



Research Essay: Student Guide

WRITING A GOOD RESEARCH PAPER

May 2015

MLA Style Research Paper
based on the 7th ed. of the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. Created Nov 10, 2009.

Your name

Professor

Course name

Date

John Smith Professor

Williams American

Studies 104

14 March 2008

Title is centered

Found Voices: Carl Sagan

Your last name, and page # on upper right corner of each page ½ inch from top border.

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Use Times New Roman 12 pt. or similar easy to read font.

Double space entire paper

Indent 1 inch from left border

Carl Sagan was perhaps one of the most influential scientific minds that the world has ever experienced. When he learned that stars were actually extremely distant suns, his world was changed and the magnitude of the universe opened up to him. Another strong motivator into science came with his reading of a popular science fiction book of the time, *The Burroughs Tales*. The stories were not extremely sound scientifically, but still presented ideals of adventure and the unknown. The idea that life could exist elsewhere in the universe fascinated Sagan and remained with him for

Italicize names of books, plays, poems, television shows, newspapers, magazines, websites, databases, art, ships, and space craft.

Indent additional ½ inch when

beginning a new paragraph

the rest of his life (Eicher). In-text citation pointing to a specific source in the works cited list.

Perhaps one of Sagan's most famous individual accomplishments was his involvement with the *Pioneer 10 Space Probe*. The probe was created to be the first object to exit our galaxy. Sagan acknowledged that the chances of anything actually discovering the probe were astronomical, but believed that it was important to promote public appreciation for science and thought the project to be "all in good fun" (McDonough 50). Citation with page number of quotation.

Public appreciation for science was, in fact, what made Sagan the "superstar scientist" that we hear of today. His ability to portray complex

Your name, page # on upper right corner of each page ½ inch from top border.

Leave a 1 inch margin from top of paper

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science as attainable was what made him such a sensational figure. The greatest example of this was his *Cosmos Series*. In this thirteen part television series Sagan presented and explained a large variety of scientific topics ranging from the origin of life to our place in the universe. It was the most watched series in the United States for ten years after its release in 1980 (Cohen).

Another work of his similar to *Cosmos* was his book *Pale Blue Dot*. In the book Sagan instills a sense of perspective and wonder into man's position in the universe (Carl Sagan - *Pale Blue Dot*). This is one of the most widely known works by Sagan and many believe it to be his greatest work.

Along with this interest and promotion of science, Sagan also tried to push people away from pseudo science. His work in exobiology made it inevitable that he would eventually have to address the growing belief in UFOs that was so prevalent in the 60s era. Sagan investigated and

acknowledged extraordinary claims but remained extremely skeptical in his approach. He believed that investigating and disproving popular paranormal claims would raise scientific awareness (Morrison, Sagan 30).

Sagan was a strong proponent of ending the arms race. This may have been motivated in part by his study of exobiology. While considering the probability of other life in the universe he surmised that industrial societies would bring about their own extinction rather quickly (Morrison, Carl 57).

Leave a 1 inch margin from bottom of paper

When there are two different sources by one author, in the in-text citation provide additional information to direct the reader to the correct source.

Definition

The research essay is distinguished by its formal style, title page, parenthetical citations, and works cited list. A research essay is an essay in which you incorporate your own thoughts with other people's words and thoughts (*Communications* 40). The research paper is "based on your exploration of the people's ideas, rather than simply an analysis of your own thoughts" (Buckley 77). The purpose of the research paper is not merely to inform or explain, but to present a point of view, by supporting or drawing a conclusion from the information presented. Your purpose is to take a stand on a particular topic and present evidence to support that stand.

A research essay is **NOT** a report. A report merely presents factual information with no argument; it is like a news report. A research essay, on the other hand, expresses the author's opinion, supported by research, by arguing a thesis. A research essay:

- is meant to present research
- is a formal essay based on investigation of other people's ideas
- is **NOT** simply an analysis of your own thoughts
- includes a thesis based on research from a wide variety of sources
- demonstrates that you have accessed, evaluated, and recorded source material in a cohesive way
- evaluates and synthesizes your findings according to your thesis
- does not simply record facts (*On* 15)

Steps in Writing the Research Essay

1. Choose a subject and narrow it into a topic
2. Access resources and do some preliminary research
3. Formulate a thesis (based on your research)
4. Take notes
5. Prepare a working bibliography
6. Create an outline
7. Write a first draft
8. Revise and edit your paper
9. Write your final draft according to MLA specifications
10. Prepare your works cited page

Sources of Information

Print

- Books (Use OPAC)—Miller and Regina Public Library

Electronic

- On-line encyclopedia
- Databases (InfoTrac for magazines; Proquest for newspapers)
- Search engines

Other

- Television program, movie
- Personal interview

Evaluating Sources

- Who is the source of information? A person? Organization? Government or other agency?
- Can you confirm that the source is credible?
- Does the date of the source match the level of currency you need for your paper? Is the site updated? Do the links work?
- Can you determine if the source is fact, opinion, or propaganda?

Thesis statement

A thesis statement is a single, declarative sentence which states the main purpose (argument) or central idea of your paper. The thesis makes a point which will be proven in the essay.

- It is **NOT** the title or topic of the paper.
- It is **NOT** a question.
- It often contains sub points.
- It is the conclusion which arises logically out of the research.
- It is part (usually the last sentence) of the introductory paragraph.

Examples of thesis statements:

- *Seniors, over the age of seventy, should be retested for their driver's license because of physical and mental health problems which cause an increase in accidents.*
- *Shakespeare is not the author of the plays attributed to him.*
- *Many of the activities included in the Olympics are not truly sports, and therefore should not be a part of the games.*

Documentation and Plagiarism

All borrowed material **MUST** be acknowledged. This includes direct quotations, paraphrases (including ideas, style, and language), and summaries. Failure to provide the sources for all borrowed ideas and facts constitutes **plagiarism**—a serious academic offense of intentionally or unintentionally presenting another's words or ideas as your own. It is also known as cheating, borrowing, stealing, or copying (*On* 41).

To avoid plagiarism, you must indicate the source of all material you use in your essay. This consists of two parts—parenthetical citations within the body of the essay and a works cited list at the end of the essay.

In-text Citations

MLA recommends in-text citations that refer readers to a list of works cited. A typical in-text citation names the author of the source, often in a signal phrase, and gives a page number in parentheses. At the end of the paper, the list of works cited provides publication information about the source; the list is alphabetized by authors' last names (or by titles for works without in-text authors). There is a direct connection between the in-text citation and the alphabetical listing. See the following examples.

Examples taken from the website: <http://www.hackerhandbooks.com/writersref>

1. AUTHOR NAMED IN A SIGNAL PHRASE Ordinarily, introduce the material being cited with a signal phrase that includes the author's name. In addition to preparing readers for the source, the signal phrase allows you to keep the parenthetical citation brief.

Christine Haughney reports that shortly after Japan made it illegal to use a handheld phone while driving, "accidents caused by using the phones dropped by 75 percent" (8).

The signal phrase — Christine Haughney reports that — names the author; the parenthetical citation gives the page number where the quoted words may be found.

Notice that the period follows the parenthetical citation. When a quotation ends with a question mark or an exclamation point, leave the end punctuation inside the quotation mark and add a period after the parentheses: ". . . ?" (8).

2. AUTHOR NAMED IN PARENTHESES If a signal phrase does not name the author, put the author's last name in parentheses along with the page number.

Most states do not keep adequate records on the number of times cell phones are a factor in accidents; as of December 2000, only ten states were trying to keep such records (Sundeen 2).

Do NOT use punctuation between the name and the page number.

3. AUTHOR UNKNOWN Either use the complete title in a signal phrase or use a short form of the title in parentheses. Titles of books are italicized; titles of articles are put in quotation marks.

**As of 2001, at least three hundred towns and municipalities had considered
legislation regulating use of cell phones while driving ("Lawmakers" 2).**

TIP: Before assuming that a Web source has no author, do some detective work. Often the author's name is available but is not easy to find. For example, it may appear at the end of the source, in tiny print. Or it may appear on another page of the site, such as the home page.

4. PAGE NUMBER UNKNOWN You may omit the page number if a work lacks page numbers, as is the case with many Web sources. Although printouts from Web sites usually show page numbers, printers don't always provide the same page breaks; for this reason, MLA recommends treating such sources as unpaginated.

**The California Highway Patrol opposes restrictions on the use of phones while
driving, claiming that distracted drivers can already be prosecuted (Jacobs).
According to Jacobs, the California Highway Patrol opposes restrictions on the use
of phones while driving, claiming that distracted drivers can already be prosecuted.**

When the pages of a Web source are stable (as in PDF files), however, supply a page number in your in-text citation.

5. TWO OR THREE AUTHORS Name the authors in a signal phrase, as in the following example, or include their last names in the parenthetical reference: (Redelmeier and Tibshirani 453).

**Redelmeier and Tibshirani found that "the risk of a collision when using a cellular
telephone was four times higher than the risk when a cellular telephone was not being
used" (453).**

When three authors are named in the parentheses, separate the names with commas: (Alton, Davies, and Rice 56).

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6. FOUR OR MORE AUTHORS Name all of the authors or include only the first author's name

followed by "et al." (Latin for "and others"). Make sure that your citation matches the entry in the list of works cited.

The study was extended for two years, and only after results were reviewed by an independent panel did the researchers publish their findings (Blaine et al. 35).

7. ORGANIZATION AS AUTHOR WHEN THE AUTHOR IS A CORPORATION OR AN ORGANIZATION, NAME THAT AUTHOR EITHER IN THE SIGNAL PHRASE OR IN THE PARENTHESES.) FOR A GOVERNMENT AGENCY AS AUTHOR, SEE ITEM 17 ON P. 419)
THE AMERICAN DIABETES ASSOCIATION ESTIMATES THAT THE COST OF DIAGNOSED DIABETES IN THE UNITED STATES IN 2012 WAS \$245 BILLION.

8. AUTHORS WITH THE SAME LAST NAME If your list of works cited includes works by two or more authors with the same last name, include the author's first name in the signal phrase or first initial in the parentheses.

Estimates of the number of accidents caused by distracted drivers vary because little evidence is being collected (D. Smith 7).

9. TWO OR MORE WORKS BY THE SAME AUTHOR If your list of works cited includes two or more titles by the same author, mention the title of the work in the signal phrase or include a short version of the title in the parentheses.

On December 6, 2000, reporter Jamie Stockwell wrote that distracted driver Jason Jones had been charged with "two counts of vehicular manslaughter . . . in the deaths of John and Carole Hall" ("Phone" B1). The next day Stockwell reported the judge's ruling: Jones "was convicted of negligent driving and fined \$500, the maximum penalty allowed" ("Man" B4).

Titles of articles and other short works are placed in quotation marks, as in the example just given. Titles of books are italicized.

In the rare case when both the author's name and a short title must be given in parentheses, separate them with a comma.

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According to police reports, there were no skid marks indicating that the distracted

driver who killed John and Carole Hall had even tried to stop (Stockwell, "Man" B4).

11. ENCYCLOPEDIA OR DICTIONARY ENTRY Unless an encyclopedia or a dictionary has an author (Look for the author's name at the end of the article), it will be alphabetized in the list of works cited under the word or entry that you consulted — not under the title of the reference work itself. Either in your text or in your parenthetical reference, mention the word or the entry. No page number is required, since readers can easily look up the word or entry.

The word crocodile has a surprisingly complex etymology ("Crocodile").

12. SELECTION IN AN ANTHOLOGY Put the name of the author of the work (not the editor of the anthology) in the signal phrase or the parentheses.

In "A Jury of Her Peers," Mrs. Hale describes both a style of quilting and a murder weapon when she utters the last words of the story: "We call it--knot it, Mr. Henderson" (Glaspell 210).

13. WEB SOURCE Your in-text citation for a source from the Web should follow the same guidelines as for other sources. If the source lacks page numbers but has numbered paragraphs, sections, or divisions, use those numbers with the appropriate abbreviation in your in-text citation: "par.," "sec.," "ch.," "pt.," and so on. Do not add such numbers if the source itself does not use them; simply give the author or title in your in-text citation.

Julian Hawthorne points out profound differences between his father and Ralph Waldo Emerson but concludes that, in their lives and their writing, "together they met the needs of nearly all that is worthy in human nature" (ch. 4).

In the list of works cited, the work is alphabetized under Glaspell, not under the name of the editor of the anthology.

Glaspell, Susan. "A Jury of Her Peers." *Literature and Its Writers: A Compact*

Introduction to Fiction, Poetry, and Drama. Ed. Ann Charters and Samuel Charters.

3rd ed. Boston: Bedford, 2004. 194-210. Print.

14. INDIRECT SOURCE (SOURCE QUOTED IN ANOTHER SOURCE) When a writer's or a speaker's quoted words appear in a source written by someone else, begin the parenthetical citation with the abbreviation "qtd. in" .

According to Richard Retting, "As the comforts of home and the efficiency of the office creep into the automobile, it is becoming increasingly attractive as a work space" (qtd.in Kilgannon A23).

15. VERSE PLAYS AND POEMS For verse plays, MLA recommends giving act, scene, and line numbers that can be located in any edition of the work. Use arabic numerals, and separate the numbers with periods.

In Shakespeare's *King Lear*, Gloucester, blinded for suspected treason, learns a profound lesson from his tragic experience: "A man may see how this world goes / with no eyes" (4.2.148-49).

16. SACRED TEXTS When citing a sacred text such as the Bible or the Qur'an, name the edition you are using in your works cited entry. In your parenthetical citation, give the book, chapter, and verse (or their equivalent), separated by periods. Common abbreviations for books of the Bible are acceptable.

Consider the words of Solomon: "If your enemies are hungry, give them food to eat. If they are thirsty, give them water to drink" (*Holy Bible*, Prov. 25.21).

Additional Information

Short, prose quotations of four lines or fewer are integrated into your text.

Quoted material of more than four lines is set off from the text. This material is indented an **additional** five spaces or one tab from your left margin. You do not need to use quotation marks because the indented format establishes that it is a direct quote. The block is double spaced and is introduced by a colon. For example:

In his book on the Apollo space shuttle programs, Joseph Trento reports on the final mission on the Apollo program:

The last mission involving the Apollo hardware nearly ended in tragedy for the American crew. After reentry the crew opened a pressure release valve to equalize the command module atmosphere with the earth's atmosphere. But the reaction control rockets failed to shut down and deadly nitrogen tetroxide oxidizer gas entered the cabin's breathing air. The crew survived the incident, but some at Houston wondered if layoff from manned flight hadn't put the crew at risk. (144)

When you quote **poetry** within the text of your essay, indicate the line structure by means of a slash.

The epigram, "do not go gentle into that good night, /Rage, rage against the dying of the light" prepares the reader to meet Hagar.

MLA Style Works Cited

Arrange sources alphabetically by the author's last name, or if no author, by the first word in the citation.

Include the medium of each

source: **print, web, CD, DVD,**

television, radio, film, e-

mail, film, performance
etc.

Indent each source 1 inch

from border, double space, and indent second and

consecutive lines.

Your last name, and page # on upper right corner of each page ½ inch from top border.

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Works Cited

Adler, Jerry. "Unbeliever's Quest." *Newsweek* 31 Mar 1997:

64-66. Print. **Medium**

Print magazine

Broad, William J. "Even in Death, Carl Sagan's Influence is Still Cosmic."

New York Times. New York Times, 1 Dec 1998. Web. 20 Mar 2008.

Newspaper
online

"Carl Sagan – Pale Blue Dot." 2 Apr 2007. *YouTube*. Web. 7 Mar 2009.

YouTube

Chyba, Christopher. Telephone interview. 22 Mar. 2009.

Telephone interview

Drake, Frank. Personal interview. 5 Mar 2009.

Personal interview

Eicher, Dave. "CARL SAGAN, 1934-1996." *Astronomy* 25.3 (1997): 28.

Academic Search Premier. Web. 3 Mar 2009.

Magazine article from a database

Harrison, Jane. "Incidental music." *The Oxford Companion to Music*. Ed.

Online reference source

Alison Latham. *Oxford Music Online*. Web. 14 Dec. 2009.

<<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t114/e3406>>.

McDonough, Tom. "Carl Sagan and the Search for E.T." *Skeptic* 13.1

(2007):49-51. *Academic Search Premier*. Web. 13 Mar 2009.

Magazine article
from a database

Morrison, David "Carl Sagan's Life and Legacy as Scientist, Teacher,

Date of article

and Skeptic." *Skeptical Inquirer*. January-February 2009. Web.

Date you accessed article

7 Mar 2009. <<http://www.csicop.org/si/2007-01/sagan.html>>.

Web site

Morrison, David. "Sagan and Skepticism." *Skeptic* 7.1 (1999): 29-31.

only if the instructor requires it, or the
source cannot be found without it.

Include the URL

Academic Search Premier. Web. 13
Mar 2009.

Magazine article
from a database

	NASA Panel Discussion. "Complex Life May or May Not Be Rare."	
Opposing Viewpoints Database: Chapter of a book with a corporate author.	<i>Contemporary Issues Companion: Extraterrestrial Life</i> . Ed. Sylvia Engdahl. Detroit: Greenhaven Press, 2006.	
	<i>Opposing Viewpoints Resource Center</i> . Web. 4 Dec. 2009.	
	Sagan, Carl. "Mr.X," <i>Marijuana Uses</i> . Ed. Lester Grinspoon.	
Web site	Marijuana-Uses.com. Web. 17 Mar 2009.	
Biography Resource Center Online	"Sagan, Carl Edward " <i>Earth Sciences for Students</i> . 4 vols. Online. Macmillan Reference USA, 2008. <i>Biography Resource Center</i> . Web. 15 Dec. 2009.	
	"Sleep Disorders" <i>DSM-IV-TR</i> Fourth Edition. American Psychiatric Publishing, Inc. <i>PsychiatryOnline</i> . Web. 15 Dec 2009.	
DSM-IV-TR Online		
	Spangenburg, Ray and Kit Moser. <i>Carl Sagan: A Biography</i> . New York: Prometheus Books, 2008. Print.	
Book with 2 authors.		
	Streep, Mark. "Sagan Pioneer of His Time." <i>New York Times</i> . 5 Dec. 2008.	
	<i>LexisNexis</i> . Web. 20 Mar 2009.	Online newspaper from a database.
Unsigned online encyclopedia	"Whirlpool galaxy." <i>Encyclopedia Britannica</i> . Encyclopedia Britannica Online, 2009. Web. 8 Dec 2009. < http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9110642 >	
Unsigned article from an online reference source, "CountryWatch.	"Zimbabwe." <i>CountryWatch</i> . CountryWatch Inc., 2009. Web. 8 Dec 2009.	
	Zimbalist, Paul A. "Nuclear Winter" <i>World of Earth Science</i> . Ed. K.L. Lerner and Brenda Wilmoth Lerner. Vol.2. Detroit: Gale, 2003. 403 – 405.	
Electronic reference book from a database.	<i>Gale Virtual Reference Library</i> . Web. 15 Nov. 2009.	

Final Copy

- Your essay should be typewritten and double-spaced on one side of the paper. Do not double space between paragraphs.
- All margins should be 1 inch or 2.5 cm. Indent the first line of every paragraph one tab.
- All pages should be numbered. This includes the first page and works cited page. To do this in Microsoft Word, go to “View”, select “header and footer”, select justified right margin, type your last name, leave 1 space, click on the # sign. This will automatically give you this information on every page.
- There should be no white-out on the paper.

Helpful material: Print

Buckley, Joanne. *Checkmate: A Writing Reference for Canadians*. Scarborough, ON:

Thomson Nelson, 2003. Print.

Hacker, Diana. *A Canadian Writer's Reference*. 2nd ed. Toronto: Nelson Canada, 1996.

Print.

Harris, Muriel and Joan Pilz. *Canadian High-School Writer's Guide*. Don Mills, ON:

Pearson Education Canada, 2004. Print.

Helpful material: Websites

<http://www.dianahacker.com/resdoc/> (how to document)

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/2/11/> (how to document using MLA)

<http://easybib.com> (template for works cited page)