

# RESEARCH PAPER HANDBOOK

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Step-by-step guide to writing  
effective research papers

Fourth Edition

James D. Lester, Jr.

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Printed in the United States of America

Good Year Books  
A Division of Social Studies School Service  
10200 Jefferson Boulevard  
Culver City, CA 90232-082

(800) 421-4246  
(310) 839-2436

[www.goodyearbooks.com](http://www.goodyearbooks.com)  
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ISBN: 978-1-59647-470-3  
e-book ISBN: 978-1-59647-471-0  
Product Code: GDY236 v4.0

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# Establishing a Topic

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## **Overview and Clear Targets**

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Regardless of the writer's experience, writing is a demanding process that requires commitment. Your first task is to choose a topic that will hold your interest throughout the entire research project. At the same time, the chosen topic will need a scholarly perspective. Your topic may focus on any subject—the positive influence of video games, conservation for our changing world, or President Theodore Roosevelt. The subject might be a topic that you have always wanted to learn more about, a question that you want answers to, or an investigation into an area that is entirely new. This chapter charts a direction for your research project:

- ◆ Selecting a research topic
- ◆ Relating personal ideas to a scholarly problem
- ◆ Refining your topic with online sources
- ◆ Developing a thesis statement
- ◆ Framing a research proposal

In these early stages of the research project, you must remember that the process can often be confusing and involve many starts and stops as you move toward a practical topic.

## 1a Identifying Your Role as a Researcher

The first step in the research process is to identify your role as a researcher. Your voice should reflect the investigative nature of your work, so try to display your knowledge. Refer to authorities as well as sources that you have consulted; do not hide them. Offer quotations. Provide charts or graphs that you have borrowed from the sources. Your teacher will give you credit for using the sources in your paper. Just be certain that you give in-text citations to the sources to reflect your academic honesty. Your role is to investigate, explain, and defend the issue at hand.

### Establishing a purpose

Research papers have different purposes—they explain, analyze, and persuade—often in the same paper. A writer who argues for the use of peer mediation in school to prevent conflicts or bullying must also explain the process and analyze the benefits of the program.

You will use the **explanatory purpose** to review and itemize factual information for the reader. One writer defined scoliosis and explained its effect on the spinal column. Another writer explained how carbon monoxide has become a silent killer in our homes.

The **analytical purpose** is used when you classify various parts of the subject in order to investigate each one in depth. One writer examined the long-term effects of antidepressant medications on the brain, the eyes, the lungs, the heart, and so on. Another writer classified and examined the religious symbolism of building the ziggurat, a temple-tower, in ancient cultures.

A **persuasive purpose** addresses the readers with a message of conviction that defends a position. One writer condemned underage drinking and warned of its dangers. Another writer argued that television programs entice children into bad habits: eating poorly, experimenting with illegal substances, drinking alcohol, and committing acts of violence.