A SHORT GUIDE TO RESEARCH PAPERS

1. **Choose your topic.**
   Many times this step is automatic because your professor will assign a topic. If you have difficulty finding a topic, talk to your professor or a librarian or find suggested topics in the Library Handbook or in a database such as *Opposing Viewpoints*.

2. **Find general background information on your topic.**
   Consult encyclopedias, subject-specific reference works and databases. If you already have a good general knowledge of your topic, you may go directly to step 3.

3. **Find books and articles on your topic.**
   Search the online catalog for books and the databases for articles from magazines, journals and newspapers. Evaluate books and articles for currency, author’s credentials, and point of view (bias).

4. **Write your introductory paragraph(s), which should include your thesis statement.**
   Your thesis statement should let the reader know not only what your topic is, but also the aspect(s) of the topic on which you are going to focus. Most research papers either analyze a topic or argue (defend) a point of view.

5. **Construct an outline.**
   Write a preliminary outline at first. As you find more sources and begin to read and evaluate them and write your paper, you can use note cards or write in the margin of your copied materials to indicate where a particular point or piece of information should go. As you progress, revise your outline into a more formal version.

6. **Write the body paragraphs or sections of your paper.**
   Organize the paragraphs in the body of your paper logically; for example, if you are defending your thesis with three or more supporting ideas or sections, begin with a strong supporting idea and build up to your strongest idea in the final paragraph or section of the body.

7. **Write a conclusion for your paper.**
   In your conclusion, you should restate or summarize your main points and possibly suggest future outcomes or directions.

8. **Write your final draft.**
   Check your paper for content, logic and style as well as the mechanics of writing: grammar, spelling and punctuation.

9. **Cite your research.**
   Consult MLA or APA guidelines for including references in your paper and writing the Works Cited Page or Bibliography at the end.

10. **Ask a Librarian!**