**Writing the Formal Research Paper**

After you have completed your research, you have the opportunity to present it. Aside from posters, the most effective way to do this is through a formal paper. To write a formal research paper, consult the resources provided and follow the four steps described below. Also, keep in mind that plagiarism can result in suspension, expulsion, and the revocation of college credit, so remember to cite your sources correctly.

**Writing Resources**

* [Writing and Learning Commons](http://www.wcu.edu/academics/campus-academic-resources/writing-and-learning-commons-walc/index.asp)
* [Hunter Library](http://www.wcu.edu/hunter-library/index.asp)
* [Hunter Library Research Help & Reference](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5CChequita%5CDocuments%5CSpring%202013%5CUndergraduate%20Research%20Manual%5Cresearchguides.wcu.edu%5Chelp)
* [The Online Writing Lab at Purdue (Owl)](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5CChequita%5CDocuments%5CSpring%202013%5CUndergraduate%20Research%20Manual%5Cowl.english.purdue.edu%5Cowl%5C)

**I: Thesis Statement**

Every paper has to have a thesis statement – a sentence in the introduction of a paper that tells the reader the topic of the paper and the position that the author is taking. Your thesis should cover what your paper will discuss in general terms and be no longer than a sentence or two.

**II: Outline**

Once you have your thesis, you should make an outline of what your paper will look like. Your paper should have an introduction that tells your reader what he or she will be reading about, a body that contains what you’re writing about, and a conclusion that recaps what you just told your reader about. Your outline will help you to organize your research into a format that makes it easier to manage. In your outline, you should come up with what you will say in your introduction and conclusion, figure out how many body paragraphs you’ll need, what you’ll put in those body paragraphs, and what order they should go in. It’s important that one item flows into the next smoothly so that your paper doesn’t sound choppy and disjointed.

**III: The Paper**

Once you have your outline done, you can start embellishing it to make your actual paper. Put everything into that recognizable essay format while watching your grammar and following the citation style appropriate to your discipline (e.g. MLA, APA, Chicago, etc.) The style varies from discipline to discipline, and each style is unique in terms of stylistic details as well as citation format. If you aren’t sure what style your discipline uses, talk to your advisor or someone in your department.

**IV: Revision**

Once you finish your paper, review it several times and look for problems – unnecessary information, grammatical errors, and other such mistakes. It’s recommended that you put your paper aside for a while before editing it, as it’s easier to spot mistakes if you don’t think about the paper extensively before you go back over it. You can also ask other people to read it; anyone else can spot mistakes and places where an idea is unclear. Reading your paper aloud to yourself is also a good proofreading tactic – if something is hard to say, it will be harder to read, and you’ll hear mistakes you didn’t catch while reading it silently.