline to guide your note taking

An informal outline is a list of the important points you want to take notes on from your sources.

You may use statements or questions as in the examples below.

Topic: Princess Diana

Research Question:

Who was Princess Diana and how is she remembered?

Smaller points to help us to answer this question:

- Basic information about her life (who, what, when, where, why?)
- What have people said about her?
- How did she help others?
- How have her ideas and accomplishments influenced Britain and the world?
- How did royalty affect her life?
- Her tragic death

Topic: Pit Bulls

Research Question:

Why should pit bulls be banned as pets?

Smaller points to help us to answer this question:

- What is the breed of dog called a pit bull? (Basic background information)
- Why are pit bulls considered dangerous?
- What dangers do they pose to humans?
- What dangers do they pose to other animals?
- Does obedience training make a difference?

4. Record the sources of information

Locate at least three sources of information. They should not all be Internet sources. Here are some examples:

- reference book
- non-fiction book
- Internet source
- online database article
- periodical (magazine in print)
- audiovisual
- interview

Record the information for each source on a 3x5" card like the ones listed below.

Book

Krohn, Katherine E. *Princess Diana: Her Life and Times*. Minneapolis: Lerner Publications, 1999. Print.

Website with author

Huffman, Heinrich. "Princess Diana: 1961-1997." *Memorial Sites*. 15 Sept. 1998. Web. 3 July 2006.

Online database

Gutierrez, Jose. "Princess Diana." *People Magazine*. 5 September 2007: 38-39. *Ebsco Advanced Placement Source*, Web. 20 Aug. 2007.

Website without an author

"Diana: Case Closed, But Probably Not." *Princess Diana Fan Club*. 16 Dec. 2006. Web. 10 Aug. 2007.

5. Take notes

- Copy informal outline points as headings onto the top of binder paper. Use one sheet of binder paper per heading.

Who was Princess Diana?

- Diana Frances Spencer (Krohn 17)
- Born in Norfolk, England July 1961 (Huffman)
- Died in Paris August 1997 (Gutierrez 38)
- Married to Charles, Prince of Wales (Gutierrez 39)

Continue writing facts to answer the question.

- Take notes by paraphrasing, summarizing or quoting.
- Add parenthetical (internal) documentation after each fact.

See Appendix A at end of booklet for more details.

***Plagiarism** means stealing words or ideas from someone else. You must cite the source where you found each fact or you are plagiarizing.

6. Write a thesis statement

After you finish taking notes, turn your research question into a thesis statement.

The thesis statement:

is the main point of your research paper

includes a subject and an opinion

is broad enough to be supported by 4-5 informal outline points

Subject

pit bulls

global warming

video games

Opinion

should be banned as pets

is a not major threat

are an innocent pastime

The evolution of a thesis statement...

Who is Princess Diana and how is she remembered?



Although Princess Diana died young, she accomplished a lot in her 30+ years.



Although she was a commoner and died before the age of 40, Princess Diana contributed greatly to the 20th century, living up to her title "The People's Princess."

7. Organize notes and write a formal outline with topic sentences

- Place your notes in logical order
- Combine any notes that prove the same point
- Write a topic sentence for each group of notes. A topic sentence is like a mini-thesis for a body paragraph. It is a statement rather than a question and it contains an opinion. It helps to prove the thesis.

Sample Formal Outline

Princess Diana

- I. Introduction
- II. Princess Diana was a commoner at heart.
- III. Diana accomplished much in her short life.
- IV.
- V. Conclusion

Body
Paragraph

Body
Paragraph

Body
Paragraph

Pit Bulls

- I. Introduction
- II. The clamping jaw structure of the pit bull make it a fearsome and dangerous killing machine.
- III. Obedience training, while useful, can never complete with a dog's basic nature
- IV.
- V. Conclusion

8. Write the introductory paragraph

Introduction

1. Hook
2. Mini-background
3. Thesis

Introduction

Hook

In his eulogy at her death, Edmond Spencer remembers that “Diana, named after the goddess of hunting, was ironically one of the most hunted people in the 20th Century” (Zamudo 5).

Hook

Diana. She was a beloved figure to Britons, from her shy sideways glance to the sea of bouquets marking her grave in 1997. *Born in Norfolk, England in 1961, she later became the wife of Charles, the Prince of Wales, and the mother of Prince William and Harry, second and third in line for the royal monarchy of Great Britain (Huffman). She later divorced Prince Charles and was killed in a fatal auto accident.* **Although she was a commoner and died before the age of 40, Princess Diana contributed greatly to the 20th Century, living up to her title “the people’s princess” (Krohn 3).**

Mini-
background

Thesis

9. Write the body paragraphs

Body Paragraph

1. Topic sentence
2. Facts (from notes), plus internal documentation
3. Commentary (when appropriate)
4. Concluding sentence which reflects back on topic sentence

Stanley “Tookie” Williams had a hard time growing up. He was born December 29, 1953, in South Central Los Angeles. He had no father to be there for him to guide him through life as he was growing into a man. His mother had to assume this role. She also had to provide for the family and they didn’t have much money. In addition to these problems, Williams’ neighborhood was crime ridden and gang infested. In 1971 when Williams was eighteen, he met a man from East Los Angeles named Raymond Lee Washington. The two became friends and decided to join their neighborhoods together by starting a neighborhood watch program to keep their homes and possessions safe (Williams 27). The idea was to keep small gangs from committing crimes against the neighbors. Williams called his group the “Cribs,” though later the word was pronounced “Crips” (Williams 35). What happened, however, was that the Crips became more and more powerful, until they evolved into one of the major criminal gangs in the United States, of which Williams is credited as the founder. As the Crips became...

10. Write a concluding paragraph

Conclusion

1. Restate thesis – say again in new words
2. Expand ideas – your commentary
3. Concluding sentence – sounds finished, ends with “bigger picture”

Conclusion

Pit bulls have proven to be a dangerous pet. Today with so many breeds of dogs in shelters that need homes, the decision to have a pit bull is irresponsible. Pit bulls are anatomically built to crush prey in their strong jaws and not let go. Even with obedience training, one can never fully trust a pit bull. With over 90,000 documented pit bull attacks from 2004-2006 in the United States, it is clear that stronger regulation of pit bull ownership and mandatory spaying and neutering of dogs is necessary (McLean 82). While many would argue that pit bull ownership enhances an owner's macho image, and that pit bulls make good loyal pets, the fact remains that so would hundreds of other breeds of dog. Extinguishing the pit bull breed is a viable answer. Then again, cross-breeding pit bulls with poodles to create a “pit-poodle” is the best solution.

11. Add a title

Be creative! Here are some examples:

Diana: The People's Princess

Pitbulls: Unleashing the Danger

Dying to be Thin

Champions in Unexpected Places

Lance Armstrong Rides to Glory

The SUV is Man's Worst Enemy

12. Complete a Works Cited page

Make sure to alphabetize entries and double-space.

Don't forget to number the page.

Allow 1"
from top of
page to
start

Works Cited

Allow ½" from
top of page for
your last name
and the page
number.

Smith 10

"Diana: Case Closed, But Probably Not." *Princess Diana Fan Club*. 16 Dec.

2006. Web. 10 Aug. 2007.

Gutierrez, Jose. "Princess Diana." *People Magazine*. 5 September 2007: 38-39.

Ebsco Advanced Placement Source. Web. 20 Aug. 2007.

Huffman, Heinrich. "Princess Diana: 1961-1997." *Memorial Sites*. 15 Sept.

Web. 3 July 2006.

Krohn, Katherine E. *Princess Diana: Her Life and Times*. Minneapolis: Lerner

Publications, 1999. Print.

Rodriguez, Carmen. "The Sons of Princess Diana." *English Royalty*. 16 Feb.

Web. 7 Sept. 2007.

Zamudo, John L. *The Diana Chronicles*. Boyes Hot Springs, California: Jack

London Press, 2004. Print.

Be sure to allow a 1" margin on both sides of your paper. For the second line of each source, indent ½" or 5 spaces.

13. Type a rough draft

Follow MLA format.

Page number on the first page is optional.

Allow 1” from top of page	Allow 1/2” from top of page for your last name and page number. Numbering page 1 is .. .	Smith 1
Susie Smith		
Mr. Johnson		
English 120	center title, no underline	
12 April 2010		
Princess Diana: The People’s Princess		
In his eulogy at her death, Edmond Spencer remembers that “Diana, named after the goddess of hunting, was ironically one of the most hunted people in the 20 th Century” (Zamudo 5).		
Diana. She was a beloved figure to Britons, from her shy, sideways glance to the sea of bouquets marking her grave in 1997. Although she was a commoner and died before the age of 40, Princess Diana contributed greatly to the 20 th Century, living up to her title “The People’s Princess.”		
Princess Diana was a commoner at heart. After marrying Prince Charles and becoming a royal, she never forgot those less fortunate. She brought focus to AIDS and land mine removal as		
	Allow 1” margin on both sides of your paper and 1” margin at the bottom of your paper.	

14. Review, revise and edit your paper

Carefully read over the typed rough draft, checking to see if you have included all the required elements:

___ MLA heading (Your name, instructor's name, etc.)

___ title

___ hook

___ thesis

___ a topic sentence to begin each body paragraph

___ a concluding sentence to end each body paragraph

___ internal documentation throughout each body paragraph (after concrete details)

___ commentary when appropriate

___ concluding paragraph

___ memorable line at end

___ works cited page

Now, you are ready to proof-read and edit for grammar and mechanics.

Remember that writing is a process; you need to keep perfecting your paper until it represents your personal best work.

15. Submit the final paper with all notes and drafts

Remember to keep a photocopy of your final paper for your records.

Congratulations!

Appendix A

Here is an example of a source card, next to the note card for a book:

Source card:

Note card:

<p>Krohn, Katherine E. <i>Princess Diana: Her Life and Times</i>. Minneapolis: Lerner Publications, 1999. Print.</p>	<p>“Diana had provided the world with a fairy tale come true. Her wedding may have been the most expensive recorded in British history, but it also raised more than £750,000 for charity” (Krohn 154).</p> <p>Example of a direct quote</p>
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Source card:

Note card:

<p>Williams, Stanley. <i>Life in Prison</i>. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1998. Print.</p>	<p>Williams recounted that spending day after day in prison caused strange things to happen to his sanity. He lost touch with reality and began to go stir-crazy (31).</p> <p>Example of a paraphrase</p> <p>*notice that since Williams is mentioned in our sentence, we do not need to list his last name in the parenthetical reference (Williams 31).</p>
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Here is an example of a source card and a note card for an online database article:

Source card:

Note card:

<p>Gutierrez, Jose. “Princess Diana.” <i>People Magazine</i>. 5 September 2007: 38-39. <i>Ebsco Advanced Placement Source</i>, Web. 20 Aug. 2007.</p>	<p>Throughout her life, Diana’s parents, although divorced, never embroiled her in their own problems (Gutierrez 39).</p> <p>Example of a summary</p>
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