The Research Process
Library Research Support Materials

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  Sample MLA Outline from Diana Hacker (2 pages)
  Sample MLA Research Paper With Works Cited Page from Diana Hacker (7 pages)
Student Checklist: Project Requirements

Project Title: ________________________________________________________

1. What is the due date for the completed project? ________________

2. Write the dates below when specific materials are due during different stages of the research process:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resources Required</th>
<th>Date(s) Due</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Background research using the library</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storing/saving important information</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preliminary or working thesis due</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research conference form (if required)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed note cards</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outline/Organizer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working Bibliography/Works Cited</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Draft</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Draft</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation (if required)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. What are the format requirements for the project? Circle all that apply:
- Formal Paper
- Oral Presentation
- Video or Multimedia Project
- Other __________________

4. What is the required length of the project in words, pages, slides or minutes? __________

5. What is the specific number of sources required? __________

6. Are specific source types required? Circle all that apply:
- Books
- Magazine Articles
- Articles from Databases
- Websites
- Newspaper Articles
- Primary Sources

7. What forms of documentation should I include in my paper? Circle all that apply:
- Works Cited Page
- In-Text Citations
- Annotations

8. List here any other project requirements for this project and dates due:

__________________________________________________________________________________
The Research Process
Step 2: The Preliminary Search
Where To Locate Information

There are so many wonderful resources available at your school and public library to help you complete your research. Now that you know what you need, and you know what the library has to offer, let us show you how to find these useful sources.

How to Access Information Sources:

- Think about a subject or topic that interests you and relates to your assignment.

- **Browse** the shelves of books and magazines in your school or public library.
  - Does anything catch your eye?
  - Take the time to consider all the books that you find interesting, even if they are not directly related to your topic!

- Visit the **online catalog computer (OPAC)** at your school or public library to locate a book on your topic of interest.
  - You can access the OPAC from school or from home!
  - Ask your librarian if you have any questions!

- Guided by your librarian, log into the databases at your school or public library.
  - Search for the subject that interests you.
  - Your librarian will show you how to flip through your list of results to reach the articles that you find interesting.
  - Almost the databases at your school and public library have remote access. This means you can continue your search at anytime, “24/7” from your home!

- Guided by your librarian, visit an Internet Subject Directory.
  - A good place to begin is: **www.lii.org** (Librarians’ Internet Index)
  - Browse through the subject lists and search for information on the topic that interests you.
  - OR Perform a basic search on the topic that interests you.

Remember:

- During this step, your topic is just an idea.
- Keep an open mind.
- Consider all of the information you find.
- The information you gather during your preliminary search may make you decide to change your topic.
- That is all part of the research process!
The Research Process
Step 2: The Preliminary Search
Sources That Are Available

Before You Begin-Plan Your Search!

1. You need to find background information on your general topic.
2. Your goal is to investigate your topic and narrow it down to a working thesis.
3. In order to do this you need to gather background information and materials on your general topic.
4. Google and other Internet search engines are not your only options!
5. There are better sources of information for you to use.
6. Look at the chart below for more information about all the sources that will help you conduct your preliminary search.
7. Feeling lost or overwhelmed? Ask your school librarian or the librarian at your public library for help!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Source</th>
<th>Format</th>
<th>Benefits of Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internet Database</td>
<td>Online</td>
<td>• Contains reliable, authoritative, unbiased information that you can trust.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Facts are frequently updated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• “24/7” easy access from any computer or wireless device.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book</td>
<td>In Print</td>
<td>• Contains reliable, authoritative, unbiased information that you can trust.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Information is easy to access.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eBook</td>
<td>Online</td>
<td>• Contains reliable, authoritative, unbiased information that you can trust.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• “24/7” easy access from any computer or wireless device.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet Subject Directory</td>
<td>Online</td>
<td>• Organizes Internet sites by subject and allows readers to browse the websites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Different Than a Search Engine!)</td>
<td></td>
<td>on topics of interest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Organized by human beings, not computers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• A good search engine will contain a majority of reliable websites created by</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>experts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magazines</td>
<td>In Print or Online</td>
<td>• Contains factual information laid out in a simple, easy to read format.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Articles from recent issues are timely and deal with current events.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Interviews</td>
<td>Person to Person or In Print</td>
<td>• Contains “firsthand” factual information that has not been changed or</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Firsthand Accounts)</td>
<td></td>
<td>misinterpreted.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Research Process
Step 2: The Preliminary Search
How to Store and Save Important Information

Now that you have used all that the library has to offer, you should have found some good books and articles on your preliminary topic. You should also have taken down some basic notes on your preliminary topic. It is important that you save all of your work, so you do not lose this important information. Don’t worry about having too much; you will discard what you do not need, after you create your final thesis statement.

Storing and saving what you found during your preliminary search—Some Recommendations:

• As you read different chapters in books and parts of journal articles, jot down notes on anything that strikes you as interesting or important. Be sure to include:
  o The title of the book or article you are reading.
  o The page numbers and chapter where you found the information.
  o The title of the website and the website address (url).

• There are many different ways for you to keep track of the information that you find:
  o Keep a running “research log” of notes and facts that you found during your searches in Microsoft Word or Microsoft OneNote.
    ▪ ALWAYS back up your work on a flash drive!
  o Keep a research notebook (in print) filled with important facts, notes and information that you found during your searches.
  o Use a folder with multiple tabs so you have a place to store the important articles that you print and any notes that you take.
  o Create a separate folder on your computer for your research assignment. Store any online articles, website links and notes that you take in this folder.
    ▪ ALWAYS back up your work on a flash drive!

• It is a good idea to keep a separate “Research Portfolio” for every assignment that you receive.

• Remember to bring the portfolio with you every time you visit the library and always backup your work!
The Research Process

**Step 3: Select and Narrow Your Topic/Subject**

Questions for Narrowing Your Topic

- **Broad, General Topic**
- **Specific, Focused Topic**

1. **How do you know if your topic is too big or broad?**
   
   If your topic can be summed up in a word or two, such as: *underage drinking, school cheating, education, overweight teens, corporeal punishment, Korean War,* or *hip hop,* the topic is too broad.

2. **How should you narrow down your topic?**

   The easiest way to narrow down your topic is to apply the familiar question words to what you are researching: *Who, What, When, Where, Why* and sometimes *How.*

**For example:**

Take the broad topic of “**Violence and the Media**” and apply the above questions to narrow down the focus:

**Question 1:** Who is involved?
   Who is affected?

**Question 2:** What is the problem?
   What type of media is being studied?

**Question 3:** When did this problem occur?
   Is this problem still happening?
   What time period is being studied?

**Question 4:** Where did this problem occur?
   Will one specific area or region of the country or world be studied?

**Question 5:** Why is it important to focus on this issue?
   Why did this problem occur?
The Research Process

**Step 3: Select and Narrow Your Topic/Subject**

Narrowing Your Topic - Examples

Take the broad topic of “**Violence and the Media**” and apply the above questions to narrow down the focus:

**The following examples and conclusions are based on materials found during the preliminary search:**

**Who is involved?**

- Artists meaning, actors, actresses, musicians, screenwriters and directors.
- Media moguls, people that own multiple television and radio stations, movie networks and websites.

**Who is affected?**

- Children and young adults.
- For this assignment the focus of the research will be limited only to young adults.

**What is the problem?**

- Violent and graphic images being shown to children and young adults.
- An Increase in violent behavior in children and young adults.

**What type of media is being studied?**

- Will limit to movies and music videos.

**When did this problem first occur?**

- Not sure, but according to preliminary research, this been a problem for over two decades.
- Will focus on the time period of the last ten years.

**Where did this problem occur?**

- This is a problem all over the world, but for this paper will focus on urban areas in the United States.

**Why is it important to study this issue?**

- Information that was found during my preliminary research shows an increase in crimes being committed by young adults in urban areas in the United States.
- There is evidence of a link between an increase in crime and the violent images that young adults witness at the movies and in music videos.
Try it! Take a big, broader topic and break it down, by apply the following questions. Choose any topic that interests you. Remember, if your topic can be summed up in one or two words, it is probably too big and broad. This should be rough, free thinking, brainstorming exercise. **Fill in the blanks below.**

**My broad, general topic is:** __________________________________________

Who is involved? Who is affected? **OR** Is there a person that you would like to focus on?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

What is the problem? **OR** What specifically do you want to know about this topic?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

When did this problem first occur? **OR** Is there a specific time period that you want to focus on?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Where did this problem occur? **OR** Is there a specific region or area that you want to focus on?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Why is it important to study this issue? **OR** Why do you want to know more about this topic?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
The Research Process

**Step 3:** Select and Narrow Your Topic/Subject

**Optional Research Conference Form**

- The purpose of this conference is to avoid research “holes,” to ensure you have identified quality sources and have not overlooked any significant sources or search strategies before you finalize your thesis statement.
- Schedule an appointment with your teacher or librarian to discuss your progress and be sure to bring all of your research materials with you, including your journal, online log and or portfolio.

Complete This Section Prior to Your Conference.

**Broad, general topic:**

**Preliminary, possible thesis:**

**Preliminary search materials:**

**Best four sources so far (print or online):**

1. __________________________________________  2. __________________________________________
2. __________________________________________  3. __________________________________________
3. __________________________________________  4. __________________________________________

List any problems you have encountered so far:

Complete This Section during the Conference

**Teacher or Librarian suggested strategies:**

Student signature ________________________________ Class____________________ Date___________

Teacher or Librarian signature _______________________________________________ Date __________
The Research Process

Step 4: Begin To Research Your Topic

How To Evaluate An Author

We use the Internet everyday, yet did you know that the Internet is a global network made up of over 3 trillion websites? 

Anybody can make a website and post information online, even if that information is inaccurate. In the self-publishing environment of the Web, you need to be careful. You want to be sure that the sources you use are credible.

Why should I use a credible author?

• If you are unsure of an author’s credentials, you might have difficulty defending use of his or her work in your paper.
• Your teacher is likely to question you if you quote an expert who is unknown.
• You may be citing incorrect and false information in your paper.

How can I make sure my author is credible?

• Do a little background investigating before you complete your project. See the tips below.
• If you are unsure if someone is a credible author, ask your librarian for help!

Ways To Verify Author Credibility:

1. Search the Web for the author’s resume or C.V. (curriculum vita or vitæ). If you cannot find a resume or C.V., at the very least, look for evidence of a university affiliation or association with a major organization.

2. Search biographical reference tools in your school library’s database for the name of the author. Good places to start are: Twayne Author Series, Current Biography and the Gale Literature Resource Center.

3. Search for news of the author in one of your school library’s newspaper databases. Try typing the author’s name into EBSCOhost or ProQuest.

4. Do a “link check.” In either AltaVista or Google, perform the following search: 

http://link:INSERTURLHERE

Your results will show who else has linked to the page you are evaluating. Would the pages that link to your page be considered reputable? Is there a review or annotation of the page you are investigating?

5. Truncate the URL. If you can not find any information about the author on the website, then you need to backtrack. Try erasing everything in the URL up until you reach the site ending ( .com, .gov, .org, etc.)

6. Examine the URL-You can be guided by the ending of a website URL. See the examples on the “Website Evaluation Sheet” on the next page.
The Research Process

Step 4: Begin to Research Your Topic

How To Evaluate A Website By Examining The URL

- URL – Universal Resource Locator. You can simply call it the website address. For example:
  http://www.gardencity.k12.ny.us

- A URL is made up of three different parts:
  2. www. – this tells you that the address you on the World Wide Web.
  3. .org, .com., gov., etc. – this is the domain name for the particular website.

- More about the domain:
  - A very important part of the URL is the domain.
  - The domain is your clue as to who created the website and who may be responsible for the information on that website.
  - The domain can help you determine if the information on the website is reliable.

- Domain Names Explained:

  1. .gov is likely to be a reliable government site. This includes sites from the United States and International websites. Be sure to ask yourself this question:
     Would a website created by the government contain reliable information?

  2. .org is likely to be the work of a respected organization. Be sure to ask yourself the question:
     Does this organization have a specific agenda or are they promoting a certain message?

  3. .edu or .ac is likely to be a website created by a university, or a college, or k-12 students. Keep in mind that any website that includes a ~ symbol is generally a personal website. Be sure to ask yourself this question:
     Do I want to use the work of a college freshman that may be struggling in class?

  4. .com is likely to be a commercial or personal website. Be sure to ask yourself these questions:
     Does this website have an agenda? Is this website trying to sell me something? Is this website trying to influence me or sway my opinions?

Be sure to ask yourself this question:

What are the best websites that I have found that were created by reliable, authoritative authors?
The Research Process
Step 4:
Begin To Research Your Topic
Evaluating Your Information Using The CARRDS System!

**C**REDIBILITY: Who is the author?

What are his or her credentials?

**A**CCURACY: Can facts, statistics, or other information be verified through other sources

Based on your knowledge, does the information seem accurate?

**R**ELIABILITY: Does the source present a particular view or bias?

**R**ELEVANCE: Does this information directly support my thesis?

Does this information answer my question?

**D**ATE: When was this information created?

When was it revised?

Is this the most up to date information on my topic?

**S**OURCES BEHIND THE TEXT: Did the author use reliable, credible sources?
The Research Process

Step 5: Formulate The Question You Will Research and Write A Preliminary Thesis Statement

How To Create A Thesis Statement

● A thesis statement answers your essential question.

● A thesis statement declares what you believe and what you intend to prove through your research

● A thesis statement usually appears at the end of the first paragraph of your paper.

A good thesis statement makes the difference between a thoughtful research paper and a simple retelling of facts.

What Makes A Good Thesis Statement?

● It should propose an arguable point with which people could reasonably disagree.
  EXAMPLE: “High school graduates should be required to take a year off to pursue community service projects before entering college in order to increase their maturity and global awareness.”

● A strong thesis statement is provocative.
  EXAMPLE: “Because half of all American elementary school children consume nine times the recommended daily allowance of sugar, schools should be required to replace the beverages in soda machines with healthy alternatives.”

● It is specific and focused:
  EXAMPLE: “Hunger persists in _________ because jobs are scarce and farming in the infertile soil is rarely profitable.”

How Do You Know If You Have A Solid Thesis Statement?

Try these five tests:
1. Does the thesis inspire a reasonable reader to ask, “How?” or “Why?”
2. Would a reasonable reader not respond with “So what?” or “No kidding?” or “Who cares?”
3. Does the thesis avoid general phrasing and sweeping words such as “all” or “none” or “every”?
4. Does the thesis lead the reader towards subtopics needed to prove the thesis?
5. Can the thesis be adequately developed in the required length of the paper or project?

(Reproducible for academic use: courtesy of Joyce Valenza-Power Research Tools)
## THE RESEARCH PROCESS

**Step 6: Gather Research Materials and Create Note Cards With Bibliographic Information**

### SAMPLE NOTECARDS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Name: Jane Smith</th>
<th>Class: English, period 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Topic:</strong> Euthanasia &amp; Economics</td>
<td><strong>Source Number:</strong> 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**A quote** from this source that I would like to use in my paper is: “without strict legal protections, euthanasia will increasingly be used for economic reasons, when a patient is unable to protest” (p.4).

**A paraphrase** of an idea from this source that I would like to use in my paper is: Individuals who suffer from terminal illness should be allowed to choose the time and place of their death (p.6).

**A summary** of the overall theme of this source is: The article focuses on the economic circumstances of terminally ill patients. Personal finances may play a role when making this difficult decision.

Other useful information about this source: Great introduction for my paper.

---

**Jane Smith, English per.5**

**Source number: 1**

**Type of Source** (Book, Magazine, Website, Article from Online Database): **Online Database**

**Title of book or article:** Euthanasia: Guide To Critical Analysis

**Author(s) of book or article:** No authors listed


**Date of Access:** November 13, 2009

**City of publication** (if listed): No city of publication listed

**Year of publication** (if listed): **2009**

**Name of publisher** (if listed): Great Neck Publishing Company

**Useful page numbers or chapters** (if necessary): **pgs. 1-6**
The Research Process

Step 6: Gather Research Materials and Create Note Cards With Bibliographic Information

NOTE CARD TEMPLATES

| Student Name: ____________________________________________ | Class: ____________________________ |
| Topic: ______________________ | Source Number: ________ |

A **quote** from this source that I would like to use in my paper is ________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________ (p.____)

A **paraphrase** of an idea from this source that I would like to use in my paper is__________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________ (p.____)

A **summary** of the overall theme of this source is ____________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________

Any other useful information about this source ______________________________________________________

| Student Name: ____________________________________________ | Class: ____________________________ |
| Topic: ______________ | Source Number: ________ |

Name of website or database __________________________________________________________

Title of book or article ________________________________________________________________

Author(s) of book or article ____________________________________________________________

URL _______________________________________________________________________________

Date of Access __________________________________________________________________________

City of publication (if listed) __________________________________________________________

Year of publication (if listed) _________________________________________________________

Name of publisher (if listed) ___________________________________________________________

Useful page numbers or chapters (if necessary) __________________________________________
The Research Process

Step 6: Gather Research Materials and Create Note Cards With Bibliographic Information

Quoting and Paraphrasing

QUOTING:

Quotations are the exact words of an author, copied directly from the source word for word. Quotations must be cited in-text and the original source must be cited on the Works Cited page.

A good quotation example*:

“Students frequently overuse direct quotation in taking notes, and as a result they overuse quotations in the final research paper. Probably only about 10% of your final manuscript should appear as directly quoted matter” (Lester 46).

Use Quotations When:

- You want to add the power of an author’s words to support your argument.
- You want to disagree with an author’s argument.
- You want to highlight particularly eloquent or powerful phrases or passages.
- You are comparing and contrasting specific points of view.
- You want to note the important research that precedes your own.

PARAPHRASING:

Paraphrasing means rephrasing the words of an author, putting his or her thoughts and ideas in your own words. A paraphrase can be viewed as a “translation” of the original source. Paraphrased text should be slightly shorter than the original work. Paraphrased material must be followed with in-text documentation and the original source must be cited on the Works Cited page. A paraphrase does not mean changing one or two words of the original quote. A good paraphrase uses only the idea of the author.

A good paraphrase example*:

Students should take just a few notes in direct quotation from sources to help minimize the amount of quoted material in a research paper (Lester 46).

Paraphrase When:

- You plan to use the information you have gathered from a source and wish to avoid plagiarizing.
- You want to avoid using too many quotations in your paper.
- You want to use your own voice to present information.

*Examples based on those listed at The Owl at Purdue: http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/619/01/
Quoting, Paraphrasing, And Summarizing

You can borrow from the works of other writers as you research. Good writers use three strategies to blend the words and materials of other writers in with their own, while making sure their own voice is heard. These three strategies are:

1. Quoting
2. Paraphrasing
3. Summarizing

Quotations are the exact words of an author, copied directly from the source word for word. Quotations must be cited in-text and the original source must be cited on the Works Cited page.

**USE QUOTATIONS WHEN:**

- You want to add the power of an author’s words to support your argument
- You want to disagree with an author’s argument
- You want to highlight particularly eloquent or powerful phrases or passages
- You are comparing and contrasting specific points of view
- You want to note the important research that precedes your own

Paraphrasing means rephrasing the words of an author by putting his or her ideas into your own words. A paraphrase can be viewed as a “translation” of the original source. Paraphrased text should be slightly shorter than the original work. Paraphrased material *must* be followed with in-text documentation and the original source must be cited on the Works Cited page.

**PARAPHRASE WHEN:**

- You plan to use information on your note cards and wish to avoid plagiarizing
- You want to avoid over using quotations
- You want to use your own voice to present information

Summarizing involves putting the main idea(s) of one or several writers in your own words and including only the main point(s). Summaries are significantly shorter than the original and take a broad overview of the original material. Summarized material *must* be followed with in-text documentation and the original source must be cited on the Works Cited page.

**SUMMARIZE WHEN:**

- You want to establish background or offer an overview of a topic
- You want to describe common knowledge (from several sources) about a topic
- You want to determine the main ideas of a single source
When Should I Cite Sources In My Text?

In-text citation is the accepted format for acknowledging borrowed information within your original text. Use in-text documentation to cite a source whenever you:

- Use an original idea from one of your sources in the form of quoting or paraphrasing.
- Summarize original ideas from one of your sources.
- Quote directly from a source or use a date, fact, or statistic that might be challenged.
- Use factual information that is not common knowledge.
  - Common knowledge is information that recurs in many sources. Examples:
    - Barack Obama is the President of the United States.
    - The sky is blue.
  - If you are not sure if something is common knowledge, cite to be safe.

Examples of MLA In-Text Citations

MLA format follows the **author-page** method of in-text citation.

- This means that the author's last name and the page number(s) from which the quotation or paraphrase is taken must appear in the text.
- A complete reference should appear on your Works Cited page.
- The author's name may appear either in the sentence itself or in parentheses following the quotation or paraphrase.
- The page number(s) should always appear in the parentheses, not in the text of your sentence.

**See Examples Below***:

- Wordsworth stated that Romantic poetry was marked by a "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" (263).
- Romantic poetry is characterized by the "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" (Wordsworth 263).
- Wordsworth extensively explored the role of emotion in the creative process (263).

**Quotation Example:**

On December 6, 2000, reporter Jamie Stockwell wrote that distracted driver Jason Jones had been charged with "two counts of vehicular manslaughter in the deaths of John and Carole Hall" (Jones 31).

*Use no punctuation between the name and the page number. The punctuation goes outside of the parentheses.*

**Paraphrase Example:**

Most states do not keep adequate records on the number of times cell phones are a factor in accidents; as of December 2000, only ten states were trying to keep such records (Sundeen 2).

*Use no punctuation between the name and the page number. The punctuation goes outside of the parentheses.*

* [http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/02/](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/02/)
* [http://www.dianahacker.com/resdoc/p04_c08_s1.html](http://www.dianahacker.com/resdoc/p04_c08_s1.html)
Why and How to Create a Useful Outline*

Why create an outline? There are many reasons; but in general, it may be helpful to create an outline when you want to show the logical ordering of information. For research papers, an outline may help you keep track of large amounts of information. Many people find that organizing an oral report or presentation in outline form helps them speak more effectively in front of a crowd.

**Primary reasons for creating an outline:**

- Aids in the process of writing
- Helps you organize your ideas
- Presents your material in a logical form
- Shows the relationships among ideas in your writing
- Constructs an ordered overview of your writing
- Defines boundaries and groups

**How do I create an outline?**

- Determine the purpose of your paper.
- Determine the audience you are writing for.
- Develop the thesis of your paper.

Then:

- **Brainstorm:** List all the ideas that you want to include in your paper.
- **Organize:** Group related ideas together.
- **Order:** Arrange material in subsections from general to specific or from abstract to concrete.
- **Label:** Create main and sub headings.

Remember: creating an outline before writing your paper will make organizing your thoughts a lot easier. Whether you follow the suggested guidelines is up to you, but making any kind of outline (even just some jotting down some main ideas) will be beneficial to your writing process.

*Source - [http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/544/02/](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/544/02/)
Sample Outline in an MLA Paper (Levi)

Outline

THESIS: Unless the risks of cell phones are shown to outweigh the benefits, we should not restrict their use in moving vehicles; instead, we should educate the public about the dangers of driving while phoning and prosecute irresponsible phone users under laws on negligent and reckless driving.

I. Scientific studies haven’t proved a link between use of cell phones and traffic accidents.
   A. A study by Redelmeier and Tibshirani was not conclusive, as the researchers themselves have admitted.
   B. Most states do not keep records on accidents caused by driver distractions.
   C. In a survey of research on cell phones and driving, Cain and Burris report that results so far have been inconclusive.

II. The risks of using cell phones while driving should be weighed against the benefits.
   A. At the Harvard Center for Risk Analysis, researchers found that the risks of driving while phoning were small compared with other driving risks.
   B. There are safety, business, and personal benefits to using cell phones on the road.

III. We need to educate drivers on using cell phones responsibly and enforce laws on negligent and reckless driving.

Source: Diana Hacker (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2006).
This paper has been updated to follow the style guidelines in the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, 7th ed. (2009).
A. Educating drivers can work.

B. It is possible to enforce laws against negligent and reckless driving; in states that do not do an adequate job of enforcement, the public can lobby for improvement.
A Call to Action: 
Regulate Use of Cell Phones on the Road

When a cell phone goes off in a classroom or at a concert, we are irritated, but at least our lives are not endangered. When we are on the road, however, irresponsible cell phone users are more than irritating: They are putting our lives at risk. Many of us have witnessed drivers so distracted by dialing and chatting that they resemble drunk drivers, weaving between lanes, for example, or nearly running down pedestrians in crosswalks. A number of bills to regulate use of cell phones on the road have been introduced in state legislatures, and the time has come to push for their passage. Regulation is needed because drivers using phones are seriously impaired and because laws on negligent and reckless driving are not sufficient to punish offenders.

No one can deny that cell phones have caused traffic deaths and injuries. Cell phones were implicated in three fatal accidents in November 1999 alone. Early in November, two-year-old Morgan Pena was killed by a driver distracted by his cell phone. Morgan’s mother, Patti Pena, reports that the driver “ran a stop sign at 45 mph, broadsided my vehicle and killed Morgan as she sat in her car seat.” A week later, corrections officer Shannon Smith, who was guarding prisoners by the side of the road, was killed by a woman distracted by a phone call (Besthoff). On Thanksgiving weekend
that same month, John and Carole Hall were killed when a Naval Academy midshipman crashed into their parked car. The driver said in court that when he looked up from the cell phone he was dialing, he was three feet from the car and had no time to stop (Stockwell B8).

Expert testimony, public opinion, and even cartoons suggest that driving while phoning is dangerous. Frances Bents, an expert on the relation between cell phones and accidents, estimates that between 450 and 1,000 crashes a year have some connection to cell phone use (Layton C9). In a survey published by Farmers Insurance Group, 87% of those polled said that cell phones affect a driver’s ability, and 40% reported having close calls with drivers distracted by phones. Many cartoons have depicted the very real dangers of driving while distracted (see fig. 1).

Scientific research confirms the dangers of using phones while on the road. In 1997 an important study appeared in the *New England Journal of Medicine*. The authors, Donald Redelmeier and Robert Tibshirani, studied 699 volunteers who made their cell phone bills available in order to confirm the times when they had placed calls. The participants agreed to report any nonfatal collision in which they were involved. By comparing the time of a collision with the phone records, the researchers assessed the dangers of driving while phoning. The results are unsettling:

> We found that using a cellular telephone was associated with a risk of having a motor vehicle collision that was about about four times as high as
that among the same drivers when they were not using their cellular telephones. This relative risk is similar to the hazard associated with driving with a blood alcohol level at the legal limit. (456)

The news media often exaggerated the latter claim (“similar to” is not “equal to”); nonetheless, the comparison with drunk driving suggests the extent to which cell phone use while driving can impair judgment.

A 1998 study focused on Oklahoma, one of the few states to keep records on fatal accidents involving cell phones. Using police records, John M. Violanti of the Rochester Institute of Technology investigated the relation between traffic fatalities in Oklahoma and other devices while driving (Lowe A21).
the use or presence of a cell phone. He found a ninefold increase in the risk of fatality if a phone was being used and a doubled risk simply when a phone was present in a vehicle (522-23). The latter statistic is interesting, for it suggests that those who carry phones in their cars may tend to be more negligent (or prone to distractions of all kinds) than those who do not.

Some groups have argued that state traffic laws make legislation regulating cell phone use unnecessary. Sadly, this is not true. Laws on traffic safety vary from state to state, and drivers distracted by cell phones can get off with light punishment even when they cause fatal accidents. For example, although the midshipman mentioned earlier was charged with vehicular manslaughter for the deaths of John and Carole Hall, the judge was unable to issue a verdict of guilty. Under Maryland law, he could only find the defendant guilty of negligent driving and impose a $500 fine (Layton C1). Such a light sentence is not unusual. The driver who killed Morgan Pena in Pennsylvania received two tickets and a $50 fine—and retained his driving privileges (Pena). In Georgia, a young woman distracted by her phone ran down and killed a two-year-old; her sentence was ninety days in boot camp and five hundred hours of community service (Ippolito J1). The families of the victims are understandably distressed by laws that lead to such light sentences.

When certain kinds of driver behavior are shown to be especially dangerous, we wisely draft special laws making them illegal and imposing specific punishments. Running red lights, failing to stop for a school bus, and drunk driving are obvious examples;
phoning in a moving vehicle should be no exception. Unlike more general laws covering negligent driving, specific laws leave little ambiguity for law officers and for judges and juries imposing punishments. Such laws have another important benefit: They leave no ambiguity for drivers. Currently, drivers can tease themselves into thinking they are using their car phones responsibly because the definition of “negligent driving” is vague.

As of December 2000, twenty countries were restricting use of cell phones in moving vehicles (Sundeen 8). In the United States, it is highly unlikely that legislation could be passed on the national level, since traffic safety is considered a state and local issue. To date, only a few counties and towns have passed traffic laws restricting cell phone use. For example, in Suffolk County, New York, it is illegal for drivers to use a handheld phone for anything but an emergency call while on the road (Haughney A8). The first town to restrict use of handheld phones was Brooklyn, Ohio (Layton C9). Brooklyn, the first community in the country to pass a seat belt law, has once again shown its concern for traffic safety.

Laws passed by counties and towns have had some effect, but it makes more sense to legislate at the state level. Local laws are not likely to have the impact of state laws, and keeping track of a wide variety of local ordinances is confusing for drivers. Even a spokesperson for Verizon Wireless has said that statewide bans are preferable to a “crazy patchwork quilt of ordinances” (qtd. in Haughney A8). Unfortunately, although a number of bills have been introduced in state legislatures, as of early 2001 no state law...
seriously restricting use of the phones had passed—largely because of effective lobbying from the wireless industry.

Despite the claims of some lobbyists, tough laws regulating phone use can make our roads safer. In Japan, for example, accidents linked to cell phones fell by 75% just a month after the country prohibited using a handheld phone while driving (Haughney A8). Research suggests and common sense tells us that it is not possible to drive an automobile at high speeds, dial numbers, and carry on conversations without significant risks. When such behavior is regulated, obviously our roads will be safer.

Because of mounting public awareness of the dangers of drivers distracted by phones, state legislators must begin to take the problem seriously. “It’s definitely an issue that is gaining steam around the country,” says Matt Sundeen of the National Conference of State Legislatures (qtd. in Layton C9). Lon Anderson of the American Automobile Association agrees: “There is momentum building,” he says, to pass laws (qtd. in Layton C9). The time has come for states to adopt legislation restricting the use of cell phones in moving vehicles.
Works Cited


