Ten Steps for Writing a Research Report

Step 1: Choose and Narrow a Subject
Choose a subject you find interesting. You will need to focus on a part of the subject small enough to cover in one report. If you choose a very broad topic, like volcanoes, you will need to do endless amounts of research to cover everything about volcanoes. Instead, you should narrow your subject to a focused topic.

Step 2: Think About Purpose, Audience and Voice
Your purpose is your reason for writing. You have two purposes for writing a research paper – to discover information for yourself and to share what you have learned with others.

The audience for your report will be people who share your interest in the topic, but do not already know a lot about it. In most cases, the audience will include your teacher and your classmates. Ask yourself:
- What does my audience already know?
- What does my audience need to know?
- What kind of information will my audience find interesting?

The way your writing sounds is your voice. When you are trying to inform, you want to use a voice that sounds knowledgeable and interesting. Avoid using slang or clichés. Express your ideas in a clear, direct way.

Step 3: Finding Sources
You will not find all of the information that you need in a single source. Using a variety of sources will help you find complete answers to your research questions. Do not rely on the internet.

Step 4: Taking Notes
Write out a bibliography card each time you take notes from a new source. Make sure to label each bibliography card with a source number.

When using note cards, be sure to write the source number in the top, right-hand corner. This way, you will know exactly where you found the information.

Use a separate note card for each new note.

Make sure to summarize or paraphrase the information as you take notes. To avoid accidental plagiarism, try not to copy notes word for word from your resources. Make sure to include any exact wording in quotation marks.
Step 5: Organizing Your Information
Once you have taken your notes, they need to be put together into a logical order. Sort your note cards into categories. Each group of note cards will become a paragraph in your report. If you find some note cards that do not seem to belong to any group, set them aside until later.

Step 6: Make an Outline
It is often helpful to make an outline, or a plan for your report. It should show how you are grouping information and the order in which you will present the information in your report. An outline should list the report’s major subtopics, or categories of information, followed by a list of specific facts for each subtopic.

Step 7: Write a Main Idea Statement
To make sure readers remember the major point of your topic, include a main idea, or thesis statement in your introduction. This should tell the reader the topic of your report and the main points that you will make.

Step 8: Writing Your Report
In the introduction, you will want to include an attention-getting beginning, as well as your main idea statement.

For the body of the paper, use the categories in your outline to represent subtopics. Be sure to provide facts and explanations from your research about each subtopic. Elaborate on each subtopic by explaining each fact with an example.

The conclusion should restate the main idea statement of your report. This is also a good place to share information that did not fit into the body of your report.

Step 9: Writing a Reference List
Put your bibliography cards in alphabetical order, and type each source on a page titled, “Reference List.” List only the sources that you actually used in your report. Your reference list should be stapled to the end of your paper.

Step 10: Revise and Proofread Your Report
Read your report at least twice. Make sure it includes a main idea statement, that each paragraph contains facts that are clearly stated, and that the conclusion restates the main idea of the report.

Finally, polish your report. Read over it carefully, and correct any mistakes in grammar, spelling or punctuation.