

The Research Essay*



What is a research essay?

A Research Essay is simply a **research-based argument** in response to a research question. Remember that an **argument** is simply a claim supported by reasons to believe that claim. And remember that a **claim** is simply an answer to a question. So the purpose of your research paper is to provide an answer to the research question you stated at the end of your literature review, and to provide reasons that support that answer.

How to write the research essay

1. Clearly state your research question

It might be a question stated directly in the literature. It might be a question lurking beneath the surface of the literature. It might be a question that arises for you in response to reading the literature. In any case, state this question as clearly as you can in the introduction to your paper. Your question should be interesting. It should be a question that could have multiple possible answers. Reasonable people should be able to disagree with each other about those answers. If it's a question with an answer on Wikipedia, it's probably not a very good question.

2. Identify the type of question you're trying to answer

Is it a definitional question? A causal question? A question of evaluation? A question of proposal? Revisit the chapter in *Writing Arguments* that addresses that particular type of question. Make note of the *organizational structure* unique to that question. Begin to think about the structure your argument will take.

3. Condense your literature review

A shorter revised version of your lit review will now be its own separate section of your research essay. Feel free to cut and paste portions of your lit review directly into your research paper. The lit review should set up the question you're trying to answer. It should try to trace the origins of the question, answers that other people have already tried to give, and why those answers haven't worked or are still being debated. Keep the parts of your lit review that help you set up your argument. Get rid of the parts that are no longer relevant.

* Image from Gros, Frédéric. *A Philosophy of Walking*. Verso, 2015.

4. Answer the research question

In other words, make your argument. This is the hard part. It's the heart of the paper. You've spent weeks summarizing and synthesizing other people's arguments. Now it's time to articulate your own argument. Remember the difference between argument and opinion. An **opinion** has no reasons or evidence to support it, whereas an **argument** is a claim supported by reasons and evidence. Some of this evidence may come from your personal experiences, but it should also come from the research you've done and are continuing to do. In other words, you'll need to keep reading to find more evidence to support your argument. Again, your argument will have a specific structure depending on the type of question you're answering (definition, cause, evaluation, proposal). I strongly recommend following the guidelines that *Writing Arguments* provides for structuring your particular type of argument. (If you think another form would work better for your argument, that's fine; let's just chat about it first.)

5. Expand your introduction

Return to the introduction and provide a bit more context for your argument. What's important about your research topic? Why should anyone (besides you) care about this particular topic? Provide a road map of the paper. Give a preview of what's to come.

6. Write your conclusion

Don't just "restate your argument". Instead, provide a "take-home point." Provide the "so what?" about your argument. If your argument is right, how does that change your thinking about the topic? How does it contribute to the literature? Now that you've answered this particular question, what other questions become possible to answer?

Minimum requirements

- 8-12 pages
 - Introduction (1/2 - 1 page)
 - Lit Review (4-5 pages)
 - Argument (3-5 pages)
 - Conclusion (1/2 - 1 page)
- 10+ sources (5+ should be academic/scholarly)
- MLA format (8th edition)
 - 1" margins
 - Double-spaced
 - Typed in 12-point serif font
 - MLA style heading
 - Last name/page numbers
- MLA-style in-text citations and works-cited page (see pages 377-89 of *Writing Arguments*)
- Due as a hard copy and as a digital copy by Tuesday, December 11th, at noon. You can turn in hard copies at my office (Columbine 1024). You can turn in digital copies via email (msiebert@uccs.edu).