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Introduction

Writing a research paper is an essential experience for a high school student, particularly those who are college bound. We recommend that students complete at least two complete research papers prior to graduation. This particular course is designed to be completed in one semester and is worth ½ high school credit. Some experience with report writing should be accomplished prior to tackling a research paper project. A fairly strong mastery of writing including paragraph development, transition sentences, basic grammar/punctuation and outlining will make the process easier to complete successfully.

Our goals for the students who utilize Train up a Child Publishing curriculum to learn about the research paper writing process include:

- Selecting appropriate topics
- Developing stronger organization methods
- Researching and note-taking techniques
- Outlining proficiency
- Thesis statement development
- Improving writing skills
- Creating a bibliography
- Footnoting skills
- Understanding the MLA standards for writing.

As with all Train up a Child Publishing high school curricula, we have included distinctive and helpful components for both the student and the teacher. Some valuable highlights of this particular curriculum include:

- An introduction and teacher notes with information about the research paper writing process and how to fully use the curriculum.
- Step by step instructions offering various assignments directly related to the creation of a research paper.
- Evaluation directions, rubric usage and recommendations for the teacher.
- The opportunity to utilize the course for Honors credit.
- Appendices containing helpful tools such as:

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- Example of an actual high school student’s research paper including the thesis statement, outline and bibliography
- Information about plagiarism
- Exploration research worksheet
- MLA standards and formatting
- Common transitional words
- Editing checklist
- Footnoting instructions and example

Teacher’s Notes

Honors Credit

Before beginning this course, you will want to decide whether to work through the Honors course load or the College Prep course load. An Honors curriculum is more challenging and time consuming, typically requiring higher level thinking skills and more effort. However, it is an asset to any student’s transcript when seeking college admission and scholarships, particularly in a state with a weighted grade point average. With a research paper, the best way to establish criteria for Honors credit is by developing specific goals including:

- *Length of the paper* – for College Prep credit, the paper length should run between 10-13 pages. For Honors credit, the student should aim for 15-18 pages.
- *Research depth* – for College Prep credit, the number of resources may be around two to three books plus one to two other resources, including Internet research. For Honors credit, the student should add several resources to the list.
- *Topic selection* – a significant aspect of Honors credit is higher level thinking and this should be reflected in the topic selection. A more challenging, thought provoking topic should be considered for Honors credit.

Course Format

This particular course is designed in the following order:

1. Introduction and Teacher’s Notes
2. Student’s instructions

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3. Teacher's evaluation directions
4. Appendices.

We recommend that the teacher read the entire student section and evaluation directions prior to beginning the course. Looking over the Appendices to see available tools and additional instructions is also useful.

Understanding the Steps

This curriculum is set up with the student's portion of the course presented first followed by the teacher's evaluation section and the appendices. Establishing a time frame for each section is recommended so that the student can complete the paper in a single semester or 18 weeks. We recommend the following timeline, but depending on the student's motivation, work ethic and number of drafts needed, you may want to adjust it.

- Topic Selection (1 week)
- Research and Note-taking (4-6 weeks)
- Thesis Statement/Outline (1 week)
- Writing Body/Footnoting – initial draft (4-6 weeks)
- Introduction and Conclusion (1 week)
- Bibliography (1 week)
- Second draft (1-2 weeks)
- Final draft (1-2 weeks)

It's wise to develop specific deadlines for your student prior to starting the process. You may even want to consider having more than one deadline during the note-taking and writing sections so that you can be sure that your student is on track for successful completion. Of course, it is important for you to check your student's progress often – for most students, a weekly “check-in” is helpful to make sure assigned work is getting done on a timely basis.

Note the sample research paper in Appendix B. You may want to have your student read the paper prior to starting or simply utilize each part of it as examples, when needed.

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Final Note

A student's first research paper can seem daunting and maybe even impossible. If you have a reluctant writer, you can increase enthusiasm for the project by letting your student choose a topic of interest to research and write about, particularly for a first research paper. My youngest loved the process of learning about the history of electric guitars for his first research paper!

It's best to be clear up front that writing a research paper is a multi-step process eventually leading to a final greater project. Staying on top of the deadlines and making sure that your student completes each step completely and properly is vital.

Support

If you have any questions about how to use this curriculum, please contact us at infodesk@trainupachildpub.com and we will do our best to get back to you within one business day. We are here to help you succeed!

Student's Instructions Sample

STUDENT'S INSTRUCTIONS

Understanding Research Writing

The Purpose of Writing Research Papers

Definition

Research writing is a type of academic expression that:

1. demonstrates a thorough examination and understanding of a specific topic or subject.
2. includes the writer's evaluation or analysis of the research accomplished.
3. relies on expert advice and information.

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This style of writing requires an integration of the author's knowledge supported by that of qualified experts. A research paper is more than a combination of information, bibliographic sources and statistics in the proper format. It requires analytical and critical thinking skills so that the writer demonstrates not only an understanding of the material but why that understanding is important.

Components

A research paper contains the following components, all of which should be examined prior to beginning the process.

- *Topic* – Selecting an appropriate topic allows you to start off on the right foot.
- *Notes* – Note-taking is an essential skill for writing a research paper. A thorough understanding of how best to take notes will help you stay organized and avoid plagiarism. See Appendix D for more information about plagiarism.
- *Thesis* – What your paper is about. You will develop this statement to provide a clear picture of the paper's theme.
- *Outline* – As the map of the research paper, a thorough outline provides direction for you in the midst of a lengthy writing project. If you carefully think through your outline, your paper will be much easier to write.
- *Body* – The actual writing based on the notes and outline.
- *Footnotes* – These notations reflect where you found the expert statements and ideas you used in the body of your paper to support your assertions.
- *Bibliography* – A list of resources utilized throughout the paper; this section provides a quick reference material overview.

Types of Research Papers

The two main types of research papers are analytical and persuasive. Almost any thesis can be altered to demonstrate one of these two formats.

1. *Analytical* – With this type of research paper, your job is to do enough research to become an expert on a specific topic and then present that expertise in your own unique way. Often students think that simply copying notes from a source and rewording them is all it takes. The reality is that you should have a thorough understanding of your topic and create an originally written paper based on the acquired knowledge.

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Analytical writing requires critical thinking and evaluation of a given topic. Reading and examination of research sources is the most common way for you to acquire the necessary knowledge. Other types of research may be done as well, including interviewing, questioning and interacting (i.e. creating a social networking account online to directly experience the ramifications and value). Questioning is a vital part of research writing (i.e., Why did the Civil War start? How important were slaves to the South? Who created the Emancipation Proclamation?). Ultimately, the goal of an analytical paper is to demonstrate your authority on a specific subject.

2. *Persuasive* – Also known as an argumentative paper, you create a thesis statement that takes an obvious stance concerning a multi-sided subject. You then focus on persuading the reader by presenting support for your stance. The research comes into play as you use expert research and experience to establish your persuasive points. The key to an excellent persuasive essay is to present substantially supported points in an organized, cohesive manner allowing the reader to be persuaded. The focus needs to be on the specific points that will lead the reader to being convinced that the thesis statement is true.

Many thesis statements may be presented as either analytical or persuasive, depending on the main idea and presentation. For example, an analytical thesis could be, “Leonardo da Vinci’s scientific and artistic achievements demonstrate his identity as the quintessential Renaissance man.” A persuasive slant on that same thesis might be, “Leonardo da Vinci’s artistic achievements greatly outweigh any of his scientific contributions.” It is essential that you have a clear understanding of which type of paper you are writing prior to note-taking and establishing your thesis statement. The process of note-taking may alter your thinking and research paper type as you discover the expertise available to support one or the other more effectively.

Overall Objectives

Writing:

1. The writing is original.
2. The writing is concise, clear and well-organized.
3. The paper follows the outline.

Technical:

1. All technical rules are followed as outlined in Appendix F on MLA standards and formatting.

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2. The essay is within the length as noted on the grading rubric.
3. The essay is completed within the agreed upon time frame.

Format Related:

1. All formatting rules are followed as outlined in Appendix F on MLA standards and formatting.
2. The paper is written in 3rd person.
3. All components (body, footnotes, bibliography, etc.) are included in the final draft.

Topic Selection

Choosing the Most Appropriate Topic

While it might be tempting to view this component of a research paper as easier than the others, don't jump too quickly. It is definitely possible to choose the wrong topic, or too broad of a topic, and waste time before you realize it's not working out well. Rather than randomly choosing a topic, follow these guidelines and assignments to make a wise decision.

Techniques

If a topic hasn't been assigned to you by your teacher, try each of the following techniques in order to create a topic list for yourself.

1. *Defining direction* – Defining which direction you'll take in topic selection can depend on your interests, your areas of knowledge or a particular subject (i.e., science, history, etc.). For example, if you need a science topic, consider moving in the direction of those themes that you have recently studied. If you don't have direction from a course or instructor, another path you could consider is an area in which you have particular knowledge or a strong interest. You could also select a topic you desire to learn more about. Your topic list could be related to art, sports, politics, religion or current events.

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Assignment A: Describe the general direction that you'll be using to select your topic. For example, Modern American History, Female Folk Singers or War Weapons could all work. They're general, but still eliminate many other types of topics.

2. *Brainstorm* – Once you've defined your direction, create a list of topics by brainstorming. During this process, don't think of any topic as off limits. Simply make a list related to your topic direction. You'll probably notice that as your list grows, ideas develop from noted topics.

Assignment B: For this brainstorming activity, be sure to include at least 12-15 topic ideas that are all related to your topic direction.

3. *Questioning* – After you've completed your brainstormed list, ask yourself the following questions about each of your topics:
 - Will I be able to locate enough information and sources related to this topic?
 - Is this a topic that I'll stay interested in as I research and write an extensive paper?
 - Will my audience (teacher, classmate, etc.) find this topic interesting?

This technique should help you narrow down your list somewhat. Any topic that doesn't receive a positive answer to the above questions should probably be eliminated early on.

Assignment C: Apply the above questions to each of your topics and cross off any topics that don't receive affirmative answers.

4. *Journalistic Questions* – This technique can be extremely helpful in discovering an appropriate topic. It allows you to further eliminate topics. When applying journalistic questions, consider starting with the following:
 - What do I already know about this topic that would make it an appropriate one for me?
 - Why might I choose this topic over the others on the list?

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- How difficult would it be to find research information for this topic?

Assignment D: Orally apply each of the above questions, plus any others that you've thought of, to your remaining topics. By doing so, you should be able to narrow down your topics even further and maybe even get down to two or three topics.

5. *Exploration Research* – Once you're down to two or three topics, preliminary research can help you determine which topic would be best for your research paper.

Assignment E: Using the Exploration worksheet in Appendix E, pre-research your topics by exploring the options available. Using the Internet and library services, investigate what resources are available for each of your topics. By examining your possible research materials, you may find that certain topics are much more viable than others. Be sure to check out the dates of publications because more recent materials may be most valuable.

If after completing all of these techniques, you are still struggling with which topic to choose, select the one that you find most interesting or would enjoy exploring deeply.

Now that you have completed the first essential step to writing an excellent research paper, get ready for some serious note-taking.

Notes or questions:

Teacher's Instructions Sample

TEACHER'S DIRECTIONS

Evaluation and Grading Tips/Tools

Evaluating a student's research paper is a multi-step process with the emphasis on the final draft of the paper. The components of the research paper writing process may be evaluated for a number grade and then averaged or basically assigned a pass/fail grade for each. Each component relies on the previous one, so if the student doesn't complete a portion properly, movement through the

The Steps to Writing a Research Paper Sample

process shouldn't continue until there is success. For example, if the outline is weak or not detailed enough, no actual writing should take place until the outline has been corrected. Even if you don't require the student to do every assignment in this curriculum, the following basic components must be completed for the research paper process to be complete:

- Topic Selection
- Research and note-taking
- Thesis statement
- Outline
- Body of the paper
- Footnotes
- Multiple drafts
- Bibliography.

The majority of the evaluation takes place with the completed final draft. We strongly recommend using a grading rubric to establish a single grade for the overall paper.

Research Paper Grading Rubric

This is the end of the sample of The Steps to Writing a Research Paper! If you have any questions about this or any of our other courses, we would love to hear from you at the email address at the bottom of the page.