



RESEARCH PAPER CHECKLIST

Use this checklist when you think you have finished with your research paper to verify you have avoided some of the most common errors of writers of research papers.

WORLD HISTORY

I. TITLE PAGE

- A. Is a title page included?
- B. Does the title page contain all of the required information?
 1. Title
 2. Name
 3. Teachers' Names—Did you spell the teachers' names correctly?
 4. Course Titles
 5. Date—Was the MLA date format used where the day is given first, then the month, and then the year (e.g., 5 April 2000)?
- C. Is the title page formatted correctly? See "Formatting an MLA Research Paper" for specifics.

II. OUTLINE

- A. Is the outline titled using the same title as the paper itself?
- B. Does the outline contain the thesis statement?
- C. If subtopics are used under any main topic, are there at least two subtopics? Note, subtopics are divisions of the topic above them. A topic cannot be divided into fewer than two parts.
- D. Do all topics in the outline develop and relate to the thesis statement? Do all subtopics under a topic develop and relate to that topic?
- E. Is the outline parallel in form? As a general rule, main topics should be parallel in form, and subtopics under the same topic should be parallel in form. If in a list of topics the first word is a noun, the others should be nouns; if it is an adjective, the others should be adjectives. Subtopics under different topics need **not** be parallel.
- F. Is the outline properly formatted? See the "Formatting an MLA Research Paper" model for specifics.

III. BODY OF PAPER

- A. Is the paper formatted properly? Note, the teacher does **not** want to hear such statements as: "The computer wouldn't do what it was supposed to do." **All** computers are capable of doing the following, so learn how to do these, find someone who does, or suffer the consequences!
 1. Do all pages have a one-inch top, bottom, left, and right margin?
 2. Is the paper double-spaced?
 3. Is a proper-sized font used? Times New Roman 12 point is a proper-sized font and should be used in all cases.
 4. Does each page of the paper—including the outline, first page, and works cited—have the proper header in the upper right-hand corner of the page one-half inch from the top? The header needs to contain your last name and the page number.
 5. Is everything stapled in the correct order? Please, you only need to staple the paper. **Do not put the paper in a folder or binder.** Staple the components of the paper in the following order:
 - a. Body of Paper
 - b. Appendix (optional)
 - c. Works Cited Page
 - d. Bibliography (optional)

- B. Does the paper have a clear, strong introduction? The introduction should get the reader's attention with an appropriate attention-getting device, transition toward the thesis, and end with the thesis statement. The introduction should be interesting, should flow smoothly, and should make the point(s) to be proven through the research. Since it makes the first impression on the reader, the introduction should be taken very seriously.
- C. Does the paper have a good, strong thesis statement?
1. Poor, weak thesis statement: "World War I had many causes."
 2. Good, strong thesis statement: "World War I was caused by the rise of nationalism along with massive military buildups and the creation of competing alliances throughout Europe."
- D. Is the thesis statement supported by three to five main points?
- E. Is equal support given to all main points?
- F. Is the paper paragraphed properly?
1. Do paragraphs have a topic sentence and a closing sentence?
 2. Does the content in each paragraph develop and stick to the topic sentence?
 3. Are any of the paragraphs overly long? If they are, it might be a good idea to divide that paragraph into a few smaller paragraphs.
 4. Are any of the paragraphs extremely short? Remember, a paragraph does not consist of a single sentence. A good rule is to have a minimum of five to seven sentences per paragraph.
- G. Have clear transitions been used between ideas within paragraphs and between paragraphs?
- H. Do all paragraphs relate to one of the main points? Remember, try to stay focused and do not include information that is irrelevant!
- I. Have such words as "this," "that," "these," and "those" to function as subjects in sentences been avoided? This construction leads to indefinite references.
1. Sentence with an indefinite reference: "This is very good."
 2. Sentence avoiding the indefinite reference: "This paper is very good."
- J. Is everything documented that needs to be documented?
1. Are all quotations documented directly?
 2. Are all facts and figures documented even if they are not quoted? Remember, though, that common knowledge should not be documented. For example, if the following statement appeared in the paper, it should not be documented: "The Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, just before 0700 hours."
- K. Is all documentation done correctly?
1. Parenthetical references contain the last name of the author(s) and the page(s) on which the material can be found.
 2. If the author is unknown, a shortened form of the title (correctly punctuated) should be used. The first important word of the title under which it was alphabetized in the Works Cited should be used.
 3. If the last citation you made within the paragraph was from the same source, only the page number needs to be included in the citation. But once a new paragraph begins, a full citation must be given again.
 4. Marks of punctuation come after the citation unless a block quotation is used, in which case the mark of punctuation comes before the citation.
- L. If quotations were used, were they used properly? Everyone is encouraged to quote specific passages from other sources. When quoting, though, be sure to observe the following rules:
1. Use quotations sparingly.
 2. **Do not just stick a quotation into a paper.** All quotations should be introduced or blended into your sentences. When attributing a quotation to a specific person, give that person's credentials; it makes what they have to say more meaningful and credible. Also, make sure the quotation relates to the previous sentence(s). There must be good continuity.
 3. Carefully choose the information quoted. Make sure the quotation serves some purpose and would not have been better served to have been paraphrased. Do **not** quote specific dates or statistics.
 4. Keep quotations short. Try to avoid quoting entire paragraphs or pages of text. If a quotation runs over four lines (about 100 words), a block quotation must be used. To make a block quotation,

indent the entire quotation an extra one inch from the left margin. Also, in a block quotation, the punctuation comes before the citation, and quotation marks are not used.

5. Do not hesitate to ask if there is any uncertainty. The effective use of quotations can be tricky.
- M. Is the paper free from the use of first person (I, my, mine, we, our) and second person (you, your)? Note, if the first or second person appears in a direct quotation, it is acceptable.
- N. Is the paper free from the use of contractions (it's, isn't, we're, they're, etc.)?
- O. Is the paper free from the use of abbreviations? Note, even the use of common abbreviations such as "U.S." for "United States" should be avoided. However, the acronym for an agency with a long name may be used if the agency's complete name is written out the first time it is used and appropriate acronym is indicated afterwards in parentheses. For example, NASA may be used in subsequent references if it was properly identified the first time it was used as follows: National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA).
- P. Is everything spelled correctly? Note, running the computer's spell check may not be enough to catch misused words such as "there" and "their," "affect" and "effect," "except" and "accept," etc.
- Q. Is everything punctuated correctly?
- R. Does the paper include a clear, strong conclusion? The concluding paragraph makes the last impression on the reader, so it should be considered as important as the introduction. Begin the conclusion with a restatement of the thesis, but do not use the exact wording. Then summarize the main argument in three or four sentences. Finally, end your paper with a creative, thought-provoking idea that gives the paper a feeling of finality. Do not begin the conclusion with the words "in conclusion" or other such expressions.
- S. Does the paper integrate all sources used? **Note, a research paper is not a summary of one source with a fact or two from other sources thrown in for good measure!**
- T. Has someone else read the paper? Having someone else read the paper is a good idea. They are much more likely to catch a mistake, especially if the paper was written at the last moment.
- U. **Is the paper free from plagiarism?** Note, the passages from another source cannot simply be copied word-for-word! These passages must either be quoted or paraphrased and must be documented! **Plagiarism will result in automatic failure!**

IV. WORKS CITED PAGE

- A. Does the Works Cited page contain all sources used and only those sources actually cited somewhere in the paper? Note, if other sources have been consulted but have not actually been cited in the paper, they may be included in a separate Bibliography, but the Works Cited page is not the place.
- B. Is the Works Cited page labeled and formatted properly? See the "Formatting an MLA Research Paper" model for specifics.
- C. Does the Works Cited page contain at least the minimum number of sources required?
- D. Are all entries documented properly? Note, you must capitalize all important words in a title, even if they were not capitalized in the actual title.
- E. Are all sources alphabetized by the author's last name or the first important word in the title if the author is unknown? Note, the bibliographic citations are not numbered.