

# Foster Care to Academic Success

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How to Write a College Level Paper

## How to Write Essays & Research Papers

(More than you EVER thought you wanted or needed to know about writing college-level papers)

- Part I**      **Figuring out what you have to do ...**
  - **Essays versus Research Papers**
  
- Part II**     **Understanding the Assignment**
  - **Choosing a topic**
  
- Part III**    **Getting Started**
  
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## How to Write a College Level Paper

### Part I. Figuring out what you have to do ...

#### Essays versus Research Papers

##### A. Essays

According to English Professor Frederick Crews of the University of California, Berkeley, an essay is "a fairly brief piece of nonfiction that tries to make a point in an interesting way."

There are several different types of essays –

**A Definition Essay** takes a term or an idea and describes what it is, then going on to discuss several examples.

- Example question: Write an essay defining energy resources and discuss the different types.
- Introduction: Define the key term, "energy resources."
- Supporting paragraphs: Define several types of energy resources, each in one paragraph. Examples would be renewable and non-renewable resources.
- Concluding paragraph: Summarize energy resources.

**A Classification Essay** separates things, events or ideas into specific categories and discusses each of them.

- Example question: Write an essay discussing the three main types of government in the United States
- Introduction: Give some background about the American system of government
- Supporting paragraphs: Define and describe federal, state and local government systems
- Concluding paragraph: Summarize government in the United States

**A Description Essay** tells what a person, place, thing or event is like. The essay is organized by describing different parts or aspects of the subject.

- Example question: Write an essay describing the Grand Canyon.
- Introduction: Introduce what the Grand Canyon is
- Supporting paragraphs: Describe the various aspects of the Grand Canyon – geological, historical, picturesque, and as a money-making tourist attraction.
- Concluding paragraph: Summarize what the Grand Canyon is.

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A **Compare and Contrast Essay** discusses the similarities and differences between two or more people, places, things or events. The essay is organized by writing about one subject first and then comparing it with the second, or by comparing each subject by category.

- Example question: Compare and contrast Huck and Jim's views on slavery in Huckleberry Finn.
- Introduction: Introduce the characters of Huck and Jim.
- Supporting paragraphs: Describe each of their views on slavery and explain how they are similar and in what ways they are different.
- Concluding paragraph: Summarize the similarities and differences between Huck and Jim's views on slavery.

A **Sequence Essay** describes a series of events or a process in some sort of order, usually chronological. The essay is organized by writing about each step in the process in the order it occurred.

- Example question: Write an essay outlining the stages of the salmon life cycle.
- Introduction: Describe what a salmon is like
- Supporting paragraphs: Describe the stages of the salmon in order – young, adult and as they die.
- Concluding paragraph: Summarize the main stages of the salmon life cycle.

An **Explanation Essay** describes how or why something happens or has happened. Different causes and effects are discussed, and the essay is organized by explaining each individual cause and/or effect.

- Example question: Write an essay explaining why so many Irish moved to the United States during the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century
- Introduction: Give some background information on European immigration during this period.
- Supporting paragraphs: Enumerate some reasons and describe them – the poor economy in Ireland, oppression by the British, and the Potato Famine.
- Concluding paragraphs: Summarize Irish immigration to the United States during the mid-1800s.

An **Evaluation Essay** judges an idea, person or event. The evaluation or judgment is made based on certain criteria and the essay is organized by discussing those criteria.

- Evaluate the impact of public opinion regarding the situation in the Middle East on the election of 2004.
- Introduction: Describe whether or not you believe the situation in the Middle East was a major factor in President Bush's reelection/John Kerry's defeat.

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- Supporting paragraphs: Use media polls, newspaper and magazine articles and even personal experience to support your position.
- Concluding paragraph: Summarize your opinion of whether or not the situation in the Middle East impacted the 2004 election.

### **B. Research or Term Papers**

The other type of college paper you might be expected to produce is a Research Paper. This is a piece of academic writing that involves familiarizing yourself with the work of experts – books, scholarly articles, website information, even personal communication – on a particular topic, synthesizing what you have learned, and comparing it with your own thoughts on the topic. In a college level research paper, you use academic literature to complement your own critical thinking on a subject. Your professor is not as interested in what the “experts” have to say (he may very well know most of that already) as in how well you use what the experts have to say to support your paper’s thesis. The main point of the library research paper is to learn more about a topic, write down what you have learned in an organized, readable fashion and evaluate it.

## **Part II. Understanding the Assignment**

When you first are handed an assignment, READ IT carefully. If you have ANY questions, ask your professor immediately – it is much better to get a straight answer before you start than to struggle through the assignment only to find out at the end that you have done it entirely wrong ...

An assignment handout usually has three parts – an overview of the subject (“It has been estimated that nearly 2/3 of the population of England died in the plagues and famines of the 14<sup>th</sup> century...”), the specific task (“What effect did this have on the decline of the feudal system and the rise of the middle class?”), and technical details (“The paper must be between 5-7 pages long, double-spaced and contain a bibliography of at least five resources...”).

In the assignment handout, the professor may use several words that can clue you in as to what he or she wants – when you see these words, you will know what kind of an essay you will be working on from the list above.

**INFORMATION** words ask you to demonstrate what you know about a subject (the famous who, what, when, where, why and how).

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- **DEFINE** – give the meaning of the subject or subject word
- **EXPLAIN WHY/HOW** – give reasons why or examples of how something happened
- **ILLUSTRATE** – give descriptive examples of the subject and show how each example is connected to the subject
- **RESEARCH** – gather material from outside sources about the subject. It is generally expected that you will analyze the material you find.
- **SUMMARIZE** – briefly list the important ideas you learned about the subject.
- **TRACE** – outline how something has changed or developed from an earlier to the current time.

**RELATION** words ask you to show how things are connected.

- **APPLY** – use details you have been given (usually in the assignment directions or in class) to demonstrate how an idea, theory or concept works in a particular situation
- **COMPARE** – show how two or more things are similar
- **CONTRAST** – show how two or more things are different (COMPARE and **CONTRAST** are of course usually used together in the context of a writing assignment)
- **SHOW CAUSE** – relate how one event or series of events made (caused) something else to happen
- **RELATE** – describe the connections between things

**INTERPRETATION** words ask you to defend your ideas about a subject. Note – these words do not usually mean “just give us your opinion off the top of your head;” rather, they mean “give us your opinion as it is supported by concrete evidence based on readings, class discussion, or outside research.”

- **ASSESS** – summarize your opinion of the subject and measure it against something
- **PROVE, JUSTIFY** – give reasons or examples to show why or how something is the truth
- **EVALUATE, RESPOND** – state your opinion of the subject as good, bad or indifferent, with reasons and examples
- **SUPPORT** – give evidence of, or reasons for, a fact, statement or position you believe to be true.
- **SYNTHESIZE** – put two or more things (ideas, facts, events) together that have not already been put together in class or in your readings. Do not just summarize them in turn and then state why they are similar or different; rather, you must give an argument or reason for putting them together and defend it through the paper.
- **ANALYZE** – determine how individual parts create or relate to the whole; figure out how something works, what it might mean or why it is important

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- **ARGUE** – take a side on a position and defend it with evidence for your side and against the other side

Another very important clue to how to go about writing this paper is its LENGTH. If your professor asks for a two-page paper, you cannot pad it with flowery words or extraneous examples (we all know what that's called, too). State your point immediately, give one or two clear examples, and conclude. This would be a basic five-paragraph essay – introduction, three supporting paragraphs, and conclusion. If your professor asks for a 10- or 20-page paper, however, you need to have a thesis statement and introduction and you probably will have to do significant research. You will have to elaborate on several main ideas or relationships and prove one or more points. Such a paper would generally be considered a term paper, and a good suggestion is to block out the time in your calendar RIGHT AWAY for producing a thesis statement and outline, doing research, and finally putting the paper together and writing it.

### **What if the Professor asks me to choose the topic of my essay or research paper myself???**

If you have not been assigned a topic, then the whole world lies before you. This may make the task of starting seem even more intimidating, but actually it means you are free to choose a topic of interest to you. You should give careful thought to what you want to write about, because the more interested in it you are, the better paper you will produce.

The first thing to do is to think about the purpose of the paper – back to those helpful clue words again! Is your purpose to persuade people to believe as you do, to explain to people how to complete a particular task, to educate people about some person, place, thing or idea, or something else entirely? **Whatever topic you choose must fit that purpose.**

Now write down some general subjects that interest you. Browse the internet, or leaf through books and the encyclopedia, to find potential subjects if you cannot come up with any on your own.

Once you have some subjects in mind, consider each one individually. Think about how you feel about that topic. If you must educate, be sure it is a subject about which you are particularly well-informed or about which you know there is ample research material available. If you must persuade, be sure it is a subject about which you are at least moderately passionate. Of course, the most important factor in choosing a topic is the number of ideas you have about that topic.

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**In general, the narrower your subject, the better a paper you can write.** Pick one topic, one argument, that is finite, limited, and can be defined. Do not try to explain everything; it can't be done. Your professor is looking for a coherent paper, not, as one professor called it, "a bushel of babble." Narrow in on a specific question or problem or character. Pick a word, a phrase, an image, or an event. Ask a specific question: "Why does the author use this particular word or image in this paragraph?" "Why did the Americans in Texas declare their independence in 1836 instead of 1835?" "Why does Jesse Jackson prefer the term 'African American' to 'Afro-American' or 'black'?"

In your paper, you can work from the specificity of your topic to the broader universe if you like, but you should start with one question, one position or one theory. Work out from there, and then work back again.

If the sad truth is that none of the subjects you thought of seem particularly appealing, talk to your professor. She may have ideas you never thought of.

### **So there are three things you need to know –**

- 1. Is it an essay or a research paper?**
- 2. What will your focus be? (based on the clue words)**
- 3. How long does it have to be?**

### **– and one thing you have to have –**

**An appropriate topic.**

Once you have figured out exactly what the professor expects based on his or her description of the assignment, you are ready to start work. **REMEMBER – if you do not understand exactly what is required, ASK the professor immediately.** Do not wait until two minutes before the assignment is due to ask your girlfriend's roommate what she wrote about!

## **Part III. Getting Started**

As we said, there are two different types of college paper, and we will discuss the mechanics of each one separately. However, regardless of the type of paper you are writing, you should look at the First Module in this series, Time Management, before you start.

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Perhaps the single most important part of writing a good paper is MAKING THE TIME FOR IT. You should start with the date your paper is due and work backwards through the important milestones, to make sure you get everything done in a timely fashion and you are not bleary-eyed at four in the morning the day the paper is due. You can use your planner, or one of the calendars provided in the First Module.

An excellent resource, if you are not sure how long things might take and what the steps are in preparing your paper, is <http://www.lib.umn.edu/help/calculator/>. This service is from the University of Minnesota's library system. Plug in the current date, the date the paper is due, and the general topic of your paper (accounting, biology, European history ... it is very cool) and a screen will appear not only with dates for crucial elements, but links to information on one of those crucial elements.

Now, you are ready to start the actual work ...

### Part IV. Research

The basic difference between an essay and a research paper is that for an essay you rely mostly on your own thoughts, with more than likely some quotes from a relevant article or the literary piece under discussion, whereas for a research paper you have to do research (usually library and/or internet) and synthesize that research with your own thoughts on a particular topic. Therefore, we will start with how to go about doing research, and then talk about the steps in writing any paper.

Once you have determined your topic, you are ready to start research. Today, the logical first stop is the internet. Let us say your question is "How did the plagues, famines and social unrest of the 14<sup>th</sup> century affect the feudal system in England?" (Okay I'm sorry it's what I did my senior thesis on back in the days when we didn't even HAVE the internet. That's right. Imagine that. And I'm not even OLD.)

Select the key words in your question; plague, 1300s, England, would be a good start. Type them into [www.google.com](http://www.google.com) or [www.yahoo.com](http://www.yahoo.com) or [www.excite.com](http://www.excite.com) or whichever one is your favorite search engine. Your key words should be the most important words, representing the major concepts of your research. Keywords can be topics, geographic locations, names – whatever you think it is likely would be included in the abstract (summary) of a website. Black Death, bubonic plague, middle ages, feudalism, manorial system ...

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You should get a good list of websites containing your key words, which will give you a great start on your research. The first thing to do is evaluate these websites – look for extensions such as .edu (educational institution), .gov (government), .org (organization) and .com (commercial). Knowing the source may lead you to recognize any biases or advertising spiels. For example, if you are looking for information on pain relievers, you might want to try [www.nlm.nih.gov](http://www.nlm.nih.gov) (the National Institutes of Health, National Library of Medicine) or [www.drugdigest.org](http://www.drugdigest.org) before you try [www.tylenol.com](http://www.tylenol.com).

Here are some questions to ask when you are considering any website:

- Who is the author/source?
- What are the author's reputation and qualifications in the subject covered?
- Is the information on the site accurate according to what you already know?
- Is the information presented in an objective, balanced manner?
- How does the site compare with other sites on the same subject?
- Does the site contribute something unique on the subject?
- How current is the information?
- Does the site tell you when it was last updated?
- If there are links to other sites, do they work?

Depending on your topic, you should be able to get a lot of information on line. Often, in fact, professors limit the number of websites you can use because it is too easy to only use the internet and ignore those wonderful dusty old tomes dear to every true researcher's heart – books and periodicals.

Many websites contain lists of print materials for you to start with; you just have to see if your library or another library affiliated with your school has them. However, you should also go directly to your library's card catalogue – on line or file cards – to look for both general and specific books about your topic. Here again, use key words (called subject headings) to refine your search. Also remember that just because a book is not specifically about your topic – the plague in 14<sup>th</sup> century England – does not mean it will not contain relevant material. A book titled, The Black Death in Medieval Europe, is more than likely to have a chapter on 14<sup>th</sup> century England. Therefore, be sure to take any book on your general subject and leaf through it and, of course, look in the index for key words regarding your specific topic.

Finally, every subject has its scholarly association(s). For example, typing “American Association of Paleontology,” into [www.google.com](http://www.google.com) gets the following:

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The Paleontological Society (USA)  
The Paleontological Association (England)  
The World Paleontological Society

Also the paleontological societies of Wichita, Kentucky, Austin, Denver, Southern California and Dallas – and these are just the first 10 among 99,000 web pages. The point is that **each one of these associations and societies has a journal, where you are likely to find the most up-to-date, scholarly, and esoteric information.**

**Depending on the subject of your research, archived newspapers and magazines may be a good resource as well.**

**And in some cases you may even be able to talk to people directly** – ask them if you can record the conversation or take notes – as part of your research. In writing a paper on voter turnout in the last election, for example, you might want to interview the head of the local League of Women Voters.

**If in doubt as you begin your research, ASK YOUR PROFESSOR for a starting point, or, even better – ASK THE RESEARCH LIBRARIAN.** The research librarian has a whole *degree* in how to do research!

## Part V. Note Taking

### Now that you know where to look – what do you do with what you find?

The key to writing a good research paper is having all of your notes ready at hand and nearly organized, so that when you write your outline and begin to put your thoughts on paper, you are not flipping frantically through stacks and stacks of books and magazines looking for the quote you KNOW you saw somewhere...

The BEST way to take notes while you are researching is to buy a packet or two of **3x5 or 4x6 lined index cards.** **As you are reading, instead of highlighting the book as you would do when studying, write any useful or interesting fact on a note card.**

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<b>Number corresponding to Source</b> Your first source is #1. Every card from that source should have a #1 in this corner; followed by all #2s, #3s, etc.	<b>First card only for each source:</b> Library call number Bibliographic data (last name, title, city and publisher, date)
<b>Fact/Quote/Thought and PAGE NUMBER</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• One fact/quote/thought per card! Write it in your own words to prevent accidental plagiarism.</li><li>• Put quotation marks around anything you copy directly – when writing the paper this will remind you that it is a quote and needs a footnote or endnote.</li><li>• Use full sentences – this might save you some time when you are writing your paper</li><li>• ALWAYS put the page number so that you can find the information again if necessary</li></ul>	

When you have finished your research, you should have as many numbers on cards (#1, #2 etc.) as you have resource materials in your bibliography. The same information can be entered **for websites visited – just put the URL in the top right hand corner so** that you can find the site again and so that you can enter it properly into your bibliography.

Always start a new card when you open a new book, magazine, pamphlet or web site. Even if you don't use any information from that source, it is still good to have a card.

### Part VI. Organizing Your Ideas and Writing the Paper (finally!)

Now that you have your research at hand and know your subject very well – much better, certainly, than when you started this assignment! – you can refine your thesis statement, write your outline, and flesh it out to make a GREAT paper.

**You organize your thoughts and write your paper in the same way if you are writing a research paper as you do if you are writing an essay.**

**A thesis statement tells the reader what the essay/paper will be about, and what point it will make.** Looking at your research, what do the main themes and supporting ideas say about your topic? Formulate your thesis in two parts – **the first part will state the topic or premise of the paper:** “It has been historically understood that the devastating events of the 14<sup>th</sup> century in

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England (climate changes with their attendant crop failures and livestock decimation, social turmoil, and of course the infamous Black Death) signaled a dramatic change in the fabric of social life in that country, with a shift from the manorial system of feudal lord and serf to a more town-based society and a developing middle class.” **The second part of the thesis summarizes your findings and states the point of the essay:** “In actuality, the change from the manorial system to a system of self-supporting towns had started long before the 14<sup>th</sup> century and was not completed until long after. The events of the 1300s were traumatic, but although they perhaps to some degree hastened the end of feudalism, they did not cause it.” Or, to put it more simply – the first part of your thesis could be “Public transportation” and the second part, “could solve some of Boston’s most persistent and pressing problems.”

With a solid thesis statement, you are ready to prepare your outline. You have known how to write an outline since grade school, but here for the record is how it is done:

<b>Topic</b>	
<b>Thesis Statement</b>	
I. Introduction	
A. part I of the thesis statement	
B. part II of the thesis statement	
II. First main point	
A. supporting idea/evidence/quote	
B. supporting idea/evidence/quote	
C. supporting idea/evidence/quote	
III. Second Main Point	
A. supporting idea/evidence/quote	
B. supporting idea/evidence/quote	
C. supporting idea/evidence/quote	
.....	
CXXIV.	One hundred twenty-fourth Main Point (JUST KIDDING)
IV. Conclusion	

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**If you are writing an essay rather than a research paper, the steps are exactly the same – formulate the thesis and then decide on your supporting ideas.**

Once you have written the outline, look at each of the main points. Which is the strongest point? Which is the most interesting? Which is the most controversial? Which, on the other hand, is the weakest? **You might want to change the order of your outline to bring the point of your paper across the most effectively.**

Now it is time to write your paragraphs. This should not be difficult, because you have ALL of your points in the outline and on your well-organized note cards. **Simply start each paragraph with a summary of the main point and then flesh it out with your supporting evidence, ideas or quotes.**

- I. Dogs make better pets than cats
  - A. Dogs are loyal – cats stay with the house
  - B. Dogs are always happy to see you – cats couldn't care less
  - C. Dogs protect your house – cats hide under the bed

*I have always thought dogs make better pets than cats. Dogs are loyal to their owner; they follow them around and want to be with them and they will go with you anywhere you go. Cats usually prefer to be left alone – unless they want to take a snooze on your lap – and if you move, they sometimes even stay with the house they are used to rather than moving with you. Dogs are always happy to see you. They are waiting at the front door when you come home from school or work, and they jump all over you and lick your face. Cats will say hello if they happen to already be in that room, or if it is dinner time and they are looking for food. Finally, dogs bark when strangers come to your front door, and if a burglar came in they would attack him. Cats, on the other hand, hide under the bed even if you want to show them off to your best friend. They would never protect your house!*

OKAY – We don't actually believe the paragraph above, just so you know. Cats make equally great pets, and so for that matter do parakeets and ferrets and hermit crabs.

When you have written (and checked! and edited! and verified!) each of the paragraphs of the body of your essay or paper, you are three-quarters of the way home. All you have to do is write the introduction and conclusion, add the footnotes and bibliography, type it all up, and

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then make sure you have followed any special instructions given in the assignment. And then turn it in – on time and ready for an A.

The introductory and concluding paragraphs should be very easy to write as well; they are your thesis statement elaborated.

You see? If you have read the assignment and understood it, done enough research, taken adequate notes and organized them appropriately, and made a thoughtful, considered outline – the actual writing of the paper itself should be the least of your worries!

## Part VII. Footnotes and Bibliography

Your footnotes and bibliography should be a snap, based on the index cards you have neatly stacked on your desk. Every quote and every fact you got from somewhere other than your own mind should be on those cards, and all you have to do is pull the information from there.

### When do I use footnotes or endnotes, and what is the difference?

Footnotes and endnotes credit reference sources for any material you summarized, paraphrased, or quoted in your paper. They refer readers to the exact pages of the work, which must be cited separately in the bibliography. Footnotes can also be further elaboration of a point made above, with information that is interesting and relevant but not critical to the paper.

A footnote is typed at the bottom of the page; endnotes are grouped together at the end of the paper.

Here, taken directly from Professor Jennifer Helton's website at Cañada College in California (<http://www.smccd.net/accounts/helton/exfootnotes.html>), is a very good summary of when and how to use footnotes and endnotes to credit a source:

If you use Microsoft Word, you can insert a footnote by going to the Insert Menu and choosing Insert footnote. This is the footnote format for a book, such as your textbook. [1] Here is the format for a primary source in an anthology. [2] If you want to quote or paraphrase one of my lectures, use this format. [3] Cite web sites using this format, if you don't know the author of the web site page. [4] If you do know the author, use this format. [5] The second time you cite a source, you don't need to write out all the publication information – just the author's

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name and page number (if it's a book) [6] or name and date (if it's a lecture). [7] If you cite the same source twice in a row, use "ibid" instead of the author's name. [8] Remember to also include a List of Works Cited at the end of your paper.

[1] John McKay, Bennett D. Hill and John Buckler, *A History of Western Society* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin., 1999) 1: 345.

[2] Winston Churchill, "Blood, Toil, Tears, and Sweat," in *Sources of the Western Tradition* 4<sup>th</sup> ed. ed. Marvin Perry, Joseph Peden and Theodore Von Laue (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999) 2: 396.

[3] Jennifer Helton. History 100 Lecture. Cañada College, Redwood City CA. October 3, 2001.

[4] "Manifest Destiny," *The U.S. Mexican War*, <http://www.pbs.org/kera/usmexicanwar/mainframe.html>.

[5] Quiroga, Miguel Angel González, "The Power of an Idea," *The U.S. Mexican War*, <http://www.pbs.org/kera/usmexicanwar/mainframe.html>.

[6] McKay 1:456.

[7] Helton, October 12, 2001.

[8] Ibid, October 12, 2001.

**And the bibliography??**

Your bibliography should be as easy as the footnotes – it is just a long list, at the end of your paper, of all of the research materials you used.

Some things to keep in mind as you do your bibliography include:

- Be sure to use the specific format given by your professor!
- It is very important to keep the overall format consistent – the first line is used as a guide and the following lines of each citation are indented five spaces.
- Citations are arranged alphabetically by author's last name. If there is no author or editor, they should be arranged by title.
- When citing a work, the information is usually arranged in three divisions – author/editor, title, and publication details. Each division is separated by a period and a space.
- Each citation is single spaced with a double space between citations to separate them.

Here are examples, from the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, 5<sup>th</sup> edition, on how to cite references:

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Book	Gibaldi, Joseph. <u>MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers</u> . 3 <sup>rd</sup> ed. New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1999.
Encyclopedia	"Dog." <u>The World Book Encyclopedia</u> , 1988 ed.
Magazine/Journal	Kollus, Brad, "A Place for Wild Cats," <i>Cats Magazine</i> , vol. 57 issue 5, (May 2001): 22.
Web Site*	Britannica.com. Encyclopaedia Britannica. Jan. 15, 2001. <a href="http://search.britannica.com/search?query=cat">http://search.britannica.com/search?query=cat</a> .
Music Recording	Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus. <i>Szell conducts Mozart [compact sound disc]</i> . George Szell. Cleveland Orchestra. New York: Columbia/Odyssey, 1978.
Movie	<i>Saving Private Ryan</i> . dir. Steven Spielberg, Dreamworks and Paramount Pictures presents an Amblin Entertainment production. Universal City, CA: Dreamworks, 1999, c1998, video recording.
CD-ROM	Seuss, Dr. <u>Green Eggs and Ham</u> . CD-ROM. Novato, California: Living Books, 1996.
Map, Table, Illustration	Lake, D.J.. Atlas of Cuyahoga County, Ohio, from actual surveys by and under the directions of D.J. Lake, C.E. (Philadelphia, Titus, Simmons & Titus, 1874), map 133

Here is an excellent website on how to write a bibliography:

<http://www.aresearchguide.com/11guide.html>.

## Part VIII. Finished! The Final Check

Time for one last check –

You should go over your paper one more time for language and formatting before you do the final printout and turn it in.

Nothing can substitute for revision of your work. By reviewing what you have done, you can improve weak points that otherwise would be missed. Read and reread your paper.

- Does it make logical sense?  
Leave it for a few hours and then read it again. Does it still make logical sense?
- Do the sentences flow smoothly from one another?  
If not, try to add some words and phrases to help connect them. Transition words, such as "therefore" or "however," sometimes help. Also, you might refer in one sentence to a

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## How to Write a College Level Paper

thought in the previous sentence. This is especially useful when you move from one paragraph to another.

Here are some technical points to cover:

### Grammar and Spelling

Check your spelling.

Check your grammar.

Make sure each sentence has a subject.

Make sure your subjects and verbs agree with each other.

Check the verb tenses of each sentence.

Make sure that each sentence makes sense.

### Style and Organization

Make sure your essay has an introduction, supporting paragraphs, and a summary paragraph.

Check that you have a thesis statement that identifies the main idea of the essay.

Check that all your paragraphs follow the proper paragraph format.

### Format

Are your margins correct?

Have you titled it as directed?

What other information (name, date, etc.) must you include?

Did you double-space your lines?

### Footnotes and Bibliography

Have you referenced everything that needs to be referenced?

Is your bibliography complete and formatted according to your professor's instructions?

Finally – finally – FINALLY – take one last look at your paper. The paper itself should be clean, uncreased and unfolded. If there is a cover page it should be attractive and formatted according to the professor's instructions. It should, in short, look *professional*.

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**Congratulations! You have worked hard and even if you don't get an A on this paper, you know you have done your best, you have learned something, and you are ready to take on the next challenge. CONGRATULATIONS to you!**

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