

# Middle School Research Paper

## Overview:

- Each student will write a 2-3 page type-written research based paper.
- Students will choose a focused subject or topic of interest for a research report.
- Students will pose a question with a scope narrow enough to cover thoroughly.
- Students will draw upon reliable information from multiple sources.
- Students will incorporate relevant facts and details to support the main idea of the report.
- Students will engage in the steps of the writing process over the course of two or more weeks: planning, drafting, revising, editing and presenting.

## STEPS

### Step 1: PLANNING--Select a Topic

Together with your teacher, choose a topic a topic of interest that is within the broad category specified for your grade level. Think of the many stories, plays and articles that you have read this year, not only in your language arts class but in all of your classes. There was probably a person, place, animal, event, or tradition that you would like to learn more about. Now is your opportunity! If you are coming up blank, try writing a few short paragraphs beginning with the words “I wonder...” Let your thoughts flow freely and see if you can’t identify something you’d like to investigate. Talk with others. Make lists.

	<b>6<sup>th</sup> Grade</b>
<b>General Topic Area</b>	<i>Explore a topic from 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Science Content &amp; Standards</i>
<b>Specific Topic Ideas (suggestions)</b>	Plate Tectonics and Earth’s structure [volcanoes, earthquakes, mountain building] Shaping Earth’s Surface [glaciers, chemical weathering, erosion, landslides, floods] Heat (Thermal Energy) [fuel, radiation, conduction, convection] Energy in the Earth System [sun/solar energy, changes in weather] Ecology (Life Sciences) [photosynthesis, food webs, ecosystems, biomes] Resources [renewable vs. nonrenewable energy sources, recycling]

Required Sources	<b>Two</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• internet or printed article/book</li> </ul>
Length and Typing Requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 2 pages</li> <li>▪ double-spaced</li> <li>▪ size 12 font</li> <li>▪ title page (title, name, teacher &amp; class, date)</li> </ul>

## **Step 2: PLANNING--Narrow Your Topic**

Once you have chosen your topic, you are part of the way there. Many of the topics are very broad (i.e., BIG!), and it could take a thick book to cover all of the pertinent information. Therefore, you will need to narrow your topic so that it can fit within the length of your paper. You can do this by asking a lot of questions and by completing the **Branching Diagram** handout. Here are a few examples of narrowing questions:

<i>Suppose you choose...</i>	Solar Energy
<i>You might ask...</i>	What is the history of solar energy? Who invented it and how long has it been around? How do solar panels connect energy from the sun? What is the future of solar energy? What new types of solar-powered products are being researched and developed? How do solar batteries work?

Select the question that interests you most. This will become the focus (topic) of your research project.

## **Step 3: PREWRITING—Gathering Details**

The next step is to find a good number of interesting facts and details about your topic.

- 1) Use your local library to find books, encyclopedias, and newspaper and magazine articles. These will give you good background information. OR
- 2) Use the internet to find many sources of information. Enter key words from your topic in the search engine. Although there are many online sources available, it is important to only use sources that you trust. Try to use only sites that end in .org, .edu, and .gov in your research.
- 3) Look for other types of information, such as people you can talk to (interview an expert) or places you can visit (a museum).

## **Step 4: PREWRITING—Recording Details**

Once you have found the books and materials for your report, the next step is to read through all of them and take notes. You will need to record two things:

- 1) All of the important facts and details that are relevant to your question (topic).  
For this use **Note cards**.
  - Write a question or subtopic across the top of a card.
  - When you come across a fact that helps answer that question or develop that subtopic, write it down on the note card.
  - Staple several note cards together if necessary.
  - Usually, you will want to jot the information down **in your own words**. Sometimes, however, you will really like the way it is said and want to copy down an actual **quotation**. Be sure to use quotation marks so that you can give credit to the author for his/her words. Also, indicate in parentheses the title of the book or website where you copied the quotation from.
- 2) Bibliographic information for each source:
  - Name of source
  - Author
  - Page number or internet address
  - Publication information
  - Date (internet only)For this, use the **Sources Consulted Chart**.

## **Step 5: PREWRITING—Get Organized**

Now it is time to organize your information.

- 1) Spread all your note cards out on a table.
- 2) Begin by arranging all of the information by grouping together facts that are similar or related.
- 3) Choose the information from one note card (or one set of note cards) to be your main point.
- 4) Put the other facts in the best order possible.

## **Step 6: PREWRITING—Write an Outline**

The final step in the collecting stage of your research report is to organize your ideas into an outline. Use the online Outline Maker at <http://www.crlsresearchguide.org>. You just type in all your information, submit and print. Easy!

Begin your outline by listing the headings (questions) as Roman numerals (I, II, III, etc.) in the same order that you have already organized them. The details written on your note cards should follow as capital letters (A, B, C, etc.) You may find that you want to combine some facts or that some no longer seem very interesting or important and you decide not to use one or more.

## **Step 7: DRAFTING—Write!**

It's time to write (type, if possible!) the first draft of your report.

**Opening Paragraph:** Begin your report with a good hook, something that will start it off in an interesting or catchy way so that the reader will want to continue reading your report. Consider:

- A short 3-4 sentence story about your topic
- A quote from an interview or expert
- A dramatic fact or figure
- A lively or colorful description

### **Body Paragraphs:**

- Following your outline, each main idea (Roman numeral) can become the topic sentence for a paragraph in your report.
- The details under each main idea will be the sentences or supporting details for that paragraph.
- Support your statements with facts from your sources.

Example:

FDR rallied the American people when he told them “the only thing we have to fear is fear itself.” He then acted quickly, passing the historic New Deal in his first hundred days in office. The New Deal put people to work and gave them hope for the future.

- Don't be afraid to change your mind or make adjustments as you write.

**Closing Paragraph:** This paragraph should summarize the main points you covered in your report. Try to end with a strong closing sentence—one that will make a lasting impression.

## **Step 7: REVISION--Improve Your Writing**

Now it's time to revise your writing so that your ideas really shine. Revision is what makes good writing great and it takes work! Use the following checklist:

- ☑ Introduction: Does your opening paragraph really get the reader’s attention and introduce your topic?
- ☑ Body: Did you include enough detail in the main part of your report to make it interesting and informative?
- ☑ Conclusion: Does your final paragraph summarize the significant points of your report and leave your reader with a lasting impression?
- ☑ Paragraphs: Is each paragraph clear? Are there enough facts and details?
- ☑ Paragraphs: Is each sentence in the body paragraphs related to the topic sentence?
- ☑ Paragraphs: Are your paragraphs arranged in the best possible order?
- ☑ Wording: Did you use good transitional words such as then, after, next, in addition, however, etc. to help sentences and ideas flow smoothly?
- ☑ Wording: Did you use your own words? Or, when you borrowed someone else’s words either exactly or very closely did you indicate the source where you got it?
- ☑ Wording: Did you use strong verbs and adjectives, and did you avoid using empty words such as “thing” and “stuff”?

Now go back to your draft on the computer and make the necessary changes to bring your writing up to its finest level.

## **Step 8: EDITING—A Final Look**

- 1) Make sure your writing is **accurate**. Check the spelling, usage, capitalization and punctuation.
- 2) **Give Credit**. Be sure you give credit for an author’s ideas or words in your report (author, or shortened form of the title if no author indicated) in parentheses in the body of your writing. Write a **“Works Cited” page** following the **Citing Sources** handout exactly. It should be the last page of your report.
- 3) Produce your **final copy**. Make sure the report is double-spaced and has a one-inch margin on all sides.

## **STEP 9: PRESENTATION—Make it look good**

- 1) Create a **title page** for your report either on the computer or by hand. Use color and graphics. Be sure to include the title of the research report and your name and the date.

- 2) Make a one-page illustration to include in your report. It could be a sketch of an event or person, a map, diagram, or other related drawing. Label as needed.

## **STEP 9: Present—Ta da!**

Proudly present your research paper based on the parameters outlined by your teacher. In order, your report should include:

Title Page  
Research Paper  
Illustration  
Works Cited (or Bibliography)

## **CITING SOURCES**

From MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers 6<sup>th</sup> ed.

*Work cited lists are alphabetized by the first element in each entry, i.e. Author, Title, etc.  
**FOLLOW THE MODELS EXACTLY, right down to the last period!***

### **BOOK BY SINGLE AUTHOR:**

Fukuyama, Francis. Our Revolution. New York: Farrar, 2002.

### **BOOK BY TWO OR MORE AUTHORS:**

Eggs, Suzanne, and Diane Slade. Analysing Casual Conversation. London: Cassell, 1997.

***AN ARTICLE IN A REFERENCE BOOK*** (Dictionary, Encyclopedia, etc.)

“Azimuthal Equidistant Projection.” Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary. 10<sup>th</sup> ed. 2009.

“Mandarin.” The Encyclopedia Americana. 2007 ed.

“China”. World Almanac 2002. World Almanac, Inc., 2001. pp 864-865.

Le Patourel, John. “Normans and Normandy.” Dictionary of the Middle Ages. Ed. Joseph R. Strayer. 13 vols. New York: Scribner’s, 1987.

***MAGAZINES:***

Metha, Pratap Bhanu. “Exploding Myths.” New Republic 6 June 1998: 17-19.

***NEWSPAPERS:***

Jeromack, Paul. “David of the Art World.” New York Times 13 July 2002, late ed.: B7+.

***A FILM OR VIDEO RECORDING (VHS, DVD):***

It’s a Wonderful Life. Dir. Frank Capra. Perf. James Stewart, Donna Reed, Lionel Barrymore, and Thomas Mitchell. RKO, 1946.

***A PERSONAL INTERVIEW*** (in person, telephone, email)

Parker, Alvin F. Telephone interview. 10 Dec. 2010.

***A DOCUMENT FROM AN INTERNET SITE:***

“City Profile: San Francisco.” CNN.com. 2004. Cable News Network. 14 May 2008  
<<http://www.cnn.com/TRAVEL/atevo/city/SanFrancisco/intro.html>>.

“Selected Seventeenth-Century Events.” Romantic Chronology. Ed. Laura Mandell and Alan Liu. 1999.

U of California, Santa Barbara. 22 Jun 2010 <<http://english.ucsb.edu:591/rchrono/>>.

Jane Austen Information Page. Ed. Henry Churchyard. 6 Sept. 2005. 15 June 2010

<http://www.pemberley.com/janeinfo/janeinfo.html>

**BRANCHING DIAGRAM** (for use in narrowing a broad topic)

Begin by choosing a topic that interests you, such as “Autumn.” Write it in the largest box. Then divide that general topic into smaller subtopics, such as “time of year,” “changes,” etc. Write those in the medium-size boxes. Finally, divide each subtopic again. This time you might choose a particular autumnal change for one of the small boxes such as “leaves change color.” Now, what would you like to learn about that subtopic? For example, “Why do leaves change color in autumn?” You now have an interesting question to pose and a topic that is narrow enough to cover thoroughly. Choose one of the small boxes as your topic.

General Topic:

