Writing Research Papers for RBC.

Several documents are included in this package, covering topics related to research and writing. It will save you time if you read them before you start your class work.

As a general rule.

1. Consult your course syllabus. Know clearly what the assignment and requirements are.
2. Check the due date!
3. If you have questions about the assignment as it appears in the syllabus, contact your instructor.

Instructors might have their own requirements with regard to topics and formats. Follow the instructor’s requirements. He or she may not require MLA papers or may want you to use a different format.

There are many good Web sites that can help you refine your research and writing. You might want to check out the Owl Purdue Online Writing Lab

http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/

A couple of additional timesavers.

- Articles found in databases might have links for how to cite the source.
- Many students find www.bibme.org or www.easybib.com useful. You must select the format you want—usually MLA 7 for RBC, and you must register with bibme. These free online services will help you find titles and give you correct citations, but they might require you to format by double-spacing and using a hanging indent on the second line.

Suggested order for reading the documents with regard to research and writing.

1. Writing Research Papers at RBC
2. The Research Process
3. Web Research
4. Academic Writing
5. Evaluating Web sites
6. A Thesis Statement
7. Research Paper Format
8. Parenthetical Documentation
9. MLA Works Cited Page, Print Publications
10. MLA Works Cited Page, Print Publication (nonperiodicals)
11. MLA Works Cited Page, Web Publications
12. MLA Works Cited Page, Periodical Print Publications
The RESEARCH Process

Human nature & research:
1. We’re lazy and naive.
   - We underestimate the time and effort research takes.
   - We expect it to be easy.
   - We assume that all we need is information.
   - We assume the information we want is available in the form we expect.
2. In fact, good research:
   - takes time and effort,
   - is often difficult,
   - getting information is just part of the story.
   - and, sometimes the information is simply NOT available, or not available in the forms we expect.

Expect some confusion, frustration & anxiety, especially as you move further into the research process.

- We start confidently, but as we research, confidence disappears and we experience uncertainty. Uncertainty is normal and to be expected.
- Uncertainty increases because you encounter new information that doesn’t fit with what you already know or believe.
- After some time, we form a new perspective, a new personal focus, and then we feel better! We needed more than information—we needed a perspective that allowed meaning to be drawn from the new information.

When You Research

- Don’t be surprised. Be prepared:
  - to experience frustration & confusion as you dig in. Remember it will not last.
  - to take a few wrong turns.
  - to refine your research questions.
  - to need to read background material.
  - to document your sources and your process.
  - to examine materials that won’t be used.
  - to be delayed over availability issues.

Note-taking for your Research Papers.

- When you research, do not take extensive notes.
  - You will not need to document basic information that is non-controversial and would be found by looking in most basic sources. But be careful about plagiarism—any use of another person’s ideas or words must be cited.
  - You will need to back up with quotations and or citations anything that requires an authority:
    - information that is not commonly known.
    - unique, apt, pithy, especially effective wording,
    - interpretations,
    - controversial claims,
    - expert opinions,
    - analysis.
Research Advice

WEB RESEARCH

- Read left to right (on handouts).

GOOGLE IS NOT ENOUGH

- Search engines only cover an unknown but probably small percentage of content available on the World Wide Web.
- The priority of display in search results can be misleading, and most researchers are lazy even about clicking!
- College level research involves more than informational level searching. Ask questions beyond who, what, when and where. Ask why and how. Find sources that are qualified to answer these questions.

ALL WEB SITES ARE NOT EQUAL.

- College-level research involves new issues for incoming students:
  - Scholarly communication.
  - Peer-review.
  - Citation.

Electronic sources need to be evaluated for their usefulness in writing at the college-level.

GENERALLY SPEAKING:

- You will probably need to do research that won’t end up cited in your papers.
- Fishing on the Web for quotes and facts is not in-depth research.
- Your instructors are Web-savvy. Expect that the bar will be set higher than it was in high school.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN WEB SITES:

- Authority.
- Relevance.
- Depth.

Authority is the most important issue, and once it has been established relevance and depth will follow.

ACCEPTABLE AUTHORITY

- Anyone can have a Web site, and some popular Web sites are of little worth in scholarly research.
- Private Web sites should always be regarded critically by a researcher.
- Wikipedia (all wikis) are fascinating and useful, but should be cited in papers only under very limited conditions.
AUTHORITY—THE SITE ITSELF

- Consider the domain of the Web site. Allow .edu, and .org to take priority over .com in most cases.
- Check for affiliation. Is the Web site a part of a valid institution—a university, a think tank, a hospital, a professional organization, a headquarters?
- Is there a visible board of reference? Check for an “About Us” or FAQ menu.

PASS UP.

- Sites that are clearly the work of one person or maybe a group of friends.
- Any site with obvious spelling, layout errors and cheesy or over-the-top graphics.
- Sites with excessive advertising.
- Unsigned articles which are almost always unacceptable in cited research.
- Authors without credentials. Seek authors with legitimate degrees (watch for diploma mills), positions, & previous publishing (watch for vanity press publishing.)

RELEVANCE AND DEPTH.

- Is the authority you have found, an authority on the subject at hand or in a different field?
- Depth. Some legitimate authorities are not writing to a researching audience—they are writing at the popular level, using laymen’s terms, not citing other research, and not necessarily bringing up sticky and uncomfortable counter-arguments. See the next two slides for other important considerations.

IS IT RESEARCH OR IS IT

polemic?

1 a : an aggressive attack on or refutation of the opinions or principles of another b : the art or practice of disputation or controversy—usually used in plural but singular or plural in construction 2 : an aggressive controversialist : disputant

IS IT RESEARCH OR IS IT

Preaching to the Choir?

To commend an opinion to those who already accept it.

'Preaching to the choir' (also sometimes spelled quire) is of US origin. It clearly refers to the pointlessness of a preacher attempting to convert those who, by their presence in church, have already demonstrated their faith.

ALTERNATIVES TO GENERAL SEARCHING WITH GOOGLE.

- Google Scholar
- Google Books
- Indexes at libraries and organizational headquarters.
- Aggregators.
  + This last item includes services like Ebscohost.
  + Open source repositories, (doaj.org/ plos.org biomedcentral.com)
  + Government sites (loc.gov usa.gov)
  + University thesis, dissertation and research repositories. For example, https://kb.osu.edu
Our resident students will want to pay special attention. Other states have similar services.

http://ohioweblibrary.org/
you will be asked for your Ohio zip code (43029 at RBC)

Resources menu at Ohioweblibrary.
- Try Academic Search Premier.
- Possible strategies:
  - Choose the full-text option.
  - Choose periodical or book for literature type.
  - Consider the article and email it to yourself for closer inspection later.

If you are not in Ohio call your local public library and ask if your state has a virtual library and how you might join.

The following services are costly and are NOT available to the whole public. If you are in another academic library or know other university students in the area, or find yourself on another campus you may be able to access them. They are very useful—

- Ohiolink.edu
- ATLA

The following slides will familiarize you with the Ohio Web Library.
Here Ohio residents can find full-text scholarly articles.
You can have the full article emailed to yourself, or you can simply print it out.
Instructions are in yellow on the following screenshots.
Click on Resources
Click on EBSCO or Academic Search Premier.

Be sure to check the "Locally Purchased Databases" tab for additional resources provided by your local public library.

Statewide Databases  Locally Purchased Databases  Help

Alphabetical List  Listed By Subject

Genealogy

Explore Ohio | OPLIN
Ohio Death Certificate Index (1913-1944)
Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps

Magazines & Newspapers

All EBSCOhost Databases
MasterFILE Premier | (EBSCOhost)
NewsBank (Ohio's Newspapers)
Newspaper Source | (EBSCOhost)

Reference & Research

Academic Search Premier
Explore Ohio | OPLIN
Ohio History Central || Online Encyclopedia
Oxford Reference Online
Student Research Center
World Book Hispanica
They ask for your Ohio zip code.
Be sure to check the full text box
Enter your search term. See articles.
There will be article information, a brief abstract, and a link for the full article (PDF, HTML, both). There is also a link to email the article to yourself.
Many states have virtual libraries. The fastest way to find out about them is to contact your local public library. They may provide you access through their system.

If you don’t know about your local scene, most public libraries have good Web sites and are easy to look up. Often you can live chat with one of the librarians. Tell the librarian you are interested in reference databases with full-text articles—a librarian will know what you mean.

Librarians ask a lot of questions. Don’t be put off. They do this to figure out how to serve you!
A little background with regard to scholarly or academic writing might help you understand what is required to research for a college paper.

As you research at RBC you will encounter academic writing. It may be different from what you are used to, and you may find it difficult. Academic writing is largely what you should be consulting for your papers.

Your instructors will no doubt steer you toward Evangelical Christian scholars, but there are times when you will need to research using non-Christian scholarship. If you have questions about perspectives, especially those that seem contrary to biblical faith, ask your instructors—they are well aware of the issues and will have helpful responses.

**Some other things to keep in mind.**

- Nonacademic or popular writing usually goes in a straight line. In contrast, academic writing often zigzags, because it has to address various viewpoints and consider opposing perspectives.

- Nonacademic writing doesn’t usually include citations. There may be a reference to an expert, but in academic writing you will see many footnotes and a bibliography. Often before academics get to their point, they will review all the current literature on the topic.

- In nonacademic writing the author does not purport to be an expert. The author speaks from the perspective of the layperson who has learned just a bit more than you know. Academics, on the other hand, often are experts or aspiring-experts in their field. They have spent considerable energy researching and learning.

- Nonacademic writing avoids or explains jargon, assumes the reader knows little, considers emotional responses and tries to make itself easy to read. Academic writing might be the opposite—full of tough vocabulary, assume that you know references, be indifferent to your emotional response, and be hard and maybe even boring to read. Academics don’t guarantee that their writing will be easy.

- Much popular Christian literature is written with a perspective of personal authority, but isn’t academic as such. It is devotional by nature, and though it is the thinking of a trusted or respected leader, it may not be taken at face value in all cases.
What is peer review?

- Peer review is at the heart of scholarly communication. It simply means that others with authority have reviewed the work and decided it should be given a voice (even if they don’t agree with it). Peer review makes things easier for researchers—if an article appears in an important peer-reviewed journal, then it is deemed worthy of a researcher’s attention.

About Journals

- Most journal content is not available for free on the Web, but you may find an article at an author’s personal site, in reprints, or databases. An article from a peer-reviewed journal is a good find when you are doing academic research.
- In days gone by there were relatively few journals, and each academic discipline had just one or a few journals that all the researchers in the field consulted. Things have changed. Sometimes the new situation is referred to as a crisis. Journals have proliferated, and the Web has opened up new possibilities. There are still, of course, very important journals in different academic fields. RBC subscribes to several of these, but the range and variety is much greater.
- Good things have come out of the proliferation of sources. More voices can be heard, and no single establishment controls so much of the flow of information. Open Access Journals are an especially welcome development for a small library like RBC’s which can’t afford many journal subscriptions. Many scholars now publish, sometimes only because they have to, in free open access databases and electronic repositories at their institution.

The Book is Not Dead

A balanced use of sources might include books of several types:

- Monographs (books with a single author); reference books (books that are consulted for specific content—not usually read in their entirety); anthologies (books that are compiled of other sources); books with more than one author.

It doesn’t matter at all if a book is found in print or in another format. What matters is the quality of the writing. For research you need to find books that approach topics academically and give evidence of the features listed above.
Evaluating Web Sites for Use in Research Papers

How valuable is the information for your purposes?

✓ Some sites go wide; some go deep. For most papers at RBC, you’ll want “deep.”
  What is deep?
  o Does the article have citations? What kind of documents does it cite?
  o Is it written for college-level research, or for casual reading?
  o Does it have vocabulary that makes you pause, or look up words in a dictionary (maybe it should)?
✓ Some sites are interesting but not suitable for citation. Wikipedia is useful, and not a bad place to start, but it is best left out of research papers.
✓ Some sites are parodies. Make sure you don’t take the bait.
✓ Some sites are simply out of date. When was the last update?
✓ Some sites are inaccurate.
  How can you tell? You can’t always. For writing a paper though, avoid sites with:
  o spelling errors,
  o extreme and controversial claims,
  o writers that claim to have exclusive knowledge or unlock or reveal secrets,
  o sites that state upfront that everyone else is wrong,
  o sites that are polemic in nature (looking for a fight).

It could be that you will miss some good information by applying some of these criteria, but you will usually avoid problems and make your own life easier by being a little more exclusive.

Authority. Is the site suitable for citation in an academic paper?

Consider the source:

✓ Who sponsors this site?

✓ What is the site’s domain? Prefer .edu or .org and .net domains. .com might be shaped by commercial interests. Be flexible about this criterion.

✓ Affiliation with an institution—a college or university, a professional organization or society, a think-tank, a flagship institution, a headquarters, etc. Be less flexible about this. An unaffiliated Web site with no board of reference or directors might be a poor source for research.

(Some RBC instructors do not allow citation from sources with no board.)

✓ Are these signed articles by authors with verifiable credentials?

(Some RBC instructors do not allow citation of unsigned articles.)
o Do an independent Web search on the author’s name. Who is this person: unknown, well-known, a self-promoter? Do the author’s credentials match the field in which the author is making authoritative statements?

o Credentials might include advanced academic degrees from accredited universities, historical acceptance, recognized experience, leadership in appropriate organizations and movements, writing that has been reviewed professionally, biographical authority (life-story, say a holocaust survivor or eyewitness). What kind of credentials a writer needs depends upon the nature of the material you are citing. Be leery of self-proclaimed authority—look for endorsements.
**A Thesis Statement**

**What is a Thesis?**

“A single sentence that gives your topic and your point of view” (MLA 1.8.2).

“The point of view the writer wants readers to adopt” (St. Martins 526).

**Two factors:**

1. **Purpose**: describe, explain, argue, persuade?

2. **Audience**: is your reader a specialist, or someone like you?

*The reader in the case of most of your RBC assignments will be your instructor. Some RBC instructors might require you to write for a secular audience.*

*A thesis for a research paper is generally not argumentative or persuasive. Normally it will be informative—reporting what you have learned about a topic.*

Don’t start research until you have a *provisional* thesis statement. It will help to write it down. Be prepared to modify or even abandon this statement as you research, BUT do it deliberately! Before you start writing for a final draft have a *clear* thesis.

It is never too late to modify your thesis. If research leads you in a different direction than you supposed, or, if in writing, your focus or opinion changes, by all means, modify your thesis!

Adapted from *Write for College* (Sebranick, Meyer, Kemperer):

- Select an interesting subject. If it interests you, it will be easier to research.
- Think about your subject. Write down very briefly what you do know and what you don’t know about it. Start with who, what, when, where, why, and how questions. Read a very general entry in an encyclopedia or reference work.
- Limit your subject. Be specific. Consider what kind of research will be required and whether you can handle the topic in a timely manner.
- Write a thesis statement.
  - Put your thesis in the form of a question, but then turn it pack into a declarative sentence.
  - For example in question form: “What are the early differences between the Southern (and Swiss) Anabaptists and those in Northern Germany and Holland?”
  - In declarative form it might read. “The Northern Anabaptists differed from those of the South by holding a stricter interpretation of shunning and an unusual doctrine with regard to the incarnation.”

“A good thesis statement tells readers what your subject is and more importantly, it tells them how you plan to treat your subject. The statement is usually a single sentence with two main elements: a limited subject plus a specific feeling or attitude toward the subject.” (*Write for College* 287-288).
Here is another approach adapted from Cambridge Rindge and Latin School, a high school in Massachusetts.


- Create a statement of purpose using an “I want to find out…” formula.
- For example, I want to find out if there were ever Amish groups in Russia.
- Create the thesis after you’ve learned something.
- Thesis: “The only Amish settlements in Russia were in Volhynia (now in the Ukraine) in the early 19th Century. They are now extinct.”
Research Paper Format

Basic:

- One-inch margins at top, bottom, sides.
- Justified left. No right or full justification.
- Double-spaced.
- No title page.
- Staple or paper clip your paper (except electronic submission).

Use this form for the heading on the first page only. It is double-spaced.

Merle Swartzenyoder
Instructor Jones
Introduction to Apiary Science
30 February 2025

The heading is followed by a double space, and then the centered title.

Merle Swartzenyoder
Instructor Jones
Introduction to Aramaic
30 February 2025

Aramaic Usage in the Book of Ezra

There are actually three languages to consider…

The title is not italicized, boldface, underlined or all in capital letters.

On the first page and all subsequent pages place a header in the upper right-hand corner with your last name and a page number.

Most word processors have a “header” command.

Swartzenyoder 1

Merle Swartzenyoder
Instructor Jones
Introduction to Aramaic
30 February 2025
Aramaic Usage in the Book of Ezra

There are actually three languages to consider…

The Works Cited Page:

- Appears at the end of the paper on a new page.
- 1 inch margins as in the rest of the paper.
- Entries are in alphabetic order.
- Double space entries and between entries.
- The Works Cited Page always has the title Works Cited (centered).
- It also has the same page header with continuous numbers. If the last page of the paper is page 5, then Works Cited page is page 6.
- The Works Cited page is only for those works referenced in your paper. It is assumed you will work with other sources that you have not cited and which do not appear.

Works Cited


Parenthetical Documentation.

References in your paper should direct the reader to specific works on the Works Cited page.

Basic: (Author’s last name and page number)

It is usually best to place the citation at the end of a sentence, and often it can go at the end of the paragraph, as long as it is not confusing. Notice that in short quotations within a paragraph the citation is outside the quotation marks, BUT the final punctuation occurs after the citation.

Sample:

“There are many good reasons for a Christian to abstain from the social use of alcohol, but there is more to the virtue of temperance than merely not drinking certain beverages. Temperance is, unfortunately, one of those words that has changed its meaning. It now usually means teetotalism” (Lewis 61).

This parenthetical documentation would point the reader to the following entry on the Works Cited page.


Readability. Some samples.

1. Author’s name in text.

Sample:

There is more to the idea of temperance than being a nasty-spirited nephalist. C.S. Lewis has discussed this very point (60-64).

2. A work by multiple authors.

If there are 3 or fewer authors, cite them all in the parentheses.

Sample:

“Another aspect of the presuppositional departure from traditional orthodoxy is its critique of theistic evidence” (Sproul, Gerstner, Lindsley 264).

This parenthetical documentation would point the reader to the following entry on the Works Cited page.


If there are more than three authors you may cite the first author followed by *et.al.* (*Smith et al*. 250-51)
Works Cited Page: Print Publications

A basic book with one author.

There are 4 elements:

1. Name of author. 2. Title of the work. 3. Publication information (Place: Publisher, Year.). 4. Medium.

Special considerations by element. Use the title page (not the cover) of the book for information.

1. **Author.** Last name first followed by comma, then first name followed by a period.
   - *Use initials if the title pages does.*
   - *Omit titles and degrees.*

2. **Title.** Full title and subtitle as they appear on the title page.
   - *Put a colon after the main title.*
   - *Italicize the whole title.*
   - *Put a period after the whole title.*

3. **Publication information.** If the information isn’t on the title page, turn to the copyright page on the other side.
   - **Place:**
     - *If several cities are listed just use the first one.*
     - *Omit city, state, province or country.*
     - *Follow with a colon.*
   - **Publisher:**
     - *Shorten by omitting articles and descriptive words like “books, press, house, publishers,”* but maintain university abbreviations. *Cite only surnames. If there are several names only cite the first. Use standard abbreviations like Assn. for Association or Soc. for Society.*
     - *Follow with a comma.*
   - **Date:**
     - *Use the date on the title page, but if it is not there use the most recent copyright date on the copyright page.*
     - *Follow with a period.*

4. **Medium.** Print.
   - *Follow with a period.*

Example:

Works Cited Page: Print Publications (nonperiodicals)

Books, not monographs (books with a single author).

There are 7 elements to consider:

1. Name of author (if signed).
2. Title of the piece.
3. Title of the work.
4. Editor, compiler.
5. City of publication, name of publisher and year of publication.
6. Pages in some cases. Not used in cases of alphabetic arrangement.
7. Medium of publication (Print).

Each major element is followed by a period, except publisher/sponsor which is followed by a comma.

Special considerations by type or element with some samples.

1. An Anthology or compilation.

Begin with name of editor or compiler (name reversed – EACH name followed with a comma). Abbreviate ed. (for editor) or comp. (for compilers). Title of the work italicized and followed by a period. Publication information (Place: Publisher, Year). Medium.


2. A work in an anthology.

Add the author and title of the piece before the title of the book. Use Quotation marks. Page numbers of the full piece after the publication information.


Encyclopedia & dictionary entries. If signed, give author’s name first. Sometimes the article will be signed with initials. There is usually a table at the front of the book with full identification. Widely used reference books do not need full publication information.


Works Cited Page: Web Publications

A basic Web site

There are 8 elements:

1. Name of author (compiler, editor, etc.).
2. Title of the work.
3. Title of the Web site.
5. Publisher or sponsor.
6. Date of publication.
7. Medium of publication.
8. Date of access.

Cite that which you can. You will probably not be able to include each element. Each element is followed by a period, except publisher or sponsor which is followed by a comma.

Special considerations by element

1. Author. If there is no author, begin with the title of the work.

2. Title. If it is an independent work, italicize the title. If it is part of a larger work put it in quotation marks.

3. Web site. Only cite if it is different from the work above (in number 2). Italicize.


5. Publisher/sponsor. If not available, use N.p.

6. Date of publication. Day, month, year. If nothing is available, use N.d.


8. Date of access. Day, month, year.

Samples: Notice that you cite ONLY what you have—all 8 elements might not be available.


Works Cited Page: Periodical Print Publications

Journals and Magazines.

There are 9 elements:

1. Name of author
2. Title of the article.
3. Name of the periodical or journal.
4. Series number or name.
5. Volume number (for a scholarly journal).
6. Issue number (scholarly journals).
7. Date of publication (Scholarly journals).
9. Medium.

Regular magazines are much easier to cite since they don’t require volume and issue numbers, just dates. See the last example.

How to tell the difference between magazines and journals.

As a general rule journals are less frequent—four times a year or less. Magazines are often weekly, bi-weekly or monthly. Most journals have successive numbering within a single volume. For example if issue 1 ended with page 180, issue number 2 might start with page 181.

Journals are a mainstay of academic research and writing. Most of them are not splashy. Many don’t have advertisements or if they do they are tucked away inside and very specifically targeted—professional meetings and position openings, not Coca-Cola.

Special considerations by element for Journal Articles.

1. Author. Last name first followed by comma, then first name followed by a period.
   - Use initials if the title pages does.
   - Omit titles and degrees.

2. Title of the article.
   - In quotation marks.
   - Put a period after the title and inside the quotation marks.

3. Publication information.
   - Periodical or Journal title:
     - Omit any article in the title (The).
     - Italicize
     - No final punctuation here.
   - Volume number
     - Don’t precede it with Volume or Vol.
     - Put a period after the number.
• **Issue number**
  o No final punctuation here.

• **Date.**
  o The year only.
  o Place in parentheses.
  o Follow with a colon.

• **Inclusive page numbers.**
  o Do not precede with p. or pp.
  o Numbers are for the entire article, not from the section you cite.
  o Follow with a period.

4. **Medium.** Print.
   • Follow with a period.

Sample Journal Citation:


Sample Magazine Citation.


In a weekly or biweekly magazine the date is formatted day-month (abbr.)-year: 30 Oct. 2010: