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Printed in the United States of America
To the memory of Sharolyn Swan
whose kind guidance and unfailing support
made this publication possible ...
May her spirit rest in peace.
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Foreword

In preparing the third edition of this booklet, it became obvious that adding APA style was essential. Most professors require either MLA or APA style, and so a sample APA paper was added in addition to a list of APA requirements. This opens the booklet up to a much wider audience and will certainly prove valuable to many more students and teachers.

It is my great hope that students and teachers alike will make this small booklet a part of their academic lives and enjoy using it as much as I enjoyed creating it.
Introduction

After years of teaching thousands of students and grading approximately that many research papers, a professor starts to get an idea about how to teach the research process. I finally came to the realization that if I taught well, my students wrote some amazingly high quality papers, and grading became much easier. The result is this simple, ten-step approach to writing a well-organized, quality research paper.

These ten easy steps will guide your research effort from choosing a topic to writing the rough draft to the final quality product. I wrote a research paper, one in MLA style and one in APA style, specifically for this booklet as an example of this technique and have used the mind map and outline from the booklet to demonstrate my research method. In this way, you will be able to feel the research experience in action from beginning to end. Most of the examples in the steps refer to MLA style; however, I have included a section on APA style as well.

From the mind map to the outline to the actual paper, you can follow the step-by-step progression of writing an excellent research paper, and once you write one successful, quality research paper, the rest are a piece of cake!
Step 1  Choosing a Topic and Title

Always select a topic which truly interests you. Your enthusiasm will carry you through to the end. Remember to be specific: find a small plot and dig deep.

First of all, let me explain the most important aspect of this approach. YOU are the author of this paper. You are the one driving the boat. You are the one interpreting the information you find, and you are passing it on to others so that they can share in your discovery. It is your project.

For that reason, you need to choose a topic that both challenges and interests you, one that you would read about if you had a sunny day at the beach and nowhere to go. Sometimes you have a choice about choosing a topic and sometimes you don’t according to the class requirements. If you have the opportunity to choose your topic, look at the possible topics at the back of this booklet for some creative ideas on areas to research! After choosing your topic, create a title in the form of a question.

Hint: Look in your own collection of books to get ideas about your topic.
How I Did It...

Choosing a topic was a difficult process for me. Before I decided on a topic for the sample research paper in this booklet, I went through LOTS of topics. I asked myself many questions. What will students be interested in reading? What will really keep them involved? I was getting nowhere. Every time I came up with something I thought would “sell” students, I lost interest in the topic.

Finally, I backed off and decided to look at what would interest ME! After all, that was my advice to you, my students! At the time, I had been newly diagnosed with a stress-related illness. I was quite ill, barely getting up and down steps, fatigued and in pain. All of a sudden, I had a topic in which I had a vested interest: I wanted to get better. Now it became MY topic, and as a result of my research, guess what? I am remarkably better, not running up and down steps but so much improved! I am so glad I chose that topic. I learned more about my health and myself than a doctor could ever have taught me.

You HAVE to choose a topic that is of value to you at some level—academic, personal, emotional, physical, intellectual, spiritual—or all of the above. You have to have some vested interest in pursuing this research.

This driving fascination will not only carry you through to the end but also will allow you to create something of true worth and value, something more than just the fulfillment of a class requirement. “Research” means we are setting out to explore something of interest about which we want to increase our knowledge. Do some soul searching before choosing your topic.
Step 2  Preliminary Search

After choosing your topic, do a preliminary search on the internet and in the library to make sure there is enough material on your subject and also to make sure that your topic is not too broad. Use keywords to guide your search.

The purpose of the preliminary search is to make sure your topic is not too broad or too narrow. Remember to be very open to what you find. Use many different keywords to do your search, changing them often to open up new possibilities. Print a few articles and review them briefly to see if you want to read further. Save them for future use in your paper. At this point, your topic can change since you are still exploring the subject.

You will find yourself drawn to books and articles which reflect your genuine areas of interest, and the research trail will take you in the direction YOU choose to go!

By the way, librarians love it when you ask for help. They can show you databases and materials very specific to your subject—resources you might never have found if you had not asked for help. Go ahead...Make a librarian’s day!

**Hint:** Go to the library to get great help with finding information.
How I Did It...

The preliminary search started out pretty easy for me. After all, I am an English teacher, so the first thing I did was to look at my own collection of books to see if I could use any of them in my research. Unfortunately, I have very few health books, and I did not have any specific books on the subject of fibromyalgia since my diagnosis was relatively new. The books I do have on health, however, are very old and very basic, so I started out by reading about healthy living in general. As it turns out, my research revealed that getting better with this diagnosis means a lifestyle change as is true with so much illness. After my research, at least part of my plan has been to go back to the basics I read about in my health books of the past, the ones I reviewed during my preliminary search.

This does not mean YOU will not find really good sources in your own collection of books about your subject. You DO have a “library” whether you know it or not. Look there first. Chances are if you are excited about your topic, it is something you have explored.

Next, I did an internet search on stress-related disease which included causes, types, symptoms, traditional treatments, alternative cures, anything to help me better understand why I developed this illness and what was going to make me better.

When you do your preliminary search, really think about different combinations of keywords to check out your topic. The idea is to review different articles about your subject. If you find an article that really intrigues you, go ahead and make a copy of it for future use, or you could just bookmark the website. The important thing is to start the process of finding sources of information. Be careful that you do not spend too much time with no results.
Step 3  Mind Map and Thesis Statement

Create a mind map in the form of a bubble chart as you brainstorm about what you know of the topic including information from your preliminary search for sources.

After your preliminary review, make a mind map which is a bubble chart of your knowledge on the subject. Write down everything that you can think of about your topic, insights you had before and after the preliminary review. As you think of one aspect, branch off into other aspects. The idea is to take a snapshot of what you currently know or want to explore about your topic. This is a spontaneous, freethinking exercise. It does not have to be organized and formal. Get your creative juices flowing!

In this brainstorming process, you will collect more information than you will need, and you will use it as a means of narrowing down and better understanding various aspects of your topic that interest you. Construct a thesis statement, one sentence that summarizes the main point of your paper and include it on the first page of your paper.

**Hint:** The mind map becomes the springboard to your research project.
This is not a time to hold back. Write down everything that you can possibly think of that relates to your topic. You will be surprised at how much detail will come to mind once you get started. If you have chosen a good solid topic that thoroughly intrigues you, the mind map will flow easily. If you are struggling, perhaps this is the time to change your topic. The mind map really is a blueprint of your brain about your interest in and understanding of your chosen topic.

As you think about your topic, notice that major categories or areas of interest begin to develop. Write them down, and then branch off from these key areas of interest into more detail. The more detailed your mind map is, the easier it will be to write your outline later. You are not going to use everything on the mind map on your outline or even in your paper, but the brainstorming session will help you pinpoint what really interests you about the subject. You might only use half of the information on the mind map, but at least you will know why you picked the topic and where you want to go with it ultimately. You will be surprised at how much you already know about the subject and the many aspects that are yet to be explored. The mind map truly is the fertile ground from which your research paper will spring to life.

**Hint:** Imagine your mind is a blank page then fill it up with ideas, thoughts and reflections about your topic.
WHAT IS THE BEST APPROACH TO CONTROLLING THE EFFECTS OF STRESS ON THE HUMAN BODY AND PSYCHE?

OVERVIEW
- History
- Definition
- Positive vs. Negative Stress

ORIGINS OF STRESS
- Financial Problems
- Feeling Overwhelmed
- Anxiety
- Indecision
- Powerlessness
- Societal Pressures
- Technological Changes

PHYSIOLOGY
- Fatigue
- Nervous Disorders
- Digestive Problems
- Generalized Pain
- Weakened Immune System

REPERCUSSIONS
- Reduced Quality of Life
- Depression
- Social Dysfunction

TREATMENTS
- Identifying Stressors
- Yoga
- Meditation
- Psychotherapy
- Pharmaceuticals
How I Did It...

My mind map was relatively easy since I had explored my topic from the personal perspective of my illness and had also spent some time on the internet doing my preliminary search. As I brainstormed, I remembered to include major areas of interest about my subject. I listed these major categories and started writing down everything I could think of related to my knowledge of stress. I really had not thought about it that much. At first, I included my knowledge about the illness from personal experience, then I started freethinking about what I had discovered on the internet. It is not that difficult to brainstorm about the many aspects of a topic if you have had some personal experience with it. I started to list my symptoms, both physical and emotional. I explored ways that this illness had changed my life. I tried to pinpoint potential causes. In short, I racked my brain on every aspect of my life since I had been diagnosed with fibromyalgia. After I reviewed a few articles, I was able to compare what I had read with what I was experiencing. I recorded all this information on my mind map which was soon a combination of what I knew and what I still needed to find out.

My mind map gave me a starting point on which to build my research. It gave me the impetus to go forward. It truly offered the motivation to move forward with my paper. I have, in the past, constructed even more than one mind map.

After the mind map, it is a good idea to construct a thesis statement, which is a summary statement describing your main point. The thesis statement should appear in the first paragraph of your paper. It can help keep you on track as far as the purpose of your research. My thesis statement is the last sentence in bold of the first paragraph of the sample papers at the back of this booklet. Review them for a good example of a strong thesis statement.
Step 4  Headings

From the mind map, identify five to seven major headings for your research paper. This is called the classification pattern of writing.

Major headings will organize your research topic into manageable categories, and they will form the Roman numerals for your outline. In addition, the headings will be placed into the body of your paper so that not only is your paper easier to write, it is easier to read.

This pattern of writing is called “classifying” since you are taking bits of information and classifying them into major common areas. By creating these categories early on, you will have a guide to follow when sorting out all the data you discover.

I.  Overview
II.  Origins of Stress
III. Repercussions of Stress-Related Disease
IV.  Physiology of Stress
V.   Treatment of Stress-Related Disease
VI.  Findings

Hint:  Use your headings as the Roman numerals for your outline.
How I Did It...

I knew the headings for my paper would somehow evolve from the mind map, so I kept that in mind as I was brainstorming. I tried to think of major categories that interested me, problems I had actually encountered with my illness.

When I went back to review my mind map in search of headings, they just seemed to jump out at me. The headings I ended up choosing were clearly logical dividers for the many aspects of my topic: Overview, Origins, Repercussions, Physiology, Treatment and Findings.

I had really combed my mind to determine these headings and had given it much thought. For my first heading, I knew I wanted something introductory: Overview, Definition, History or Background. For my final heading, I wanted to prepare my audience for a definitive ending: Conclusions, Findings, Recommendations, Observations, or Deductions.

After deciding on my headings, my thoughts truly took a different turn. I could organize my research through these categories. By creating these subject areas, my review of sources could now become more organized. As I was drawn to facts and data that interested me, I was able to classify this information into the areas of my research.

After the headings fell into place, I even went back and added more to my mind map. There was something about listing the headings that seemed to make my research effort gel. I was able to categorize every piece of information I came across, then I could focus on organizing all that data within each category. Creating headings truly gave me a sense of organization and, ultimately, a well-organized research effort.
Step 5  Finding Source Materials

Find 10-20 sources on your topic. You can find materials on the internet, in libraries, on databases, and even in your own collection of books. Remember that the internet contains many sources but is not considered a source in and of itself.

Seek out lots of articles and materials on your topic. The more information you read, including opposing views and perceptions different from your own, the better you will understand your topic and the more interesting your paper will be. You probably will not use all the materials you review. By the way, remember to staple articles as you print them in order to keep track of all that paper.

Academic sources include books; articles from periodicals, journals, magazines, and newspapers; pamphlets; TV documentaries; videos; personal and professional interviews and the list goes on and on. Be creative in looking for sources. The sky’s the limit!

Hint: TV documentaries can be an interesting source of information for your paper.
With so much information at our fingertips these days, there is an endless supply of sources of data. You want to really scrutinize everything you read. Just because it is in print doesn’t necessarily mean it is a valid, documented source.

Usually, if you are reading something with a bibliography, the author has done his/her homework in researching the subject. Look over the source before you start reviewing it. Does it have an author and publication date? Is it an excerpt from a larger work?

Conducting an interview yourself is a very valuable way to obtain information. When interviewing someone in person, it is a good idea to tape the conversation WITH the permission of the person being interviewed. Often, you can email a professional, author or expert in the field with carefully constructed interview questions, and they will respond. So many of my students have done so and been surprised with the results. It’s worth a try!

**Hint:** Before your interview, think up four or five interesting questions to ask the person you are interviewing. Be imaginative!
The internet can be a great way to find materials, but you really have to be careful about what you pull up. Websites can be credible sources, but you have to verify that to yourself. What are the credentials of the experts giving information?

Whenever possible, print articles so that you can take notes in the margins as you read them. Materials can be copied as long as your intention is to use them for strictly academic purposes and not for profit. If watching a TV documentary or video, take notes and make sure to write down the time, date and name of the program.

Your school library or the public library contains a wealth of information AND librarians to assist you in wading through it. Your school library will have subject-specific databases which contain articles by subject. Some examples are PsychLit, InfoTrac and others. These databases include only scholarly articles in the field, allowing you to search for reliable sources. Feel free to explore alternative sources, however, in search of the truth. The internet has given us access to all sorts of investigative sources that research topics thoroughly. “Mainstream media” is not always the most reliable and completely documented source. Explore other options in your pursuit of truth. Look into alternative news sources.

**Hint:** Make sure the websites you use are reliable sources.
How I Did It...

Finding source materials was a little difficult because my mobility was rather limited at the time, so I did much of my research on the internet. I did, however, manage to go to the public library and access some information. While surfing the net, I was very careful about what to use. Before I even reviewed an article, I checked it for reliability. If it did not have an author or if I could not verify the origin or credentials of the writer, I did not always use the article unless it was a reputable website. In this day and age, ANYONE can post information on the web, so I was very discerning about what I chose to research for my paper.

I collected MANY articles! As a matter of fact, I did not use a number of the articles I found. My goal was to set up a broad spectrum of data. I did a brief review, and if I thought there was a remote possibility I might use the article for my paper, I copied it. I always stapled my articles as soon as I printed them since I can sometimes be disorganized about paperwork!

I started looking out for articles in the local newspaper and TV documentaries that covered my topic. When you put out feelers like this, it is amazing what will come to you. The research project really became a part of my everyday coming and going. I was determined to find out all I could about stress-related disease. I talked to people to find out what others were doing to deal with this illness.

In the end, I found out that 80% of all illness is stress-related! Wow! Not just my little disease but many others were impacted by stress. I was now ready and equipped to get down to the bottom of the issue!