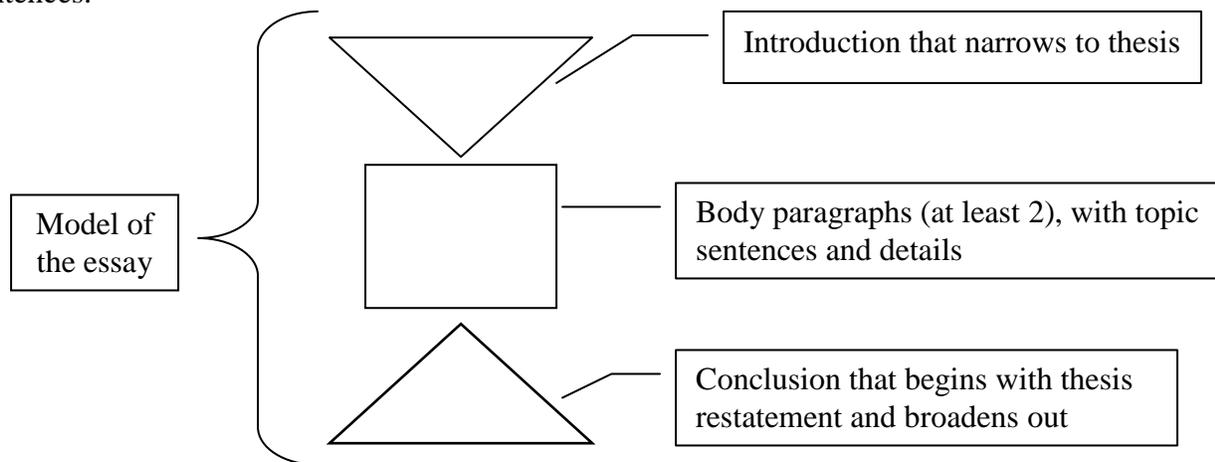


## Basic Academic Essay Components

Academic essay writing is a specific type of writing that has its own rules and expectations. No matter what your writing experience is, you must adapt to these rules and expectations to get the best grade possible. My Composition/Rhetoric research shows that most college classes require these basic elements.

1. **Standard academic English in a fairly high diction.** If you cannot communicate proficiently in English, grammar and mechanics, then no matter how good your argument is, readers will find the mistakes distracting. Worse, they may find your paper incomprehensible. Your LB Brief handbook, as well as a variety of resources on the Internet, can help you correct the errors I point out on your essays.
2. **Structure:** Formal academic essays are rigid in structure: intro, body, conclusion, thesis statements and topic sentences.



In contrast, professional essays, many of the ones in our textbook, will not always strictly adhere to a formal structure. In some cases, readers may not even see a clearly written thesis statement, and people will even disagree over what the point of the reading is. The purpose of professional and literary writing is not always to present a clear argument. Instead, it is often to provoke thought and discussion by leaving ideas open ended. In academic essays, though, writers must present a clear thesis-driven paper with the three-part structure, evidence to support the thesis, and an awareness of persuasive appeals. These appeals comprise the Rhetorical Triangle

- **Rhetorical Triangle:** Aristotle called these "pisteis." The 3 major ways we appeal to our audience are through logos, pathos, and ethos. Logos is reason: common sense, facts, figures, and objective data. I'm using information that I know will invoke an emotional response in my reader, The author in making an argument uses research and word choice to convince the audience by appealing to its logic and reason. **This is the preferred appeal in academic writing.** Pathos is emotion. The author uses empathy and sympathy to convince the audience by appealing to its emotions, such as pity, fear, anger, patriotism, etc. Ethos is credibility and trustworthiness. The author uses the credibility and ethics of resources (which can include personal experience and the tone the author writes in) to appeal to the audience by appealing to its trust. For more on classical rhetoric, check out the following web pages:
  - [http://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/resource\\_rhet.html](http://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/resource_rhet.html)
  - [http://www.molloy.edu/sophia/aristotle/rhetoric/rhetoric1a\\_nts.htm](http://www.molloy.edu/sophia/aristotle/rhetoric/rhetoric1a_nts.htm)
  - <http://www.rpi.edu/dept/llc/webclass/web/project1/group4/index.html#logos>
  - <http://www.rhetorica.net/textbook/>

If authors use the appeals illogically or dishonestly, then they are guilty of propaganda and logical fallacies. We will cover these in the second unit.

3. **Audience:** The teacher is rarely your audience in college classrooms. We are your evaluators, but not the group that you are writing to necessarily. You must identify and target a specific audience - know enough about them to make important decisions concerning vocabulary, background information provided, types of examples to use, sources to stay away from, and which rhetorical appeal to use.
- **Vocabulary:** what is my audience's education level? What words will appeal to them or turn them off? For example, if I have a conservative audience and I label something liberal, I will probably distance that audience. Instead, I need to find another way to describe it that won't get a knee-jerk reaction.
  - **Background info to provide:** what does my audience already know about this issue? What do they NEED to know to be able to understand the argument I'm making? Be sure you provide only necessary relevant info - don't stuff your introduction, or your essay, with trivial facts or biographical information that does nothing to further your argument.
  - **Types of Examples:** what will appeal to my reader - anecdotal evidence? Statistics? Hypothetical examples? Examples come in 3 types: 1) specific: you are giving the reader an example of a real person or real event (e.g., Tommy drives home from work in rush hour every day, and this adds to his stress). 2) Typical: you are painting a picture that is a composite of what usually occurs, but not citing specific people or places (e.g., Many residents of Shawnee drive home from work in rush hour every day, adding to their stress). 3) Hypothetical: you are playing the "what if" game to show people what might happen or may have happened because there is no specific evidence available (e.g., If Shawnee residents drove home from work in rush hour every day, their stress levels would increase). You would use this last one when speculating about the effects that something might have, or when trying to figure out what may have occurred. No one type is better than the other because it all depends on the situation and the audience. You do need to use specific evidence in academic essays at some point, but you have some wriggle room.
  - **Sources:** Again, what will turn off your reader? Consider a paper on qualities of a great leader. If I cite Hitler, then automatically, no matter how valid the info that I'm using from him, I will get a negative reaction from most reader. If I am writing about the qualities of great leaders according to Machiavelli, who famously advised princes that they should encourage fear rather than love in their followers in order to maintain control, then citing Hitler is completely reasonable. I've added a context, Machiavelli's definition, that would make the choice of Hitler obvious rather than potentially racist. My audiences personal profile (including politics, culture, religion, age, gender, and geography – just to name a few), may require I rethink exactly who I will use to support my thesis, the types of examples I provide, and even the diction, tone, and style I use in my writing. To ignore the audience is to make my ethos vulnerable. Of course, many arguments target a general audience who are bound together simply by a common interest in the issue, a common nationality, or something else.
4. **Context:** What is the situation that I'm creating in which to argue my point? We rarely argue topics in a vacuum. Instead, we must connect them to something the audience will see as relevant. That could be time, place, ideology, etc. For example, a discussion of tuition hikes at Harvard will not likely be interesting to an SSC audience. However, if the writer connects what is happening at Harvard to changes in Oklahoma higher education, then suddenly that tuition hike is relevant and more interesting. Time can also be an important context. No one can write a paper that talks about "since the beginning of time" or "since the first human appeared" because that is simply too large a time frame to cover, and no one knows what was really going on then. However, I can limit topics by choosing specific time contexts. A discussion of civil liberties in America would be very different if I choose to look at the 1990s as opposed to the post-9/11 era. My audience might also provide a variety of limiting contexts. Perhaps I want to use the Christian Bible as part

of my reasoning for supporting legislation. Religious freedom makes it impossible to justify that legally to general audience. However, if I limit the audience context to Southern Baptists (and specify that in my introduction), I can reasonably expect them all to acknowledge the Bible as a guide to ethics, from which most laws spring. The fact that all of your essays must follow standard Academic English provides an important context that you must incorporate in your writing. Context will be different for every essay.

## Essay Writing: The MEAT Method

### Overview

An academic essay is a group of paragraphs, organized into three sections. Those sections are: introduction, body, and conclusion. These sections may have more than one paragraph in each, though the body section must have more than one paragraph. Body paragraphs differ in structure and function from introduction and conclusion paragraphs, so we will study each section separately, identifying the common characteristics in a traditional academic essay. Using the MEAT method, we can write well-developed (dare I say “meaty”) paragraphs. MEAT stands for: **M**ain point – **E**xamples and Explanations – **A**nalysis – **T**ransitions.

1. **Main point:** An essay has two layers of main points: the thesis and the topic sentence.

- **The Thesis:** this is the overall point of the essay, and you derive all topic sentences from the thesis. The thesis statement should have two major components: the subject and the purpose. The subject announces what the essay is about, and the purpose announces what you are going to tell us about the subject. You can also provide an “essay map” in your thesis. This means previewing the topics in each body paragraph.

Example thesis: Though Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr. provided important leadership during the Civil Rights Movement, King’s leadership style proved more appealing to the mainstream who sought integration for America not more segregation.

- **Subject:** Contrasting Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr. as leaders during the Civil Rights Movement.
- **Purpose:** Show how Martin Luther King, Jr.’s style of leadership appealed to those wanting to integrate rather than segregate.
- **Audience:** People interested in diverse leadership styles of the two and why one spoke to a wider audience.

Another way of thinking about the thesis is more mathematical, what I call the “**Thesis Equation.**”

**Thesis Equation:** For Z, X is Y because {a, b, c} where

- X = essay subject narrowed to a length suitable for assignment
- Y = writer’s attitude about subject or what he/she is going to tell us about the subject
- {a, b, c} = reasons to support X/Y statement, formulated as topic sentences in the body section of the essay (# of reasons vary per paper)
- Z = limiting/focusing factors, such as audience and context of essay

*Note:* a thesis statement does not always include Z and {a, b, c}, but it should always have an X and Y. However, your essay must always make clear what the Z and {a, b, c} are to the reader. Z begins in the

introduction and continues throughout the essay in the choice of reasons to suit the audience and context as well as the tone and diction levels. {a, b, c} come directly from the X/Y statement and the Z because they are reasons that logically support the essay's thesis and also will appeal to the essay reader.

**Example:** Students should not complain about tuition hikes at Seminole State College because the money provides many useful services to them in computer labs, the library, and in classrooms.

<b>X</b>	=	SSC tuition hikes
<b>Y</b>	=	students should not complain
<b>{a, b, c}</b>	=	money provides services in computer labs, the library, and in classrooms
<b>Z</b>	=	the limiting factors are: students (the audience and complainers) and SSC (where the tuition hikes are occurring)

Thesis statements are **not**:

- *Statements of fact:* SSC raised tuition this year.
  - *Statements of the obvious:* Students don't like paying tuition.
  - *Announcements of intent:* This essay will explain how SSC uses tuition money in ways beneficial to students.
- **Topic sentences:** These drive the body of the essay. For each specific point you make to support your thesis sentence, you must have a topic sentence and at least one body paragraph that provides detailed support. For the thesis on King and Malcolm X, the topic sentences must come from the aspects of leadership you have established as important for this discussion. You must do that in your introduction, before you announce your thesis. You must tell your reader why this is an important discussion to have – why should we analyze these two? How are you defining leadership in this context?

Sample Topic sentences:

- Martin Luther King, Jr. lead his supporters into any conflict by first teaching them how to maintain a peaceful attitude that would not provoke or justify a violent response from police.
- Malcolm X encouraged aggression in his followers.

Topic sentences have two parts: the topic and the attitude.

**The Topic:** The topic of a paragraph is a word or phrase that the author has narrowed down. By “narrowed down” I mean that the author has found a topic that he can cover effectively in one paragraph. Instead of “tuition costs,” I might write about “SSC tuition hikes.” Authors narrow topics with prewriting techniques, such as brainstorming, freewriting, and clustering. These techniques ask the writer to jot down as much as possible about the topic. These prewriting techniques have multiple purposes:

- They clear the author's brain
- They allow the author to get down, on paper, everything he knows about a topic
- They allow the author to begin organizing information through grouping of like information and deleting of irrelevant information

Choosing a particular prewriting technique depends on the author and the purpose. Some techniques lend themselves to more detailed information, and others appeal to particular learning styles. Authors should practice using several techniques and discovering which work the best for them under certain circumstances.

Prewriting might yield the following topics on “tuition costs:”

- Recent hikes in tuition at SSC
- Breakdown of tuition use at SSC
- Comparison of tuition at SSC and other area colleges
- Getting financial aid at SSC

Notice that all of these topics deal with SSC. This is another way of narrowing a topic – adding a geographical CONTEXT. Since tuition may change from school to school, an author cannot easily make a blanket statement about tuition in Oklahoma or America. The more he can narrow the scope of his topic, the more he can accomplish in the paragraph. This, however, is only half of the topic sentence. At this point, the author has not informed the reader what he will say about the topic. This is the “attitude.”

**The Attitude:** Before a writer has a topic sentence, he must figure out what attitude he wants to take. We can take the four topics above and add attitudes to them:

- Recent hikes in tuition at SSC + will prevent many current SSC students from continuing their education.
- Breakdown of tuition use at SSC + reveals the college’s commitment to providing advanced technological resources for students.
- Comparison of tuition at SSC and other area colleges + shows the great bargain offered to students attending Seminole for their first two years of college.
- Getting financial aid at SSC + can be easy with the right planning.

Now we have a complete topic sentence for the paragraph. Writers must be careful that they do not begin a paragraph with simply an announcement of a topic rather than a complete statement of purpose: topic + attitude.

After the author has settled on a topic sentence, he can begin planning his paragraph. Planning is an important part of writing. When a writer has some idea of where he’s going with his paragraph, he can better prepare for any obstacle to his position on the topic that he might face and/or that the reader might have. Obstacles can present themselves in several ways:

- Lack of basic knowledge of topic: the reader does not know enough background information to fully appreciate or understand the author’s point.
- Different opinion about topic: the reader has an opposing position and may strongly disagree with the author or challenge the author’s evidence and reasoning.
- Different education level than author: the reader may not have the same vocabulary or educational background as the author, so the author must modify his diction and style to suit his audience.
- Difficulty finding evidence: the author may not find or have trouble finding the facts and examples he needs to prove his position on the topic.

Even the best planning might not help the author prevent some of these problems, but it helps lower the odds of major problems late into the writing process.

2. **Explanations and Examples:** Following the topic sentence, you must explain your point to your reader. What does it mean when you say that King taught his followers how to respond? What does “aggression” consist of concerning Malcolm X’s methods? Without this explanation, your reader may not understand the specific point you are trying to make. Explanation would also include important definitions: any words or terms the reader may not know, or that have potential multiple means that the reader may misinterpret. Explanation usually remains at the general level. You discuss what was the overall behavior like. To fully

explain, you must also provide readers a specific example to illustrate your explanation. In this case, you could use a common knowledge incident or cite (and document) from a source that shows King's methods. If necessary, you might even present two or more examples to show a variety of techniques or to prove that this was the dominant method. Examples also provide evidence to support your point. If the topic warrants, the author must back up his position with facts, statistics, authoritative testimony, and other objective evidence that supports his attitude on the topic. The more debatable or argumentative the attitude, the more likely the author will need objective evidence outside his own experience or opinion.

3. **Analysis:** Just providing materials for the reader is not always enough to make our case. The writer has to tie them all together by analyzing what they mean, what their significance is, why the reader should be concerned or pay attention, etc. Analysis can also provide evaluation (e.g., which is the better choice) and synthesize two ideas to form a new concept or present a new perspective. Often, academic argument asks students to read a source, like a literary or philosophical text, and make a connection to current events. The author's role is to synthesize the different elements by providing a context that connects them. For example, if I have to write a paper that justifies Hitler as an excellent leader, how can I connect these two ideas (Hitler + excellent leader) in a way that makes sense to most ethical people today? By using Machiavelli's definition of an excellent leader in his book *The Prince*, I can make a logical argument. You will use this technique in this class. I will provide the text and a context (such as Plato's "Allegory of the Cave" and a modern issue), and you must synthesize the two.
4. **Transitions:** between each component, you must provide connections that help the reader see the relationship between these parts, like cause, effect, comparison, and contrast, etc. You simply don't list these elements in order. It is up to you to provide the coherence and unity through transitions that logically guide your reader through your reasoning.

As you continue to work on your essays, print out a clean copy and mark each of these items on your draft. If you are missing any one, then you should work on adding that component to your paper. If your essay is falling short of the required length, chances are you are missing some of these components.

## SAMPLE ESSAY with LABELED PARTS

<i>Essay components</i>	Just Say "No" to Joe
<i>Introduction that starts broad and narrows to thesis; provides background information and context for essay.</i>	This organization today faces many challenges. One of the crucial decisions that members must make is setting five-year goals. For this, the directors must appoint a chairperson for the development committee. This position requires someone who can work well with others, provide responsible leadership, and consider suggestions from other members of the committee.
<i>Thesis statement</i>	Though the directors are considering Joe Smith for this position, they should not appoint him as committee chair because he exhibits none of these crucial qualities.
<i>First body paragraph: opens with intro sentence that isolates one part of the definition from the previous paragraph and adds more specificity.</i>	<i>New paragraph:</i> The chair must be able to work with a variety of people within the organization and outside of it. At times, the chair will encounter people who are of higher or equal rank, and he/she must be able to adjust to these different situations.
<i>Topic sentence: reason that supports thesis</i>	However, Mr. Smith only likes to work with people he can dominate.
<i>Evidence that develops topic sentence and proves author's point</i>	For example, last year, he chaired the festival committee and managed to anger the president of both town banks, the president of the chamber of commerce, and the assistant to the event's keynote speaker, not to mention the many organization members to which he was rude. An inquiry into the many complaints revealed that Mr. Smith was unable to respect the authority of other people and always wanted to be the top dog. A similar problem occurred when he was in charge of the 2002 Charity Drive and the 2003 Christmas Auction and Dinner. The organization received many letters and phone calls complaining of his highhanded manner.
<i>Summary of paragraph</i>	This is hardly the quality of an outstanding development chair.
<i>Second body paragraph: opens with intro sentence that isolates one part of the definition from the intro paragraph and adds more specificity.</i>	<i>New paragraph:</i> The person heading the committee must show responsible leadership. This involves giving credit to everyone involved in successful ventures and shouldering the responsibility for any problems that occur.
<i>Topic sentence: reason that supports thesis</i>	Mr. Smith, though, likes to take credit for any success but blame others for failures.
<i>Evidence that develops topic sentence and proves author's point</i>	Two years ago, the Charity Drive raised more money than in the 2000 and 2001 seasons combined. This was the result of a team effort and the work of Lindsey Beresford who arranged for Reba McIntire to be the keynote speaker. However, Mr. Smith took credit for these accomplishments and never mentioned any other member of his team or Mrs. Beresford's contribution. Yet, a year later, when the keynote speaker backed out at the last minute because Mr. Smith failed to confirm the date of the festival, he refused to acknowledge his fault and instead let people believe that it was a team failure. No one on either of these committees will work with Mr. Smith because of the ill will he built.

<i>Summary of paragraph</i>	The organization does not need a chair who will drive people away. It needs someone who provides strong leadership and draws in people.
<i>Third body paragraph: intro sentence with last definition</i>	<i>New paragraph:</i> Finally, the chair should encourage all team members to participate and submit ideas for developing the organization. Having many talented minds working together will create a stronger future.
<i>Topic sentence: reason that supports thesis</i>	Here again, Mr. Smith has proven that he cannot accept input from anyone else. In fact, he sees any suggestions at odds with his own plans as challenges to his authority.
<i>Evidence that develops topic sentence and proves author's point</i>  <i>No summary of paragraph</i>	This year, he proceeded to implement his own plan for streamlining the yearly membership drive. One of his committee members had previous experience in this job and offered advice that would improve Smith's plan and make the system more efficient. Mr. Smith ridiculed this person in front of several members and refused to listen to any of his ideas. The result was a catastrophe. The new plan cost the organization twice as much as the old plan, and in the process of implementing it, Mr. Smith lost several years worth of computer records that support staff had to later re-type. This took seventeen hours to finish. The person Mr. Smith ignored suggested a complete system backup to prevent such loss and cost-saving measures that would have saved money.
<i>Transition and summary of essay/ Restatement of thesis</i>	<i>New paragraph:</i> Mr. Smith's record speaks for itself: he would make a very poor committee chair.
<i>Conclusion gradually broadens by summarizing points, establishing why issue is important in author's point of view, and calling for action from directors.</i>	The directors cannot afford to give him any more opportunities to antagonize and belittle members, waste money, and take this organization down the wrong path. This position is too important to organization's future to put in the hands of someone who has very little concept of teamwork and leadership. Other members have much more experience and have proven that they have the necessary qualities to chair this committee. The directors should consider them instead of Joe Smith.

## How to Research

### 1. Identify your subject.

In some writing situations, the teacher will give you a specific topic or subject to work on. In other writing situations, you may have to find a subject yourself. Generally, try to pick ones that you have some knowledge of before research. This will make your task easier in many ways because you won't be entering the project cold.

### 2. Ask a research question.

You have to narrow the subject and choose a position from which to argue. Pinpoint the areas you are most interested in and ask a question about those areas. For a paper, I might be curious about the phrase "Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" from the Declaration of Independence. Does our government still support those ideals? See, there's a question. But it is probably too broad. I can narrow it further by brainstorming. I would want to define what our Founding Fathers (FF) meant by life, liberty, and happiness. These terms can have vastly different interpretations. For example, I might think that the three could involve freedom to choose in areas like euthanasia, abortion, wearing seatbelts/helmets. However, I cannot assume that the FF would lump them under the same heading. If I cannot find any evidence that the FF addressed these issues or others similar to them so that I might make a logical extrapolation, then I must look at the evidence I do have. What did they say about personal liberty versus government control in general? I can analyze this evidence and apply it to situations occurring today that did not occur then. I doubt strongly that abortion was a hot topic (though it happened). Nor can we expect tracts on seatbelts or helmets (obviously). But the issues surrounding these specific topics may be present in other cases.

Once I have a question in mind and a plan begun, I need to find sources to support my argument (or at least what I think is my argument at this point).

### 3. Begin researching sources.

You will find 2 types of sources. The first is primary. For the topic I listed above, the primary sources are the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution (including Bill of Rights). We call these primary because they are the beginning texts. Secondary sources, the second type, are things written about primary sources. Let me give you an analogy. If I quote President Bush, then I am using a primary source (going right to the horse's mouth). If I quote someone discussing or analyzing what President Bush said, I am using a secondary source. Both are important, and in research papers, you will need to use both to show you have looked at the different arguments surrounding your particular question. Sometimes, your teacher will give you a data set of articles to work with. In this case, you will not need to perform outside research.

However, using secondary sources does not mean letting go of your own ideas. You must have a personal argument and be able to express that and prove it. The secondary sources merely help you prove it. They should never replace your own voice and narrative in the paper. This would mean you have 3-4 pages of quotes and summaries strung together by a few of your own sentences. If you begin researching before formulating a strong question and points to argue, then you are more likely to lose control of your paper. BAD!!! I want to read what your ideas are and see that you have been able to find corroborating evidence. This is important because the reader might disagree or doubt your point, but if he/she sees evidence that supports it, the reader will be more inclined to give you benefit of the doubt. In argument, you must provide reasonable, verifiable evidence to back up your points. If you don't, then you will have failed in your purpose. Imagine a lawyer not presenting any evidence in a court case or any data that challenges evidence against her client. If she merely stands before the jury and says, "My client is innocent because he's a good person," how likely is it the jury

will be convinced? Even if she says, “My client is innocent because he was sitting in a donut shop in Hoboken at the time of the crime” but doesn’t provide witnesses or anything to verify that, the jury will not put much weight to the statement.

But it’s not just about providing evidence. You have to provide credible evidence. We must be able to verify and trust the information you provide. If the lawyer has the client’s mother swear he was with her all night but a policeman with no connection to the accused says he saw him running down the street a block from the crime, who are we more likely to believe? More than likely, the jury would believe the cop because he/she has no reason to lie (that we are aware of). The family and loved ones of defendants are usually weak witnesses because we think they would lie. The same is true of a witness with a criminal past who has made a deal. So consider your source!

#### 4. Where do I find sources?

The first place to look for the most current sources is the periodical index in the library. This lists by year all the articles published in magazines and newspapers, organized by topic. Once you find some articles, you will need to check the library’s holding list to find out what magazines and newspapers it subscribes to and the years that it has. For example, SSC might have subscribed to Newsweek from 1952-1987, stopped carrying it for 5 years, and then resubscribed in 1992. If your article is from June 1990, then you’re out of luck at SSC.

You can also go to the Internet and use <http://search.ebsco.org>. This is an online search engine of academic sources. Some of the articles you find will be available online; others you will have to find in hardcopy. You can choose the databases to search, narrowing to medical, educational, children, or other fields.

You should also check out the books SSC has on your topic. For a paper on the FF, I’m sure the library has many relevant books (including biographies of the main FF – especially Jefferson and Madison who were the primary authors of the Declaration of Independence and Constitution, respectively). Consider the publication date of the book before using the data. Is it out of date?

The reference section of the library contains sources that you cannot check out, but do not overlook it. The ref section is rich with interesting sources that may be important to your argument. The library’s database will list these books.

Don’t overlook field research. You can conduct your own surveys, experiments, and interviews. The LB Brief gives you tips on some of these things. You can find other sources to help you set up special experiments and surveys. You can conduct interviews in person, over the phone, or via email. If you can’t find someone around here that really qualifies as an expert, then you can go to the Internet and find a specialist. Usually, people are willing to answer questions concerning their field. Don’t overlook the authors of books or articles that you’ve found. Try doing a name search on the Internet. You might come up with a home page or email address for that person.

#### 5. Internet Sources can be dangerous.

The Internet is a wonderful tool, but it also contains a lot of junk. If you cannot establish the credentials of the source or verify the information, then it’s usually best not to use the source. The rule of thumb for most information is that if you can find it in three other sources, then it is likely to be true. Now, if these sources are all fifty years out of date, then it doesn’t matter how many you find. You have to use the most current information possible from the most respectable people/institutions. That still doesn’t mean you won’t find a dud, but it lowers your chances. The Internet is also a place where cut and paste abounds. By that, I mean many pages merely duplicate information found on another page. When you find three sources that contain the same information,

- be sure that they are not merely copying info. The rule of three sources means that three entities have independently verified the information.
- 6. Take precise notes during research** When you find helpful information, make a note of it, including the complete bibliographical information (author, title, publisher, date, page number). You can use note cards or any means that you prefer as long as it's easy to organize. Don't rely on memory because memory will let you down. If the information is a direct quote from the source, put it in quotation marks, so you won't mistake it for your own words. This will prevent you from accidentally plagiarizing. You may also want to make some comments about the context of the information. One of the worst things you can do is to take a quote or information out of context and thus misconstrue the meaning. If I quote an obscure doctor on the efficacy of opium to control epileptic seizures but fail to let my readers know this doctor lived in 1665, then they will assume I am referring to a current physician. See the problem? I might want to prove this theory, but I cannot use deception to do so – this is a fallacy (card stacking).
- 7. Be prepared to do a lot of reading.** To find even a handful of credible sources, you may have to read twenty books or articles. You must start early so you don't run out of time. You may also find that the library does not carry some sources that are crucial to your paper. You will have to interlibrary loan them or go to a library that does have them. You may also find that someone has defaced the book or magazine, and the article you need is not there, or that someone has checked it out. Waiting till the last minute is dangerous because you will not have time to find replacement sources.
- As for reading, generally researchers do not read everything they find. We learn to skim the article, index, table of contents, and chapters to determine the relevance of the source to our argument. If we think it could be a usable source, we put that in our "keep" pile and move on to the next potential source on our list. Once we've accumulated a good number of items in our keep pile, we sit down and look at them more closely. For books, you don't necessarily ever have to read the entire thing. Sometimes, only one or two chapters will be important to your argument. You should always at least skim the first and last chapters (or introduction chapter), because these usually give the book's "big picture." Prefaces will sometimes do this, but they are often more dedicatory in nature. For articles, try reading the first and last paragraph and the first sentences of each paragraph in between to get a good idea of the article's content. This will save you much time and allow you to go through a large pile pretty quickly.
- 8. Never forget your purpose.** It's easy to get sidetracked when researching or to even lose focus. If you have to, write down your research question on a note card and keep that handy. Reread it occasionally to keep your mind on target. That doesn't mean that you can't change your mind or even your topic, but it will keep you from getting off topic.
- 9. Write the rough draft.** With your initial research complete, you are ready to start writing the paper. Use your sources only when necessary – don't pad the paper with quotes. Be sure that you explain the relevance of each citation to your argument. Don't simply quote or summarize and then move on. You must show us that you not only understand what you've just cited but that it applies to your point.
- 10. Don't forget the MLA.** For every citation you make in your paper, you must document it. Citations include quotes, summaries, and paraphrases. You use parenthetical notation in the paper itself that tells us the author's name and page number the information is on. The author's name allows us to look at your Works Cited page and easily find the complete bibliographical information because we arrange entries alphabetically by author's last

name. If a source has no author, then you use the title of the source. Your LB Brief handbook discusses what to do when you have a work with no author. It also has the basic guidelines for MLA documentation, including examples. For the latest MLA guides on Internet sources, go to [www.mla.org](http://www.mla.org). You will find a link to documenting web sources on this homepage.

**11. Keep working while your teacher has your rough draft.**

Just because a teacher has your rough draft does not mean you still shouldn't keep doing work. You can look for other sources, work on your thesis, double check your works cited, etc. Of course, you may get your paper back with lots of corrections needed, but if you have turned in the best rough draft you can, then usually you won't be so off track that you have to change topics.

**12. Prepare the final version.**

When you get your draft back, read the comments carefully. If necessary, you may want to schedule a conference with the teacher. Do whatever he/she suggests and then go back over the paper with a fine tooth comb, looking for documentation errors, grammar and mechanical errors, organization, and other basic writing issues. Have someone else read your paper who can give you quality feedback. Before turning it in, be sure you've included your rough draft, and make a copy of it in case your teacher loses the paper (hey, it happened to me my freshman year).

For more tips on research, search the Internet. There are free on-line books and web sites devoted to research writing for college and high school students. Do stay away from the paper mills. 1) Most of these papers are poorly written, and 2) I know how to track down the source of plagiarized papers. Using a search engine, teachers can simply type in the title or a significant phrase from a suspected paper, and the Internet will tell us if it is from a paper mill.

If you are having trouble finding a topic, log in to EBSCO host via SSC's library web page. This resource not only provides access to credible journals and periodicals, but it also has a student research assistant that allows you to find current events, specialized topics in different fields (e.g., medicine, politics, sports), and tools to make finding credible information much easier than simply Googling the Internet or searching the library stacks.