

Develop a writing context

- Create a question about your topic or problem (exigence) that you want to explore and that readers will care about
- Try to inform your readers' thinking with your research question
- Use your research question to develop a thesis statement that provides readers with a clear sense of your writing purpose

Conduct source evaluations to determine the reliability of sources

- Assess the **currency** of the publication date to determine up-to-date information
- Determine the **relevance** of the source to your topic and writing purpose
- Examine the qualifications of the author and publisher to determine the basis of their **authority**
- Look for **accurate** references, links, and other supporting evidence
- Discover the author's **purpose** and evaluate the associations he/she has with special groups to determine the presence of bias

Evaluate digital sources critically

- Check the domain (.org, .edu, .gov, .com, .net, .mil) to answer questions about purpose and authorship
- Ask questions about the author's perspective

Evaluate information gathered from field resources

- Determine the relevance and accuracy of interviews, correspondence, surveys, and observations

Read, analyze and synthesize source material (enter the conversation of experts); take notes

Prepare a summary

- Determine what is important in one sentence *using your own words* when you want to shorten source material to record only the general point the author makes

Paraphrase when reading complex ideas to record the main points of each paragraph

- Use your own words without changing the meaning of the ideas and reduce the original information by about one-third, but cover all of the main points.

Record someone else's exact words accurately inside quotation marks

- Cite your source inside parentheses at the end of each sentence for whatever you summarize, paraphrase, or quote

Create a list of sources including all citation information in a working or annotated bibliography

Draft the paper according to an organizational format that meets the rhetorical purpose of the assignment and the instructor's specific guidelines

Introduction

- Frame your issue and state your thesis

Body

- Use your own words to connect ideas for the reader when introducing new paragraphs and direct quotes
- Fit in direct quotations into the paper that are purposeful, and use them sparingly— **no more than 10% of the paper should be directly quoted from your sources**
- After a direct quote, explain its significance to the argument set forth in your thesis
- Follow a formal documentation style, such as MLA, APA, or Chicago style, to list all works cited on the final pages of the paper. Use the style guide required by your specific discipline of study according to the instructor's directions

Conclusion

- Reinforce your argument with a call to action, additional insights, or further observations

Revise and proofread the paper

- Research papers are formal papers, so the language should fit the rhetorical situation
- Reword confusing sentences or weak paragraphs

- Improve the organization of ideas
- Proofread grammar and spelling and check the formatting of the paper for accuracy
- Use the guidelines below to check the use of sources in the paper to avoid plagiarism

Avoiding Plagiarism

The SWIC student Handbook Student Conduct Code defines plagiarism as “the use or close imitation of the language thoughts, or work of another to include copying, quoting, paraphrasing, or using another’s creation, images, or illustrations to represent them as your own work without proper acknowledgement of the source.” Avoiding plagiarism is vital when using research sources because, even if it’s intentional, plagiarism violates academic integrity and carries harsh penalties.

To avoid plagiarism, follow the steps below during the research process:

- Allow enough time to read, think, and write about your sources
- Use summaries, direct quotes, and paraphrases in the paper and credit the sources.
- Cite the source of any ideas that are not your own, but do not cite your own thoughts or widely known information

For additional information about plagiarism, consult the handout “Success Center Tips for Avoiding Plagiarism in Paraphrases and Summaries.”