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Introduction

Writing a research report does not have to be a difficult task that your students will try to avoid. Once your students learn a systematic approach to writing research reports, they may find they actually enjoy the writing process more, and you will dread reading their essays less. By researching and writing about a topic, your students will learn more new information and gain more understanding than with almost any other learning experience. *How to Write a Research Report* will help you teach your students how to take the pain out of writing a research report by turning the process into a series of easy steps. The result will be well thought-out, clearly written essays of which you and they will be proud.

This book is divided into the following sections:

Getting Started

Students will learn what a research report is and how to translate the writing assignment into a completed work. They will learn the importance of understanding exactly what is being asked of them. They will learn about different types of reports and how to decide what type they are to write. Students will learn how to brainstorm possible topics for their reports, how to narrow down the possibilities and how to focus on a manageable topic.

Finding and Organising Information

Students will learn sources of information for their research topics. They will be introduced to two systems for locating books in the library, plus search engines to find information on the Internet. Students will learn how to differentiate between fact and opinion, how to think critically and how to evaluate what they read. They will learn how to save a large collection of facts and figures and organise them into manageable and recognisable clusters of data and ideas.

Prewriting

Students will learn how to use the data they have collected to form the basis of their writing. They will learn to focus the data into thesis statements and topic outlines. They will learn to transform topic outlines into sentence outlines from which they will be able to write their research reports. The students will become familiar with the standard, five-paragraph form for written reports.

Writing

Students will learn to expand their outlines into fully developed research reports by writing first drafts, revising, and writing final drafts. They will learn to incorporate their thesis statements into the introductions and conclusions of their essays and how to cite resources in a way that will be acceptable throughout their educational careers.



Getting Started

The Importance of Being Early

A research report is an essay written using information obtained from a variety of sources. Locating the information and writing the report takes time. It is easy to put off until tomorrow what you need to get done today. However, when it comes to writing an assigned research report, you need to get started early. If you wait until just before the assignment is due, you will find yourself with the impossible task of trying to do research and write an essay in a very short amount of time. You will end up with a poor essay and a poor mark.

Students who write the best essays and get the best marks are usually the ones who get started early. You want to write a good essay, and you want to get a good mark. Do the responsible thing. Start thinking about your essay as soon as you get the assignment. Let your mind generate ideas. Then, the first chance you get, sit down and start planning your essay. If you divide the task into a series of steps, writing the essay will be easier and more manageable. You might even enjoy it!

Understanding the Assignment

Sometimes students do not really understand what is expected of them. One teacher may be very explicit in stating exactly how students are to do the report. Another teacher may give more general instructions, leaving the main responsibility of selecting a topic and deciding how to write the report to the student.

Obviously, it is easier to write an essay when you know ahead of time precisely what is expected. That is not always going to happen. A basic rule for any writing assignment is to write for your reader. In this case, your reader will be your teacher. If your teacher has not given you precise instructions, it is your responsibility to ask for clearer directions. You need to know the following:

- What kind of research report does the teacher expect?
- What kind of research does the teacher want you to do?
- On what will your mark be based?

You need the answers to these questions before you can get started on the assignment. Once you have this information, you are ready to begin the process of selecting a topic, setting deadlines for each step, searching for information, organising your information and writing your report. Keep these two adages in mind when beginning your research report:

You probably will not know the answers until you ask the questions.

If you don't know where you're going, you won't know when you get there.



Selecting a Topic

The next step in writing a research essay is selecting a topic. Begin with a general topic. Even if your teacher has assigned your topic, it is probably general. You will want a topic that is not too broad and not too narrow. The topic you choose should be interesting to you and to your reader. It must also meet the subject, length and other criteria your teacher requires of you.

Topic that is too broad: The Space Race in the Twentieth Century

Topic that is not too broad: The *Apollo 11* Space Mission

Topic that is too narrow: Simmons Mag Wheels

Topic that is not too narrow: The Two Best-Rated Sports Cars of the Year

Select several general topics. Think of topics you are interested in or already know something about. Next, ask your classmates, your parents and your teacher to give their ideas and reactions about how one of these subjects would work as a topic for a research essay. Page 6 describes three ways to brainstorm topics.

Possible topics are _____

When you have chosen the topic you like best, check it against this list. Revise your topic, if necessary.

Topic Checklist Criteria

- Is my topic too broad?
- Is my topic too narrow?
- Will my topic be interesting to readers?
- Is my topic interesting to me?
- Is my topic okay with my teacher?

The topic for my research essay is _____



Brainstorming

Brainstorming is a way to generate topics for a research report. There are several ways to brainstorm, and the process can be done successfully either alone or in a group. Consider using one of these methods to help generate a suitable topic for your report.

Group Brainstorming

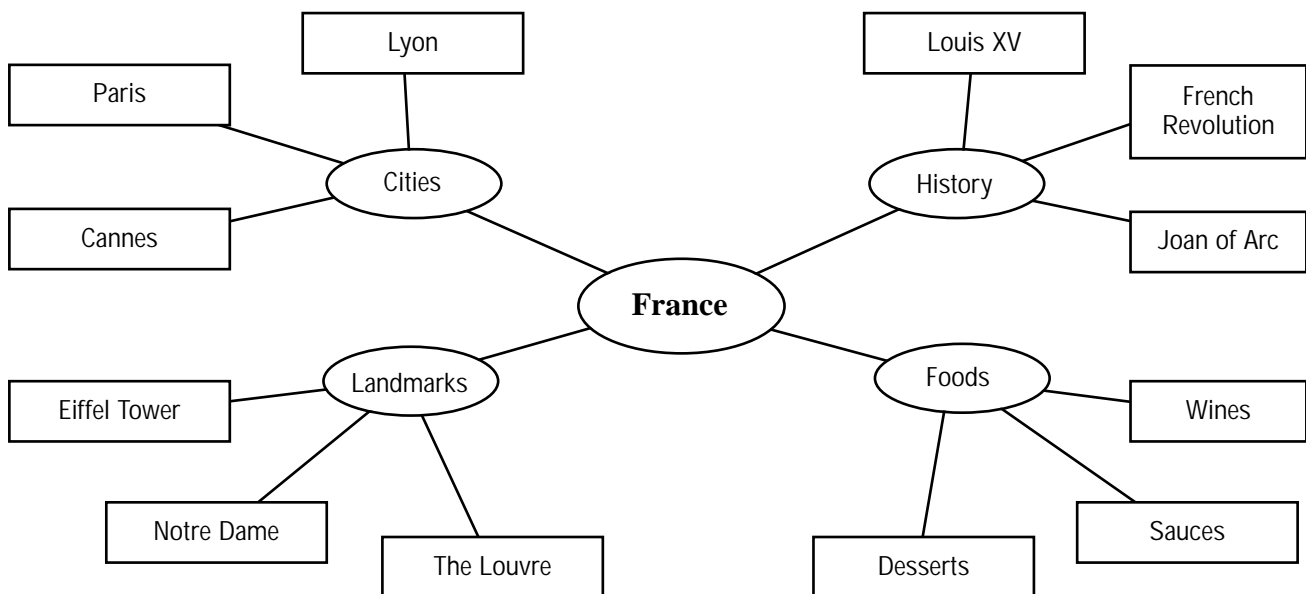
In this method of brainstorming, one member of the group acts as recorder, while each member says aloud any idea that comes to mind. As each person contributes an idea, the recorder writes the idea down without comment or discussion. After an agreed-upon length of time, the members of the group consider and discuss each of the options, finally narrowing the options down to a few upon which the members vote.

Lists

Lists are particularly useful when planning a comparison/contrast essay. To make a list, columns are set up with headings, such as 'alike' and 'different'. Everything a person can think of in which two or more things are alike is listed under 'alike', and everything a person can think of in which they are different is listed under 'different'. Then one can compare and contrast using the entries in each list.

Clustering

Clustering is a way to narrow a general topic to a manageable size. For example, a student might want to write about France, but that topic is much too general for a 600- or 1000-word report. The student can cluster possible subtopics around the general topic 'France'. After writing the general topic in the middle of the essay, write related subtopics around it. Then identify even more specific topics that relate to each subtopic. This picture will help you determine which topic has more appeal and, thus, help narrow down the possible areas for research.





Types of Reports

There are many types of research reports, but all involve the same three steps: doing research, organising information and writing the report. Most research reports written for school will be descriptive, narrative, comparison/contrast or cause and effect.

A descriptive report breaks a topic down into its parts so the reader can understand it. A narrative report tells a story of what has been discovered in the research. A comparison/contrast report demonstrates how two or more ideas or events are alike and different, or how they are and are not related. A cause and effect report seeks to prove that thing A is the cause of thing B. You will know what type of report to write by looking for keywords in the directions for the research report which your teacher gives you.

Keywords and What They Mean

1. Analyse

To *analyse* something, you break it into parts to find how the parts are related to each other. This helps you understand why events happened as they did or why you believe the way you do. When you analyse, you discuss cause and effect, explain your opinions or interpretations, and reveal facts and truths.

These keywords are similar to analyse: *evaluate, examine, explain, assess.*

2. Argue or Support

To *argue* or *support* means to take a stand for or against an issue. You must give evidence and reasons why you feel the way you do.

These keywords are similar to argue or support: *justify, defend, persuade.*

3. Describe

To *describe* means to use carefully selected details to re-create an issue or idea so your reader can understand it. You may need to tell a story about what happened.

These keywords are similar to describe: *narrate, relate, represent, depict, portray.*

4. Discuss

To *discuss*, you tell about a subject from more than one perspective. You may point out several different aspects of the subject, or you may talk about several different points.

These keywords are similar to discuss: *compare, contrast.*

The keyword in my assignment is _____