How To Do a Research Project in 10 Easy Steps

For many students, the phrase "research project" causes one to hyperventilate and down shift from calm to panic in .6 seconds. One of the big reasons this happens is the researcher tries to do too much all at once. Frequently when we assist someone with a project, he or she is attempting to come up with a topic, find sources, figure out what they're going to say, and worry about how to cite information in the paper…AT THE SAME TIME. It's no wonder heads spin like they're fresh from the *Exorcist*.

If you try to do everything at once, it would be like trying to paint a picture without paint. You can't do so without knowing <u>what</u> you want to paint, nor can you without having paint and brushes. Well, there's no way you can write a paper without knowing what you're going to write about (what picture to paint), and you can't possibly know what you're going to say—the paint and brushes—without finding information.

Below is a list of tips that if followed will dramatically reduce your already heightened stress levels and help you turn in a much better paper than you might otherwise.

1. DO NOT run to the internet. You will waste time. Besides, your teacher probably isn't going to allow its use anyway and if he or she does, at most it will be one or two sites.
2. Decide on a topic. To do this, think about your personal interests (there's <u>always</u> a way to turn it into a paper), consult the *10,000 Ideas for Term Papers* book by Kathryn Lamm (Location: Reference, 808.02 L213), and/or ask Liz or Greg in the library for help.
3. Begin locating sources of information using either the online catalog to search for books or the library's various databases…or both. Hint: Academic Search Premier, Opposing Viewpoints, Literature Resource Center, and Credo Reference Library are good places to begin and can be found using the Find An Article link. Be sure to make note of the source's publication information for inclusion on your Works Cited page. This is easily accomplished by highlighting the information, they copying and pasting it to a word processing document.
4. Read your sources and take notes. Use note cards to jot down facts, quotes, and ideas. Make sure you write down the source on each card for the facts and quotes. **For literature criticism papers**, read works by your chosen author first…then find information regarding them.

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5. Once you've created a good pile of information on the note cards, play "Research Solitaire" whereby you organize your cards in piles according to related information. You will be able to clearly see where you have enough information, where you don't and need to add more, and what just isn't going to fit. These piles will quickly and easily turn themselves into paragraphs.
6. Write your rough draft.
7. Visit the Writing Desk (either in person or you may submit your paper electronically to ops@lc.edu) for help with grammar, spelling, organization, and citation issues. You may also ask Liz or Greg for citation help.
8. Revise your paper accordingly. You may or may not need to do a little more research at this point. If you do, and your instructor allows you to use the web, this is the time to do it.
9. Bring your "final" draft to the Writing Desk (or its electronic counterpart at ops@lc.edu) and/or library for one final check. Make changes as necessary, if any.
10. Hand in paper and breathe a sigh of relief.

Other Tips

- DO NOT commit whole weekends or days to working on your paper. If you spend approximately 45-90 minutes three or four times a week, you won't burn yourself out and the project won't overwhelm you.
- Write the Introduction and Conclusion/Summary paragraphs of your paper last. Why? Because you can tweak them to fit with what is covered in your body paragraphs.
- You don't have to read an entire book. Check the Table of Contents or index for the location of your specific topic. You need only read that section.
- Education (.edu) and Government (.gov) sites are usually the most reliable sources for web information.
- Save your work frequently on **BOTH** your personal computer's hard drive and a flash drive. Work saved to LCCC computers is wiped out at the end of the day.