

Research Paper 101 Series

Step One: Start with a Plan

Do you remember learning the scientific method in elementary school? Ask a question, develop a hypothesis, test with experiments, gather data, draw conclusions, communicate results. Writing a good research paper follows many of the same steps. It all starts with making a plan.

Scenario: The sun is shining, and the birds are chirping. You feel in your bones it is going to be an excellent day. You blithely step into your Biblical Studies classroom and take a seat. Joy is welling up inside of you. Suddenly your professor gets a gleam in his eye and announces that he is going to give you instructions for the research paper that is due in four weeks. You saw this in the syllabus, but it seemed so far away. A raincloud obscures the sunlight (only you might not know this as there are no windows in your classroom). That good feeling in your bones seeps out like too much honey on a sandwich. Your palms feel sweaty and a mild feeling of panic sets in.

1. *Don't panic! Research papers can be broken in manageable steps. Back up from the due date and create a timeline.*

Here's an example based on a due date four weeks away.

One month before the due date:

- Read the assignment instructions carefully. If you don't understand the instructions, ask your professor.
- Choose your topic. Your professor may have provided you with a suggested list.
- Gather general information on your topic from course materials, encyclopedias, or reference databases.
- Based on your research, decide if you need to narrow or broaden your topic.
- Turn your topic into a research question.
- Download the format guide (APA, Chicago, or MLA) required for the assignment from <https://www.mybriercrest.ca/college/documents/>

Three weeks before the due date:

- Draft a thesis statement (see Step 3 in this series for more details).
- Visit the library to start looking at digital and print resources.
- Use a notetaking system to keep track of your information and where you find it.
- Create a concept map to show relationships between ideas, people, events, etc.
- Use your concept map to guide you in drafting an outline of the main points and supporting ideas.

Two Weeks before the due date:

- Finish researching to fill in any gaps in your outline.
- Review your thesis statement and outline. Does it need any tweaking? Ask your professor for feedback if you are unsure.
- Write a rough draft of your paper using your research notes and outline.
- Develop a bibliography/works cited page to track your sources.
- Read your rough draft and make necessary revisions and edits.

One week before the due date:

- Take your paper to the Writing Centre, Student Success Centre, or a friend for feedback.
- Make edits and proofread.
- If needed, return to the Writing Centre or Student Success Centre with your final draft. Make any final changes.

Due Date:

- Turn your paper in on time!!!

2. *Look at your calendar. Set task due dates for yourself. Block out periods of time to work on the steps for your research paper.*

4 weeks to go	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat
8:30-9:45		class		class	find specific sources in the library	
9:50-10:30	chapel	chapel	chapel	chapel		
10:40-11:35	class		class			
12:00-1:00	lunch	lunch	lunch	lunch	lunch	lunch
1:00-1:45			work			
1:50-3:05	read instructions, choose a topic	class	work	class		
3:05-4:30	class		class			draft thesis statement
4:30-5:30	dinner	dinner	dinner	dinner	dinner	dinner
5:30-7:30	work	gather general information				
7:30-9:30				make a list of questions to explore; choose one		

3. *Use graphic organizers or checklists (like the one above) to keep track of the necessary steps. The Student Success Centre has resources available.*

Next up... Developing a topic