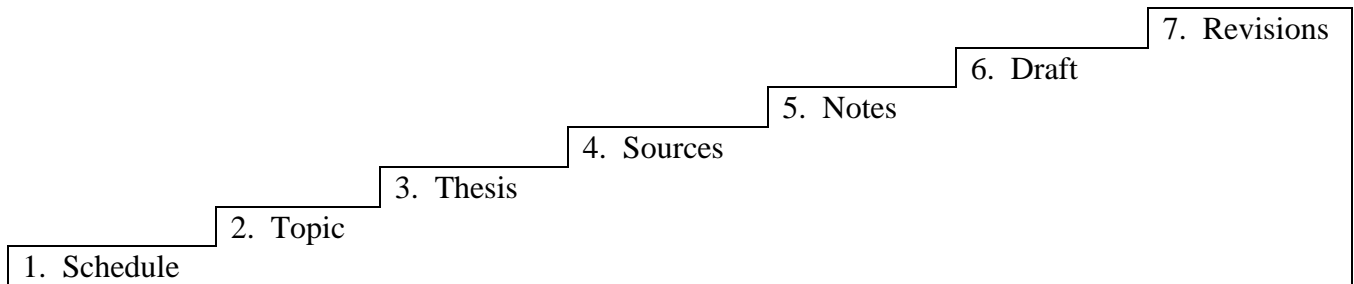


WRITING A RESEARCH PAPER: STEPS TO SUCCESS



Workshop sponsored by:

Tutorial and Enrichment Center

Presented by:

Carole Overton
Director
Dr. Mack Gipson, Jr., Tutorial and Enrichment Center
Gipson Building
Paine College
(706) 821-8345

THE RESEARCH PAPER

A research paper is like an essay, except it usually is longer and uses outside sources to support your arguments. A research paper has a clearly written thesis statement covering a topic that is open to debate. A research paper carefully develops each point. When you write a research paper, you must develop your position by reacting to information from other sources. You must explain why you agree or disagree with those sources. You must get involved with your topic. Remember: The main purpose of a research paper is to give your ideas and opinions about the topic and to use other sources to support your position.

STEP 1: SET UP A SCHEDULE

When your instructor assigns a research paper, it is very important that you *immediately* try to set up a schedule to determine when you will try to complete each step of the process of writing your paper. Try using a calendar or a time line to help you **plan ahead**. Be realistic when you make this schedule but remember that you do have a deadline: the date the paper is due.

Many students find it helpful to make a schedule on a calendar, marking down when each step of the process will be started (or completed) or showing the activity to be done every day. Other students may find it more helpful to create a time line showing when to start working on each step.

Whichever method you use, it is probably easiest to **start with the due date and work backwards**, figuring out when you would need to start each step in order to finish the paper on time.

Keep in mind that a number of factors will affect how long it will take you to complete each step of the process. For example, you may have more than one major assignment or research paper to work on at the same time. Also, certain steps may take you longer than others. (You may have to allow more time to locate sources, take notes, write or proofread your draft, type the paper, etc.) In addition, you may have other responsibilities that will prevent you from following an ideal schedule.

When you develop your own plan, make sure you take into account all of the factors which will affect you. It is better to plan for everything that may interfere rather than to omit something that may cause problems later. Be sure, too, to allow extra time for those steps which may cause you difficulties. (If you are a very slow typist, for example, you should leave more time for typing the paper once you have written it.) Do not forget that you can work on your paper during weekends and holidays: Plan ahead so you can work on your paper even if the library is closed. The more you can accomplish as time goes on, the less you will have to do at the last minute.

On the next page, you will see 2 examples of the types of schedules that students may develop to help them plan out when they will work on their research papers. Remember that you need to set up a schedule that suits your needs; don't just follow these samples.

SAMPLE SCHEDULE

	Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
SEPT.	19	20 PSYCH PAPER ASSIGNED	21 PRE - READING	22 ----- ---	23 -----	24 PICK TOPIC	25 -----
OCT.	26 -----	27 GET APPROVAL	28 THESIS AND OUTLINE	29 -----	30 -----	1 -----	2 -----
	3 -----	4 -----	5 MID-TERM EXAMS	6 MID-TERM EXAMS	7 MID-TERM EXAMS	8 MID-TERM EXAMS	9 FIND SOURCES/ TAKE NOTES
	10 -----	11 FALL BREAK	12 -----	13 -----	14 -----	15 -----	16 -----
	17 -----	18 -----	19 -----	20 -----	21 -----	22 -----	23 -----
	24 -----	25 WRITE 1ST DRAFT	26 -----	27 -----	28 -----	29 -----	30 -----
NOV.	31 REVISE/ PROOF- READ	1 -----	2 -----	3 -----	4 -----	5 TYPE	6 -----
	7 -----	8 FINAL REVIEW	9 -----	10 PAPER DUE	11 -----	12 -----	13 -----



SAMPLE TIME LINE: START DATES									
SEPT. 20	24	28	OCT. 9	25	31	NOV. 5	8	10	
Psych. paper assigned : pre-read	topic	thesis/ outline	sources/ notes	1 st draft	revise/ proofread	type	final review	paper due	

STEP 2: PINPOINT THE TOPIC

Unless your instructor gives you a topic to write about, you will have to choose your own subject. These guidelines may help you find a topic:

1. **Select a topic that is interesting to you.** It should be a question that you want to answer, a condition you want to investigate, an issue you want to explore – something that you will enjoy learning about. You will do a much better job if you are interested in what you are reading about.
2. **Make sure information is available on your subject.** Check the libraries to see if you will be able to find enough sources to write your paper. Make sure the sources you want are actually in the libraries; don't rely on the card catalog or periodical guide. Check the Internet to see if you can find reliable sources that will be accepted by your instructor.

At this point, you should also do some **preliminary reading**. This means that you will actually read a few journal articles, books, or chapters of books on your topic. You can get a better idea of the material and can use these readings to help you formulate a thesis statement. This “pre-reading” will also “jump-start” your thinking about your paper and motivate you to keep going.

3. **Pick a topic that is narrow enough that you will be able to develop it in the time available.** Keep in mind that you will have only a certain amount of time to write your paper. Make sure you select a topic that you can deal with in that time frame.
4. **Get your instructor's approval.** After you have decided on your topic, talk with your instructor to make sure it meets with his/her approval. Your instructor may also be able to help you with the next step (defining your thesis statement) or may be able to help you find some sources to use.

STEP 3: DEVELOP THESIS STATEMENT and OUTLINE

DEVELOP THESIS STATEMENT:

Your **thesis statement** (or thesis) is your opinion or assertion about your topic. It is the point you are trying to prove. Think of it as being one side of an argument. The more *specific* your thesis statement is, the easier it will be to do the research and write your paper. If you are having trouble developing a statement, try asking a question that your paper can answer.

Before you try to develop your thesis, you should do some **preliminary reading** about your topic. You will probably get some good ideas that will help you settle on a thesis.

Below is sample topic with a thesis written as both a statement and a question. (Remember: You will need only one format – use *either* a statement *or* a question format, not both.)

<u>TOPIC</u>	<u>STATEMENT</u>	<u>QUESTION</u>
Computer games	Computer games help students learn.	Do computer games help students learn?

DEVELOP OUTLINE:

The next step is to develop a basic outline to help you plan your paper and guide your search for sources. This outline will give you structure as you do your research and can help you pull your information together for your first draft.

Your outline should indicate the main points you will cover, the order in which you will do so, and the relationship between main ideas and supporting details. Be aware that you might have to change your outline while you are doing your research as you find new ideas or decide not to write about one of your topics.

Here is a sample outline for the thesis statement (and question) listed above. Note that at this point the outline is not very detailed. It does give you an overview of the paper, however.

OUTLINE	
I.	Introduction
II.	Background
III.	Advantages
IV.	Disadvantages
V.	Examples
VI.	Conclusions

STEP 4: SELECT SOURCES (REFERENCES)

It is important that, no matter what type of source you use, you spend some time evaluating the source to make sure it is reliable and can help you with your paper. Some commonly used sources available in the library are:

- Bibliographies -** General bibliographies list books available in a variety of fields. You might want to check Books in Print or The Bibliographic Index, for example.
- Indexes -** Indexes list articles by subject or author. Some of these, like the Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature, are general indexes and cover a wide range of topics and a wide variety of journals and newspapers. Other indexes are more specialized.
- Abstracts -** Abstracts provide brief summaries of the major points of journal articles. Most major disciplines have their own abstracts (Psychological Abstracts, Sociological Abstracts, etc.) Keep in mind, however, that you can not use an abstract as a source. Instead, you must read the article itself in order to use it as a source.
- Card Catalog -** The card catalog (or computerized database) lists all books available in the library. The listings are arranged by subject, author, and title.



Suggestions for locating sources:

1. Look at other books/journals located on the shelves around a book/journal that looks helpful to you. Libraries usually shelve books on similar topics in the same place.
2. Look at sources listed in the bibliography/reference section of a book or article that has good information on your topic. You might be able to find some of the sources listed as references for that book or article, as well.
3. Look through the other articles or table of contents of a journal which has a good article on your topic. Sometimes journals publish more than one article on the same topic in the same issue.
4. Be flexible and open-minded in your search for sources on your topic. Make a list of the many different key words that might be used to find information on your subject. (For example, a search for sources on the benefits of educational software could search for the following topics: computers, computer literacy, educational software, computer skills, computers in the schools, learning, motivation, computer games, etc.) If you limit your search to only one or two key words you may not find enough information.



Special Feature:

Using Internet Sources

Many students do research on the **Internet**. While this process may be very helpful, you should be very careful about using what you find. **Be sure you understand what types of Internet sources your instructors will accept and any other limitations they may place on your use of Internet sources.**

1. Keep in mind that there is not very much supervision of or control over what is published on the Internet. **Do not believe everything you read!!!!** Check the reliability of the source: Was the article written by an expert in the field? Is the site sponsored by a reputable organization? How old is the information? Asking questions like these may help you determine whether or not you should use the information.
2. Learn how to use a variety of **search engines** (special programs designed to help you look for information on the Internet). Each search engine works a little differently so doing the same type of search with two different engines may result in two different lists of sources. Students often find that it is helpful to start with **Galileo, AltaVista, or Yahoo!**
3. Learn how to do **advanced searches** which allow you to look for several key words in one search. For example, with an advanced search you could look for **computers and children's learning** instead of having to search for computers by itself. These advanced searches may help you narrow down the results of your search.
4. Be flexible in your searching: Think of as many key words as you can before you start searching. As you search the Internet, keep your eyes open for other terms that are used to refer to your topic. You might have to try many different key words or types of searches in order to find the references you need.
5. Be prepared for the overwhelming number of "hits" you will get from doing an Internet search. Many of the sources that are listed in response to a search may not be appropriate for your paper. You may have to weed through a lot of sources before you find some that you can use. (Using good search techniques may make this process a little easier.)
6. Remember that many sources on the Internet may not be complete articles but rather may be reviews, abstracts, or someone's opinion of another source. You may not be able to use these items because most instructors want you to use the original articles themselves. Make sure you check with your instructors in order to find out exactly what they will/will not accept.



STEP 5: TAKE NOTES (READ AND GATHER INFORMATION)

BIBLIOGRAPHY CARDS:

Bibliography cards should be made for each source you use. These cards contain all of the information you will need to write your bibliography at the end of your research paper. The cards will also help you when it comes to giving credit to your sources for ideas and quotations that you use in your paper.

Most students find it helpful to use 4 x 6 index cards. Put one reference source on a card. Make sure you include all of the information you will need to write the reference entry.

HINT: Do not try to take a shortcut at this point. **Fill out a bibliography card for each source as you use it.** Remember: you will not be able to use a source if you do not have all of the reference information. You will either have to find the source again to get the needed reference facts or eliminate from your paper that source and all supporting ideas and quotations you got from it.

The actual format of the sources listed on your bibliography page will be determined by the writing style or method you are using. (For example, APA style and MLA style have specific formats for reference sources.) As a general rule, you will need the following information for each source:

FOR A BOOK:

Author(s) – last name, first name, middle name or initial

Title of the Book

City of Publication

Publishing Company

Date of Publication

FOR AN ARTICLE:

Author(s) – last name, first name, middle name or initial

“Title of the Article”

Title of the Journal

Volume

Date of Publication

Page Numbers (write down all of the pages on which the article appears, even if it does not appear on consecutive pages)

It might be helpful to write down on the card the call number of the book or the location of the book or journal so that you can easily go back to find it again if you need to.

HINT: Number each source card consecutively for your own use, to save you time while taking notes. Place this “personal code number” in the upper right corner of the bibliography card and then use it to identify each note card you write from that source. **See sample bibliography cards on p. 9 of this packet.**

NOTE CARDS:

1. Use 4 x 6 index cards for taking notes. Put only one note/idea/quotation on a card.
2. Write on only one side of the card.
3. In the UPPER LEFT corner of the card, write your “personal code number” that you put on the bibliography card for that source, the author’s name, and the page number that applies to the information you are going to write on the card. Do this before you write the information itself so that you do not forget to do it!
4. In the UPPER RIGHT corner of the card, write the part of your paper to which this information applies. Usually the best idea is to write the topic or heading from your outline to show where this information will appear in your paper. (For example, you would write INTRO in the upper right corner of a card that will be used for your introduction.) You should write the part of your outline on the card at the time you take the notes so that, when you write your draft later on, you will remember why you took those notes or what purpose you had in mind. (Keep in mind that you can always change your mind when you write the paper: You might find a more appropriate spot for the information as you start to write your draft.)
5. When you take notes on your note cards, be sure to write all of the information that you will need later on. If you are writing a direct quotation, make sure you copy it word for word and include the page number. Copy the spelling, punctuation, and capitalization exactly as it is in your source. In effect, pretend you are a Xerox machine and make it an exact copy. Put it in quotation marks so you will know that it is a direct quote.
6. If you want to remember an idea that someone presented in one of your sources but you do not want to write a direct quote, you can make a note card for the idea by writing the idea in your own words. Write a reminder to yourself that the idea is written in your own words so that you will be able to use the correct citation format when you write your paper.
7. If you come up with an idea of your own while you are taking notes, write a note card for it, as well, and a reminder that it is your own idea. You might not remember your brainstorm later on.
8. Try not to depend on photocopying all of your sources. Photocopying can become very expensive. If you find you must copy an article, do not just use the copy. Instead, take notes from it on note cards so that all of the information you will want to use in your paper will be on your note cards. It will be much more difficult for you to write your draft if you have to leaf through photocopies to find your information.
9. If you take the time to write down all of the information you need as you take notes, you will find it very easy to write the paper itself.
10. **See sample note cards on page 9** of this packet.

SAMPLE CARDS

BIBLIOGRAPHY CARDS:

	Abbott, Frank	③
	Wilmer, Sarah	②
Johnson, Edward	①	
<u>Modern Times</u>		
NY, NY		
Simon and Schuster		
1989		
JO 1478		
.J2 1989		

NOTE CARDS:

③ Abbott 365	Intro
<p><i>“There are three main reasons for using computers: They are seen as ‘adult’ materials, they are versatile, and they can give immediate feedback.”</i></p>	

① Johnson 25	Advant.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>better communication</i> • <i>easy to learn to use</i> • <i>easy to use in different settings</i> • <i>adaptable to many subjects</i> 	

STEP 6: WRITE THE DRAFT

1. **If you have time, put everything away for a day or two after you have finished all of your research and taken your notes** so that you can subconsciously sort out all that you have learned. When you go to write your draft after this short break, you will be able to look at it from a fresh perspective.
2. **Separate your note cards by category**, using your notations which show in which section of your paper the information should go. If you have labeled each card in the upper right-hand corner as you took notes, you should be able to sort the cards into piles very easily. Then try to organize the cards in each pile so that they follow each other in a meaningful order.
3. **Write what you know first**, even if this means starting in the middle of your paper. Usually, once you get started writing one section your thoughts about the others will begin to flow more easily and you will be able to write those other parts. Do not worry if you do not start writing at the beginning. When you are all through writing the different sections, you will be proofreading the entire paper to make sure each section flows into the next one. If needed, you can add transitions at this time.
4. **Start each section or main point on a separate piece of paper** when you are writing your draft. You will be able to focus on that one idea and to organize your thoughts more effectively. In addition, it will be easier to add more information to a section if you come across other ideas later on.
5. **Take frequent breaks**. Writing your paper may be a long and frustrating process. You will be more effective if you work in short sessions rather than trying to write your whole paper in one sitting. Your subconscious will also be able to sort some of your ideas out during the breaks.
6. **Write as clearly as you can**. Use short sentences and simple language. Stick to your points and make sure each sentence and each part of your paper work to support your thesis. Do not assume your reader will understand what you are talking about. Explain everything in simple terms.
7. **Avoid using a lot of quotations**. Rather, try to use your own ideas and words. If you do use quotations, try not to have many long ones. It will often be much easier for your reader to follow your points if you put them in your own words.
8. **Use variety in your writing**. Your paper will be much more interesting if you vary your sentence structure and wording.

AVOID PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism means using someone else's ideas, words, or statistics in your writing without giving credit to the source (without proper documentation). There are several ways to avoid plagiarism. Each of these methods requires you to give proper documentation. The actual documentation format will be determined by the writing style you are using (APA, MLA, etc.). (*Samples of each of the three following methods are shown on the next page of this handout.*)

Summary Write a shortened, condensed version of the original source in your own words. You still must give credit to the original source by using **proper documentation**.

Paraphrase Rewrite a portion of the original text in your own words. A paraphrase is usually about the same length as the original and follows the source sentence by sentence and idea by idea. It must not change the sense of the original. You still must give credit to the original source by using **proper documentation**.

Quotation: Copy words/sentences/expressions directly from the original source. The spelling, punctuation, wording, and order of words must be exactly like the original source. You still must give credit to the original source by using **proper documentation**.

You **must** provide documentation for:

- any and all data, facts, or information not commonly known or commonly accepted and/or open to question or dispute
- all exact words, phrases, and passages taken from a source, including special terms or words that the author makes up or uses in an unusual way
- all material that you paraphrase or summarize, including any unique or distinct ideas that are not your own
- all tables, charts, graphs, and statistics that come from another source

You **should not** provide documentation for:

- ideas that you come up with on your own, including your own observations and conclusions
- familiar proverbs, famous quotations, or common knowledge (information that is found in several of your sources can be considered to be common knowledge)

SAMPLES OF SUMMARY, PARAPHRASE, AND DIRECT QUOTATION

APA and MLA Citation Formats

Original Source	Rodrigues, D., & Tuman, M. C. (1999). <u>Writing essentials</u> (2nd ed.). NY: W. W. Norton. p. 104. Effective sentence structure and word choice can help you improve the overall style of your sentences and communicate your meaning clearly. Keep in mind, however, that the purpose of your writing task and the specific focus of each paragraph should affect your choice of words and the structure of your sentences. One good rule to keep in mind is that, in general, English sentences work like relay teams in track: they perform best with the strongest material at the end.	
TYPE	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; display: inline-block;">APA</div>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; display: inline-block; transform: rotate(180deg);">MLA</div>
Summary	Good writers have a purpose for writing and make sure that every paragraph supports that purpose, trying to build up to the strongest points (Rodrigues & Tuman, 1999).	Good writers have a purpose for writing and make sure that every paragraph supports that purpose, trying to build up to the strongest points (Rodrigues and Tuman 104).
Paraphrase	Writing effectively can help you get your meaning across to your readers. Every paragraph should support your purpose for writing. The best writing usually ends with the strongest points (Rodrigues & Tuman, 1999).	Writing effectively can help you get your meaning across to your readers. Every paragraph should support your purpose for writing. The best writing usually ends with the strongest points (Rodrigues and Tuman 104).
Direct Quotation	According to Rodrigues and Tuman (1999), good writing lets you “communicate your meaning clearly” (p. 104).	According to Rodrigues and Tuman, good writing lets you “communicate your meaning clearly” (104).

EXAMPLES OF PLAGIARISM WITH CORRECTIONS IN BOTH APA AND MLA STYLES

<p>Original Source</p>	<p>Rodrigues, D., & Tuman, M. C. (1999). <u>Writing essentials</u> (2nd ed.). NY: W. W. Norton. p. 104.</p> <p>Effective sentence structure and word choice can help you improve the overall style of your sentences and communicate your meaning clearly. Keep in mind, however, that the purpose of your writing task and the specific focus of each paragraph should affect your choice of words and the structure of your sentences. One good rule to keep in mind is that, in general, English sentences work like relay teams in track: they perform best with the strongest material at the end.</p>	
<p>PLAGIARIZED VERSION</p>	<p>APA</p>	<p>MLA</p>
<p>Good sentence structure and choice of words help you improve the style of your sentences and clearly communicate your meaning.</p>	<p>You can communicate more effectively if you write good, clear sentences and choose your words carefully (Rodrigues & Tuman, 1999).</p>	<p>You can communicate more effectively if you write good, clear sentences and choose your words carefully (Rodrigues and Tuman 104).</p>
<p>Keep in mind, however, that the specific focus of each paragraph and the purpose of your writing task should affect your choice of words.</p>	<p>Rodrigues and Tuman (1999) caution the writer to “keep in mind . . . that the purpose of your writing task and the specific focus of each paragraph should affect your choice of words”(p. 104).</p>	<p>Rodrigues and Tuman caution the writer to “keep in mind . . . that the purpose of your writing task and the specific focus of each paragraph should affect your choice of words”(104).</p>
<p>English sentences are like relay teams in track – they should save the best for last.</p>	<p>Good sentences are “like relay teams in track” because they save the best for last (Rodrigues & Tuman, 1999, p. 104).</p>	<p>Good sentences are “like relay teams in track” because they save the best for last (Rodrigues and Tuman 104).</p>

STEP 7: REVISE AND PROOFREAD AND REVISE AND PROOFREAD AND...

After you have written your paper, you **MUST** proofread it. (Even if someone else typed it for you, it is your responsibility to proofread it and to correct any errors or confusions. Remember, it is your grade that is on the line!)

CHECK THE CONTENT:

Check for accuracy.

Double-check each statement, question, and reference to make sure you have not copied something incorrectly, omitted any necessary information, or given the wrong facts or improper documentation. Check your bibliography page(s) carefully, as well. This is not an exciting job, but it is extremely important.

Check for flow.

Read your paper through from start to finish to make sure your ideas, sentences, and sections flow from one to another. If you think your reader might be confused by something you have written, take the time to revise it.

Read your paper aloud.

Do this at least once. It is often easier to hear your mistakes than it is to see them.

Let someone else read it.

After you have worked so hard on your paper, you may not be able to see errors. (You may unintentionally read into it something that is not there, for example.) Someone else may be able to catch problems that you can not see.

Check for consistency.

Make sure that all parts of your paper are working toward the support of your thesis statement. If you find that a passage does not really have anything to do with supporting your thesis, consider revising that part of the paper.

CHECK THE FORM:

Read it several times.

Look for one type of error each time you read through your paper. For example, read it once to check for spelling errors, once for punctuation errors, once for capitalization, once for run-on sentences, etc. If you know that you tend to make a certain kind of error when you write, make sure you read your paper through at least once to look only for that kind of error.

Check the requirements.

Make sure you have met all of your instructor's requirements and specifications for the paper. Check to make sure that you have followed the required style format, that your pages are neat and in order, and that you have stapled or bound your paper as required.

Back up your paper as you type it. Keep a copy of your final paper for yourself. Keep your note cards and bibliography cards at least until you have received a grade for the class on your report card.

CHECKLIST

MAKE A SCHEDULE TO PLAN YOUR TIME

_____ Write down your anticipated deadlines for completing each step of the research paper process.

PINPOINT YOUR TOPIC, DEFINE YOUR THESIS, DEVELOP YOUR OUTLINE

_____ Review this packet of information on how to write a research paper.

_____ Choose a topic.

_____ Do preliminary reading to see if there is enough material available and to help you narrow your thesis.

_____ Develop a working thesis.

_____ Get your instructor's approval.

_____ Develop a working outline.

SELECT YOUR SOURCES, TAKE NOTES (READ AND GATHER INFORMATION)

_____ Make sure you have enough 4 x 6 index cards to use for both your note cards and bibliography cards.

_____ Write a bibliography card for each source.

_____ Read your sources and take notes.

_____ Include all necessary information on your note cards:

- source and page (in upper left-hand corner)
- section of your paper to which the information applies (upper right-hand corner)

WRITE YOUR ROUGH DRAFT

- _____ Sort your note cards into piles according to the sections of your paper.
- _____ Organize the note cards within each section.
- _____ Write your draft, using correct documentation for all material which is not your own (direct quotations, borrowed ideas, etc.).
- _____ Write your bibliography page(s) using the format required by your instructor.
- _____ Make back-up disks so you can save on at least two disks as you type your paper.

REVISE AND PROOFREAD AND REVISE AND PROOFREAD AND . . .

- _____ Reread your paper a number of times to look for errors, check for content, check for flow, etc.
- _____ Ask someone else to read your paper to check for form and content.
- _____ Make sure all documentation is correct and present where needed.
- _____ Make sure you have avoided plagiarism.
- _____ Make sure you have followed the requirements and guidelines for format.

PREPARE FINAL DRAFT

- _____ Develop a title page according to your required style format.
- _____ Make sure your paper is neat and complete.
- _____ Make sure your pages are in order.
- _____ Make sure you have met all of your instructor's requirements.
- _____ Save your final draft on your computer or jump drive for future reference.
- _____ Keep all of your note cards and bibliography cards and keep a copy of your final paper.
- _____ Make sure you hand your paper in on time!
- _____ Congratulate yourself for a job well done!