



## Writing a Research Paper in 15 Easy Steps

- \_\_\_ 1. Choose a topic and learn about it
- \_\_\_ 2. Write a research question
- \_\_\_ 3. Write an informal outline
- \_\_\_ 4. List sources
- \_\_\_ 5. Take notes
- \_\_\_ 6. Write a thesis statement
- \_\_\_ 7. Organize notes and write a formal outline with topic sentences
- \_\_\_ 8. Write the introductory paragraph
- \_\_\_ 9. Write the body paragraphs
- \_\_\_ 10. Write a concluding paragraph
- \_\_\_ 11. Add a title
- \_\_\_ 12. Organize sources and write a works cited page
- \_\_\_ 13. Type the rough draft
- \_\_\_ 14. Review, revise and edit your paper
- \_\_\_ 15. Submit the final paper with all notes and drafts

# 1. Choose a Topic and Learn About It

- Make sure that you choose a topic that can be argued. For example:
  - Stanley “Tookie” Williams’ death sentence
  - global warming
  - videogames and their effects
  - cell phones in classrooms
  - pit bulls as pets
  
- Before you put your pencil to the paper, familiarize yourself with the topic.

View a website...



Read a book...



Ask someone...



## 2. Write a Research Question

- Once you've selected a topic and learned something about it, write a *research question*. This is a broad question on which your research will be based. At a later time, you will turn the *research question* into a statement.

Here are some examples:

- *Who was Stanley "Tookie" Williams and did he deserve the death penalty?*
- *Should pit bulls be banned as pets?*
- *Who was Princess Diana and how is she remembered?*

- You Try It:

(Biography) Who is/was _____ and what/how did he/she contribute to/influence _____?
(Controversial Issue) Why should the government/school _____ (other) place/not place restrictions on _____? (any topic)
(Design your own question) _____?

### 3. Write an Informal Outline

An informal outline is a list of the important points that will guide your note taking.

You may use statements or questions as in the examples below.

#### **Topic: Princess Diana**

Research Question:

**Who was Princess Diana and how is she remembered?**

Smaller points to help us to answer this question:

- Basic information about her life (who, what, when, where, why?)
- What have people said about her?
- How did she help others?
- How have her ideas and accomplishments influenced Britain and the world?
- How did royalty affect her life?
- Her tragic death

#### **Topic: Pit Bulls**

Research Question:

**Why should pit bulls be banned as pets?**

Smaller points to help us to answer this question:

- What is the breed of dog called a pit bull? (Basic background information)
- Why are pit bulls considered dangerous?
- What dangers do they pose to humans?
- What dangers do they pose to other animals?
- Does obedience training make a difference?
- Statistics on pit bull attacks

## 4. List Sources

- Locate at least three sources of information. They should not all be Internet sources.
  - reference book
  - non-fiction book
  - Internet source
  - online database
  - periodical (magazine)
  - audiovisual
  - interview
- Record the information for each source on a 3x5 card like the ones listed below.

### Book

Krohn, Katherine E. Princess Diana: Her Life and Times. Minneapolis: Lerner Publications, 1999.

### Website with Author

Huffman, Heinrich. "Princess Diana: 1961-1997." Memorial Sites 15 May 1998. 3 July 2006 <<http://www.memorial.gov.uk/output/page151.asp>>.

### Online Database Author

Gutierrez, Jose. "Princess Diana." People Magazine 5 Sept. 2007: 38-39. MAS Ultra – School Edition. EBSCO. SVHS Library, Sonoma, CA . 20 Aug. 2007 <<http://search.ebscohost.com/>>.

### Website Without an

"Diana: Case Closed, but Probably Not." Princess Diana Fan Club 16 Dec. 2006. 10 Aug. 2007 <<http://www.princessdifanclub.com/>>.

## 5. Take Notes

- Copy informal outline points as headings onto the top of binder paper. Use one sheet of binder paper per heading.

### Who was Princess Diana?

- Diana Frances Spencer (Krohn 1)\*
- Born in Norfolk, England July 1961 (Huffman 5)
- Died in Paris August 1997 (Gutierrez)
- Married to Charles, Prince of Wales (Gutierrez)

Continue writing facts to answer the question.

- Take notes by paraphrasing, summarizing or quoting.
- Add parenthetical (internal) documentation after each fact.

**\*Plagiarism** means stealing words or ideas from someone else. You must cite the source where you found each fact or you are plagiarizing.

## 6. Write a Thesis Statement

After you finish taking notes, turn your research question into a thesis statement.

The thesis statement :

is the main point of your research paper

includes a subject and an opinion

is broad enough to be supported by 4-5 informal outline points

### **Subject**

Pit bulls

Global warming

Video games

### **Opinion**

should be banned as pets

is a not major threat

are an innocent pastime

### **The evolution of a thesis statement...**

Who is Princess Diana and how is she remembered?



Although Princess Diana died young, she accomplished a lot in her 30+ years.



Although she was a commoner and died before the age of 40, Princess Diana contributed greatly to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, living up to her title "The People's Princess."

## 7. Organize Notes and Write a Formal Outline With Topic Sentences

- Place your notes in logical order
- Combine any notes that prove the same point
- Write a topic sentence for each group of notes. A topic sentence is like a mini-thesis for a body paragraph. It is a statement rather than a question and it contains an opinion. It helps to prove the thesis.

### Sample Formal Outline

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#### **Princess Diana**

- I. Introduction
- II. Princess Diana was a commoner at heart.
- III. Diana accomplished much in her short life.
- IV.
- V. Conclusion

Body  
Paragraph

Body  
Paragraph

Body  
Paragraph

#### **Pit Bulls**

- I. Introduction
- II. The clamping jaw structure of the pit bull makes it a fearsome and dangerous killing machine.
- III. Obedience training, while useful, can never compete with a dog's basic nature.
- IV.
- V. Conclusion

## 8. Write the Introductory Paragraph

### Introduction

1. Hook
2. Mini-background
3. Thesis

### Introduction

Hook

“Diana, named after the goddess of hunting, was ironically one of the most hunted people in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.”

-Edmond Spencer (Zamudo and Green 5)

Hook

Diana. She was a beloved figure to Britons, from her shy sideways glance to the sea of bouquets marking her grave in 1997. *Born in Norfolk, England in 1961, she later became the wife*

Mini-  
background

*of Charles, the Prince of Wales, and the mother of Prince William and Harry, second and third in line for the royal monarchy of Great Britain (Huffman 5). She later divorced Prince Charles and was killed in a fatal auto accident.* **Although she was a commoner**

Thesis

**and died before the age of 40, Princess Diana contributed greatly to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, living up to her title “the people’s princess” (Krohn 3).**

## 9. Write the Body Paragraphs

### Body Paragraph

1. Topic sentence
2. Facts (from notes), plus internal documentation
3. Commentary (when appropriate)
4. Concluding sentence which reflects back on topic sentence

### Sample Body Paragraph

Athletics are greatly beneficial to children and adults everywhere. Along with improving physical fitness and the health of individuals, sports also support an active mind and a healthy self-image. People involved in sports gain skills and personal qualities important for the future. It has been confirmed that individuals involved in sporting activities build stronger self-confidence and self-esteem (Sutton 1). The earlier a child is introduced to athletics, the greater the chance that he will continue on to college.\* Athletic individuals have a tendency to be more focused and independent. Athletic women, particularly, develop qualities that keep them away from drugs and early sexual interaction (Sutton 2). Throughout history, athletics have taught the people skills that are important in everyday life, for example, responsibility, integrity and courage. These traits are present in Olympic athletes as well as in Special Olympians. There is no doubt that athletics benefits all participants.

\*Note: There is no parenthetical documentation here because this fact is from Sutton page 2 and is cited further down in the paragraph.

## 10. Write a Concluding Paragraph

### Conclusion

1. Evolve the thesis – say it again with new words
2. Expand ideas – your commentary
3. Concluding sentence(s) – sounds finished, ends with the “bigger picture”

### Conclusion

Pit bulls have proven to be dangerous pets. Today, with so many breeds of dogs in shelters and in need of homes, the decision to have a pit bull is irresponsible. Pit bulls are anatomically built to crush prey in their strong jaws and to not let go. Even with obedience training, one can never fully trust a pit bull. With over 90,000 documented pit bull attacks from 2004-2006 in the United States, it is clear that stronger regulation of pit bull ownership and mandatory spaying and neutering of dogs is necessary (McLean 82). While many would argue that pit bull ownership enhances an owner’s macho image and that pit bulls make good loyal pets, the fact remains that so would hundreds of other breeds of dog. Extinguishing the pit bull breed is the only a viable answer. Dog breeds have been shaped over time to suit our various needs as a culture. Do we need dogs who are killing machines? Instead, cross-breeding pit bulls with poodles to create a “pit-poodle” is a both a humane and safe solution. There is no doubt that we must educate people as to the dangers of owning a pit bill or risk unleashing tragedy into American homes.

## 11. Add a Title

Be creative! Here are some examples:

Diana: The People's Princess

Pitbulls: Unleashing the Danger

Dying to Be Thin

Champions in Unexpected Places

Lance Armstrong Rides to Glory

The SUV Is Man's Worst Enemy

## 12. Complete a Works Cited Page

Make sure to alphabetize entries and double-space.

Don't forget to number the page.

Allow 1"  
from top of  
page to title

Allow ½" from  
top of page for  
your last name  
and the page  
number.

### Works Cited

"Diana: Case Closed, but Probably Not." Princess Diana Fan Club 16 Dec.

2006. 10 Aug. 2007 <<http://www.princessdifanclub.com/>>.

Gutierrez, Jose. "Princess Diana." People Magazine 5 September 2007: 38-39.

Mas Ultra. EBSCO. SVHS Library, Sonoma, CA. 20 Aug. 2007

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Huffman, Heinrich. "Princess Diana: 1961-1997." Memorial Sites 15 May

1998. 3 July 2006 <<http://www.memorial.gov.uk/output/page151.asp>>.

Krohn, Katherine E. Princess Diana: Her Life and Times. Minneapolis: Lerner

Publications, 1999.

Rodriguez, Carmen. "The Sons of Princess Diana." English Royalty 16 Feb.

1999. 7 June 2007 <<http://www.englishroyalty/sonsofprincessdiana/>

[asp47395.html](http://www.englishroyalty/sonsofprincessdiana/asp47395.html)>.

Only break  
web address  
at a / mark

Zamudo, John L., and William Green. The Diana Chronicles. Boyes Hot Springs,

California: ABC-CLIO, 2004.

Allow a 1" margin on both sides of your paper. For the second line of each source, indent ½" or 5 spaces.

## 13. Type a Rough Draft

Follow MLA format.

Page number on the first page is optional.

Allow 1” from top of page	Allow 1/2” from top of page for your last name and page number. Numbering page 1 is optional.	Smith 1
Susie Smith		
Mrs. Dillon		
English 1 CP		
12 April 2007		
center title, don't underline		
Princess Diana: The People's Princess		
“Diana, named after the goddess of hunting, was ironically one of the most hunted people in the 20 <sup>th</sup> Century.”		
-Edmond Spencer (Zamudo and Green 5).		
Diana. She was a beloved figure to Britons, from her shy, sideways glance to the sea of bouquets marking her grave in 1997.		
<b>Although she was a commoner and died before the age of 40, Princess Diana contributed greatly to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, living up to her title “The People's Princess.”</b>		
Princess Diana was a commoner at heart. After marrying Prince Charles and becoming a royal, she never forgot those less fortunate. She brought focus to AIDS and land mine removal as		
Allow 1” margin on both sides of your paper and 1” margin at the bottom of your paper.		

## 14. Review, Revise and Edit Your Paper

- Carefully read over the typed rough draft, checking to see if you have included all the required elements:

\_\_\_ MLA heading (your name, teacher's name, etc.)

\_\_\_ title

\_\_\_ hook

\_\_\_ thesis

\_\_\_ a topic sentence to begin each body paragraph

\_\_\_ a concluding sentence to end each body paragraph

\_\_\_ internal documentation throughout each body paragraph (after concrete details)

\_\_\_ commentary when appropriate

\_\_\_ concluding paragraph

\_\_\_ memorable line at end

\_\_\_ works cited page

- Now, you are ready to proof-read and edit for grammar and mechanics.

Don't forget that research papers are written in third person.

Remember that writing is a process; you need to keep perfecting your paper until it represents your personal best work.

## 15. Submit the final paper with all notes and drafts

Additional resources available at the SVHS library self-service rack.

Handouts:

- *Parenthetical Documentation*
- *Works Cited*
- *Shaping the Research Paper*

Online Resources are available on the SVHS Library website, located at

<<http://www.svhslibrary.org/Librarywebsite>>

- EBSCO Online Database
- SVHS Style Manual