

On Research Papers
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A research paper (or a term paper) is an extended essay on a specific *topic*, reflecting some careful research and consideration. Perhaps the most important step in writing a successful term paper is choosing and refining the topic. You should be able to articulate in a sentence or two just what it is that you are studying and also the parameters of your papers.

Having selected a topic, the next requirement is to *delimit* it. This term means that you should set very clearly the parameters of what you will and will not write on. Some of this delimiting will take place at the very beginning. For example, suppose I chose to write on miracles. Since it is a huge topic, maybe I will only deal with biblical miracles, or maybe I will only deal with miracles today and how God answers prayer. Some delimiting will occur as you do research and discover some of the limitations of the resources at hand. Maybe you will discover areas you were not familiar with or maybe you cannot find enough solid information about something you wanted to discuss. However it happens, you must delimit very clearly your topic. A result of good delimiting is that you will produce a good *outline*. In a paper on miracles today, I would begin with a clear definition. Then, a discussion of why miracles are important, followed by a consideration of whether miracles are possible today, and what role they might play in apologetics.

The beginning of your paper should include an *introduction* which clearly announces your overall topic and why it is significant. It will also describe (in a paragraph or so) your basic approach or outline. The introduction needs to include a clear and specific thesis statement. The introduction is critical since it guides your work and helps the reader know what to expect. The conclusion of your paper should also include the apologetic significance or application of your paper. How is this material useful?

Another important feature of term papers is *citation of sources* used in research. Since this is a research paper, you **MUST** have a Works Cited page of the academic sources you used: books and journal articles, credible websites (NOT Wikipedia - it is not a credible site since anyone can change the content). Also, you **MUST** cite the sources that you use in the text of the paper, in accordance with MLA style. Failure to do these things will significantly reduce your grade and cause your professor great anguish!

Lightly edited by GES.

Thank you to Tim Yoder for permission to use this guide.