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The Research Process

The following steps outline a simple strategy for writing a research paper. Please note: you may need to reorder some of these steps based on your familiarity with the topic.

- Research Process - Overview
- How to Define a Research Question
- Gathering Background Information
- Develop a Search Strategy and Find Sources
- Evaluate Your Sources
- Read, Manage, and Synthesize
- Write and Cite

Research Process - Overview

Research is an iterative process of asking questions, finding information, refining your ideas, and contributing your own voice to an academic conversation. Whether you are writing a short essay or a final BA thesis, following these six steps will save you time, help you find better sources, and ensure you meet academic standards.

> **Note:** Research is rarely a straight line. You will often need to revisit earlier steps as you learn more about your topic.

Step 1: Define Your Research Question

Before you can search effectively, you need a clear focus. A strong research question is specific, debatable, and complex enough to require genuine investigation.

- **Understand the scope:** Review your assignment parameters, such as length, required source types, and deadlines. For a thesis, ensure your scope is feasible within your timeframe.
- **Brainstorm:** Start with broad topics that genuinely interest you and narrow them down.
- **Use AI responsibly:** Generative AI can be an excellent brainstorming partner to help you narrow a broad topic into a specific question. Always verify the output and consult the library guidelines on Making the most of Generative AI (ChatGPT etc.).

Read more: How to Define a Research Question

Step 2: Gather Background Information

Do not dive straight into complex academic journals. Start by mapping the landscape of your topic to understand key debates, definitions, and vocabulary.

- **Consult reference sources:** Use subject encyclopaedias, handbooks, and glossaries to grasp the fundamental concepts.
- **Harvest keywords:** Note the specific terminology, theories, and key authors mentioned in your background reading. You will need these for your literature search.
- **Refine your focus:** If you find too much information, you may need to narrow your question; if you find too little, you may need to broaden it.

Read more: Gathering Background Information

Step 3: Develop a Search Strategy and Find Sources

Academic searching requires different tools and techniques than a standard web search. A systematic approach ensures you do not miss critical literature.

- **Build a search string:** Combine your keywords using Boolean operators (AND, OR, NOT) to focus your results.
- **Choose the right tools:** Decide when to use the library catalogue (OPAC) for books, versus specialised databases (like EBSCO or JSTOR) for peer-reviewed journal articles.
- **Search iteratively:** Run a search, review the results, adjust your keywords, and search again.

Read more: Developing a search strategy

Step 4: Evaluate Your Sources

Not all information is equal. You must critically assess every source before deciding to use it in your academic work, especially for a thesis.

- **Assess the authority:** Who is the author, and what are their academic credentials?
- **Check the evidence:** Is the publication peer-reviewed? Does the author cite their sources clearly?
- **Identify bias:** What is the purpose of the publication, and what perspectives might be missing?
- **Apply a framework:** Use established methods like the CRAAP test or the SIFT method to evaluate texts systematically.

Read more: How to evaluate academic sources

Step 5: Read, Manage, and Synthesize

Once you have your sources, you need to extract the relevant information and organise it so you can build your own argument.

- **Read strategically:** Read the abstract, introduction, and conclusion first to determine if a paper is highly relevant to your research question.
- **Take thematic notes:** Group your notes by theme or concept rather than just by source. This makes it easier to write a coherent literature review.
- **Manage your data:** Use citation management software to save PDFs, organise notes, and generate bibliographies automatically.

> **Tip:** The library strongly recommends using **Zotero** to manage your sources. See our guide on Citation Management Software.

Read more: Read, Manage, and Synthesize

Step 6: Write and Cite

Writing is how you enter the academic conversation. It requires integrating your sources accurately, ethically, and persuasively.

- **Structure your argument:** Outline your introduction, body paragraphs (supported by evidence), and conclusion.
- **Integrate sources:** Use direct quotes sparingly. Prefer paraphrasing to demonstrate that you fully understand the material.
- **Cite correctly:** Apply the required citation style to avoid plagiarism and give proper credit to original authors.

> **Faculty Requirements:** The Faculty of Business (FoB) uses **APA** style. The Faculty of Architecture and Design (FoAD) uses **Chicago** style.

Read more: Write and Cite

How to Define a Research Question

Overview

This document explains how to develop, refine, and evaluate a research question. A research question is the central question your essay or thesis aims to answer. It guides your literature search, determines your methodology, and keeps your writing focused.

Prerequisites

Before developing a research question, you must:

- Understand your assignment brief or thesis guidelines.
- Know the required length and deadline for your project.
- Have a general area of interest related to your field of study.

Why the Research Question Matters

A well-defined research question prevents you from being overwhelmed by search results. If you start searching for a broad topic like "sustainability," you will find millions of results. A precise question acts as a filter; it tells you exactly what information is relevant and what you can safely ignore.

Step-by-Step Guide to Defining a Question

Step 1: Identify a Broad Topic

Begin with a general subject area that genuinely interests you and fits within your course requirements.

- *Example:* Fast fashion.

Step 2: Conduct Preliminary Background Reading

Read subject encyclopaedias, textbooks, or recent news articles to understand the current debates and key vocabulary in your topic area. Look for gaps, controversies, or recent developments.

- *Example reading outcome:* You notice that new European Union regulations are forcing changes in how clothing is manufactured and marketed.

Step 3: Narrow Your Scope

Broad topics are impossible to cover thoroughly in a single paper or thesis. Narrow your focus by applying specific limits:

- **Geography:** Limit your study to a specific country, region, or city (e.g., Germany, the European Union).
- **Demographics:** Focus on a specific age group, profession, or consumer type.
- **Timeframe:** Look at a specific decade or a recent event (e.g., post-2020).
- **Context:** View the topic through a specific theoretical lens or business function (e.g., marketing, supply chain management).

Understand Frameworks and Methodologies

Before you finalize your research question, you must decide *how* you are going to answer it. This means choosing a research framework and a methodology. Your question must match your method.

- **For Design Students (Architecture, Interior, Graphic):** Will you be conducting a precedent analysis, analyzing case studies, or doing practice-based research (research by design)? Your question needs to reflect this approach (e.g., investigating spatial relationships, user experience, or visual communication).
- **For Business Students:** Will your research be qualitative (e.g., interviews, focus groups) or quantitative (e.g., surveys, financial data analysis)?

> **New to these concepts?** Before diving deeper into your topic, it is highly recommended to understand these foundational academic terms. Learn more in our short guides: What is a Research Framework? and What is Research Methodology?

Step 4: Draft the Question

Formulate your narrowed topic into a clear, open-ended question. Avoid questions that can be answered with a simple "yes" or "no". Instead, start your question with "how", "why", or "to what extent".

- *Draft question:* How do recent European Union supply chain regulations impact the marketing strategies of fast fashion retailers in Germany?

Step 5: Evaluate Your Question

Test your drafted question against three criteria:

1. **Is it clear?** The reader should understand exactly what you are investigating without needing additional explanation.
2. **Is it focused?** The scope must be narrow enough to answer thoroughly within your word count.

3. **Is it complex?** The question should require research, analysis, and synthesis to answer, rather than a quick Google search.

Using Generative AI for Brainstorming

Generative AI tools (like ChatGPT or Claude) are highly effective for the early stages of topic development. You can use them as a sounding board to break a broad topic into narrower angles.

Example Prompt:

> "I have to write a bachelor thesis in business administration. I am interested in fast fashion and sustainability. Suggest ten specific, researchable angles focusing on the European market."

Important: AI tools are for brainstorming only. They frequently invent facts, citations, and authors (hallucinations). You must verify all claims and concepts through academic library databases before committing to a topic. See our full guide on Making the most of Generative AI.

Troubleshooting Common Pitfalls

Problem	Symptoms	How to Fix It

Too broad	Your search returns hundreds of thousands of results. Your question could fill three	Add geographic, demographic, or temporal constraints. Focus on a single variabl

Too narrow	You can not find any academic literature on the topic.	Broaden the geographic scope (e.g., expand from Berlin to Germany, or Germany

Yes/No format	The question can be answered with a single word (e.g., "Does marketing affect sales?	Changing the phrasing to explore mechanisms or degrees. Use "How does..." or "To w

Assumption-based	The question assumes a conclusion before the research begins (e.g., "Why is gree	Adopt a neutral stance. Rephrase to allow the data to dictate the conclusion (e.g., "H

Next Steps

Once you have a working research question, you are ready to identify the keywords and concepts needed to search the library catalogue and academic databases.

Continue to: Gathering background information

Gathering Background Information

Overview

This document explains how to map the landscape of your topic before diving into complex academic journals. Gathering background information helps you understand the context of your research, identify key theories, and discover the exact vocabulary used by professionals in your field.

Prerequisites

Before gathering background information, you should have:

- A drafted research question or a defined topic area.
- A basic understanding of your assignment requirements.

Why Background Information Matters

A common mistake in academic research is jumping straight into academic databases (like EBSCO or JSTOR) using everyday language. Peer-reviewed journal articles are highly specific; they assume the reader already understands the broader context, history, and terminology of the field.

If you do not gather background information first, you risk retrieving irrelevant results, misunderstanding complex articles, or missing the most important sources because you did not use

the correct academic keywords.

Step-by-Step Guide to Background Research

Step 1: Consult Subject-Specific Reference Works

Instead of general web searches, start with academic reference materials. These include subject encyclopaedias, dictionaries, handbooks, and foundational textbooks. They provide verified, broad overviews of concepts, movements, and theories.

- **For Architecture and Interior Design:** Look for architectural dictionaries, compendiums of building typologies, or overviews of design movements (e.g., Brutalism, Bauhaus). You might also need to look at visual precedents, floor plans, or case studies of similar buildings.
- **For Graphic Design:** Seek out histories of typography, visual communication handbooks, and monographs of influential design studios.
- **For Business Administration:** Consult business handbooks, industry overviews, and glossaries of economic terms to understand market contexts and management frameworks.

Step 2: Mine for Academic Keywords

Professionals and academics use specific jargon. As you read reference works, write down the exact terms used to describe your topic. You will need these keywords later to build your database search strategy.

- *Everyday term:* "Green building"
- *Academic keywords to harvest:* "Sustainable architecture", "biophilic design", "passive cooling", "LEED certification".

- *Everyday term:* "Selling online"
- *Academic keywords to harvest:* "E-commerce consumer behaviour", "omnichannel retail", "digital marketing strategy".

Step 3: Identify Key Authors and Precedents

Background reading will frequently mention the most important figures or examples related to your topic. Note these down.

- **Theorists and Scholars:** Are there specific authors whose names appear repeatedly? They are likely foundational to your topic.
- **Case Studies and Precedents:** If you are researching adaptive reuse in architecture, background reading will highlight classic examples (like the Tate Modern or Zeche Zollverein). These precedents are excellent search terms for finding detailed literature later.

Step 4: Use Wikipedia Strategically

Wikipedia is an excellent tool for pre-research, but it comes with strict limitations in higher education.

> **The Golden Rule of Wikipedia:** Wikipedia is a great place to start your research, but a terrible place to end it. Never cite Wikipedia in a university assignment or thesis.

Use Wikipedia to get a fast overview of an unfamiliar topic, learn basic definitions, and harvest keywords. Most importantly, scroll to the "References" section at the bottom of the Wikipedia page; these links often point to credible books, news articles, and academic papers that you *can* evaluate and cite.

Troubleshooting Common Pitfalls

Problem	Symptoms	How to Fix It

Terminology mismatch	Your initial search brings up completely unrelated topics, or zero results.	You are likely using everyday words instead of academic jargon. Return to subject

Information overload	The background reading reveals that your topic spans decades of history and multiple	Use this information to narrow your research question. Focus on a specific decade.

Getting stuck on visuals	For design students: you have found many images on Pinterest or Arch Daily, but not	Visuals are preceded events, not academic background. Take the names of the building

Next Steps

Once you understand the context of your topic and have a list of academic keywords, key authors, and precedents, you are ready to construct a formal search strategy.

Continue to: Develop a Search Strategy and Find Sources

Develop a Search Strategy and Find Sources

Overview

Searching for academic literature is different from using Google. A simple web search guesses what you mean; academic databases match your exact words. This means you must build a structured search strategy to ensure you find the most relevant literature without missing crucial studies. This guide outlines how to translate your research question into a database search.

> **Writing a systematic literature review?** See our advanced guide on Conducting Your Search for instructions on building complex concept blocks and testing search strings.

Prerequisites

Before building a search strategy, you must have completed:

- Step 1: Defined your research question.
- Step 2: Gathered background information and academic keywords.

Step 1: Identify Your Key Concepts

Do not type your entire research question into a library database. Instead, break it down into its core concepts (the most important nouns). Ignore instructional words (like "assess" or "describe") and relationship words (like "impact" or "effect").

Example Research Question:

> "How do recent European Union regulations impact the marketing strategies of fast fashion retailers?"

Key Concepts:

- Concept 1: European Union regulations
- Concept 2: Marketing strategies
- Concept 3: Fast fashion

Step 2: Brainstorm Alternative Search Terms

Authors use different words to describe the same idea. If you only search for "fast fashion," you will miss articles that use the term "disposable clothing." For each concept, list synonyms, broader terms, and narrower terms.

Concept 1: Regulations	Concept 2: Marketing	Concept 3: Fast Fashion

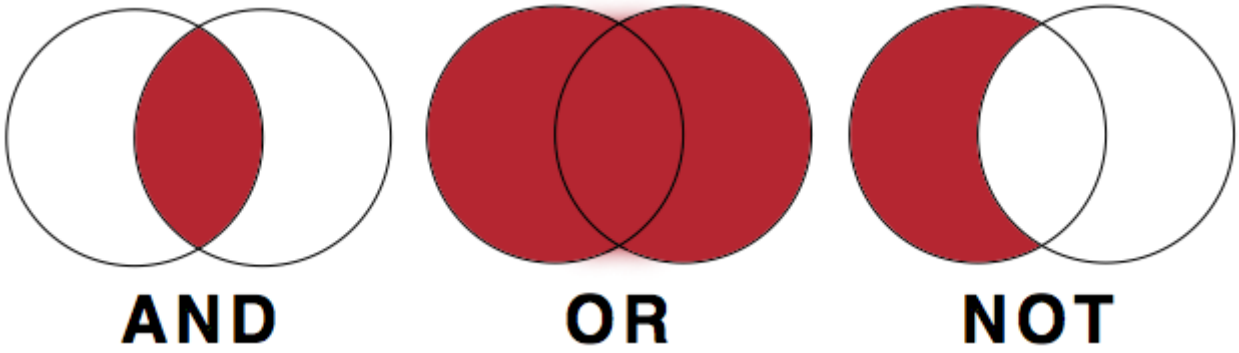
European Union	Marketing strategy	Fast fashion
EU law	Advertising	Disposable clothing
Legislation	Public relations	Ultra-fast fashion
Policy	Branding	Apparel industry

Using Truncation and Wildcards

Save time by searching for multiple word endings at once using an asterisk (`*`). This is called truncation.

- Searching for `market*` will find: *market*, *markets*, *marketing*, *marketers*.
- Searching for `sustainab*` will find: *sustainable*, *sustainability*.

Step 3: Combine Your Terms with Boolean Operators



Library databases use three commands—**AND**, **OR**, and **NOT**—to connect your search terms. These must usually be typed in ALL CAPS.

1. **OR (Expands your search):** Connects synonyms. It tells the database to find articles containing *any* of the words.
   - *Example:* "fast fashion" **OR** "apparel industry"
2. **AND (Narrows your search):** Connects different concepts. It tells the database to find articles containing *all* of the words.
   - *Example:* "fast fashion" **AND** marketing
3. **NOT (Excludes terms):** Removes irrelevant results. Use with caution, as it might remove good articles that happen to mention the excluded word.
   - *Example:* "fast fashion" **NOT** footwear

Building the Search String

Use brackets to group your synonyms (your **OR** terms) before connecting them with **AND**.

> ("fast fashion" **OR** "apparel industry") **AND** (marketing **OR** advertising) **AND** ("European Union" **OR** EU)

Step 4: Choose the Right Tool

Now that you have a search string, you need to decide where to run it. Different tools hold different types of information.

- **The Library OPAC (Catalogue):** Use this to find physical books, e-books, and architectural magazines held locally at BI. It is best for broad overviews and foundational theories.
- **Academic Databases (e.g., EBSCO, JSTOR):** Use these to find peer-reviewed journal articles. They are essential for finding the most current, specific research, particularly for your BA thesis.
- **Google Scholar:** A useful supplement to library databases, but it lacks the advanced filtering options of EBSCO and may hit paywalls. (If you hit a paywall, always check if the BI Library has access).

> **Library Access:** Remember to use the EZProxy Bookmarklet to access paywalled articles from off-campus.

Step 5: Search, Review, and Adjust (Iterative Searching)

Searching is an iterative process. You will rarely get perfect results on your first try.

- **Too many results?** Add another concept using **AND**, or use database filters to limit the publication date (e.g., the last 5 years) or language.
- **Too few results?** Remove a concept, or add more synonyms using **OR**.
- **Wrong results?** Review the titles and abstracts of the first few results. Look for the keywords the authors used, add them to your search strategy, and try again.

Using Generative AI to Design Searches

Generative AI can help you brainstorm synonyms and structure your Boolean strings. You can prompt an AI with: "I am researching the impact of EU regulations on fast fashion marketing. Generate a list of academic synonyms for these concepts and format them into a Boolean search string."

Always review the AI's string before using it, as it may include unnecessary punctuation or overly complex terms. For more guidance, see Enhancing Search Queries with AI.

Next Steps

Once you have found a selection of relevant books and articles, you must evaluate them for academic credibility before deciding to use them in your writing.

Continue to: How to evaluate academic sources

Adapted from *My Learning Essentials* resources developed by the University of Manchester Library and licensed under CC BY-NC 3.0.

Evaluate Your Sources

Overview

Not everything you find in a library database is perfect for your research, and not everything you find on the open web is useless. Evaluation is the process of deciding whether a piece of information is credible, relevant, and appropriate for your specific academic assignment.

This step is critical: building a well-written thesis on weak sources is like building a beautiful house on a foundation of sand.

Prerequisites

Before you begin evaluating sources in depth, you should have:

- A clear research question.
- A list of initial search results from the library catalogue, databases, or the open web.

The Two Evaluation Frameworks

There is no single "perfect" way to evaluate a source. Different types of information require different approaches. We recommends two complementary frameworks depending on where you found the information: the **CRAAP test** (best for academic papers and books) and the **SIFT method** (best for open-web sources and news).

Method 1: The CRAAP Test (For Academic Sources)

The CRAAP test is a checklist designed to help you deeply analyse a traditional academic source, such as a journal article or a published book. Ask yourself these questions as you review the text:

- **Currency:** When was the information published or last updated? Does your topic require very current information (e.g., fast fashion marketing trends), or are older historical sources acceptable (e.g., Bauhaus design principles)?
- **Relevance:** Does the information directly relate to your research question? Who is the intended audience? Is the academic level appropriate for a university assignment?
- **Authority:** Who is the author or publisher? What are the author's credentials or university affiliations? Are they qualified to write on this specific topic?
- **Accuracy:** Where does the information come from? Is it supported by evidence? Has the article been peer-reviewed (checked by other experts before publication)? Can you verify the claims in another source?
- **Purpose:** Why does this information exist? Is it to inform, teach, sell, entertain, or persuade? Does the author make their intentions clear, or is there hidden bias?

> **What is Peer Review?** If an article is "peer-reviewed," it has passed a high standard of academic accuracy because it was evaluated by independent experts before publication. Most library databases (like EBSCO) have a checkbox allowing you to filter your search strictly for peer-reviewed journals.

Method 2: The SIFT Method (For the Open Web)

"SIFT Infographic" by Mike Caulfield is licensed under CC BY 4.0.

When you are researching current events, business trends, or design precedents on the open internet, the CRAAP test is often too slow and assumes too much goodwill. The **SIFT method** (developed by digital literacy expert Mike Caulfield) uses a technique called "lateral reading." Instead of staying on the website to see if it looks professional, you open new tabs to see what the rest of the internet says about that site.

- **S - Stop:** Before you read the article or use it in your research, stop and ask yourself if you know the website or the author. If you don't, do not trust the information until you complete the next three moves.
- **I - Investigate the source:** Open a new tab and search for the author or the organisation (e.g., search their name on Wikipedia). Are they a respected think-tank, a partisan lobby group, or a satirical website?
- **F - Find better coverage:** If the source is making a major claim (e.g., "A new EU law bans all synthetic fabrics"), open a new tab and search for that specific claim. Are major, trusted news outlets or government sites reporting the same thing? If not, the claim is likely false or exaggerated.
- **T - Trace claims, quotes, and media back to the original context:** Articles often quote people out of context or use misleading photographs. Click through the links provided in the article to see if the original source actually says what the author claims it says.

Evaluating Different Source Types

Your faculty and your methodology dictate what kind of sources are acceptable for your assignments.

For Architecture and Design (FoAD)

- **High Value:** Peer-reviewed architectural history/theory journals, published monographs by respected academic presses, primary source plans and drawings.
- **Medium Value:** Respected professional magazines (e.g., *Architectural Review*, *Domus*). These are excellent for understanding precedents and contemporary practice, but they

are not peer-reviewed.

- **Low Value:** Pinterest, ArchDaily, or design blogs. These are great for visual inspiration and finding the *names* of buildings, but they should rarely be cited as academic authority in a thesis.

For Business Administration (FoB)

- **High Value:** Peer-reviewed journal articles, official government/EU data, financial reports from audited databases.
- **Medium Value:** Articles from respected business press (e.g., *Harvard Business Review*, *The Economist*), white papers from major consultancies (e.g., McKinsey). Use the SIFT method here to check for corporate bias.
- **Low Value:** Unattributed blogs, opinion pieces, random company websites.

Next Steps

Once you have evaluated your sources and selected the most credible and relevant ones, you must read them critically and extract the data you need.

Continue to: Read, Manage, and Synthesize

Read, Manage, and Synthesize

Overview

Once you have found and evaluated a collection of high-quality sources, you must process them. This step bridges the gap between researching and writing. It involves reading efficiently, storing your files logically, and combining different authors' ideas into a unified argument (synthesis).

Prerequisites

Before you begin reading deeply, you should have:

- A shortlist of credible, evaluated sources.
- A clear understanding of your research question.

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1. Read Strategically

Academic articles and reports are dense. You should almost never read them from beginning to end like a novel. Instead, use a strategic reading approach to quickly decide if a paper is worth your time:

1. **Read the Abstract:** This tells you the main problem, method, and conclusion. If it does not relate to your research question, stop reading and move on to the next source.
2. **Read the Introduction and Conclusion:** This provides the context and the final takeaway. You will understand the author's main argument without getting bogged down

in the data.

3. **Check the Headings and Visuals:** Look at the charts, graphs, or architectural plans. What evidence are they highlighting?
4. **Read the Methodology and Findings:** Only read the full text if the first three steps prove the source is highly relevant to your thesis or assignment.

2. Manage Your Sources

Do not leave a chaotic trail of downloaded PDFs named `article_final_v2.pdf` on your desktop. Disorganized research leads to "accidental plagiarism"; when you forget where a quote came from and accidentally present it as your own idea.

- **Use Citation Management Software:** The most important thing you can do for a thesis is use software like Zotero. It saves your PDFs, grabs the publication data automatically, and lets you organize sources into folders.
- **Establish a Naming Convention:** If you must save files manually, rename them immediately using a standard format, such as `Year_Author_Title` (e.g., `2024_Smith_FastFashionMarketing.pdf`).

> **Highly Recommended:** The library strongly advises using **Zotero** to manage your sources and automatically generate your bibliographies. See our guide on Citation Management Software to get started.

3. Take Notes and Synthesize

A literature review is not a summary of Source A, followed by a summary of Source B. It is a synthesis: a conversation between the sources, grouped by theme.

To achieve this, you must change how you take notes.

Group by Theme, Not by Author

Instead of taking notes source-by-source, take notes theme-by-theme. If your research is about sustainable architecture, your themes might be *Materials*, *Energy Efficiency*, and *Cost*. When you read an article, place the relevant notes directly under those thematic headings.

Create a Synthesis Matrix

For a thesis, try using a "Synthesis Matrix" (a simple spreadsheet).

- List your **Sources** down the left-hand column.
- List your **Themes** or **Concepts** across the top row.
- As you read, fill in the boxes where the source and the theme intersect.

This method forces you to see where authors agree, where they disagree, and where the gaps in the research are. When it is time to write, you simply read down the "Theme" column to see exactly what all your sources said about that specific topic.

Paraphrase Immediately

When taking notes, write the author's ideas in your own words immediately. Only copy exact sentences if the phrasing is so unique or impactful that it cannot be changed. This saves you from accidentally plagiarizing when you transfer your notes into your final paper.

Using Generative AI for Synthesis

Generative AI (like ChatGPT, Claude, or specific research AIs like Elicit) can be a helpful assistant during the reading phase, but it cannot replace your own critical thinking.

Good uses of AI in this step:

- Asking an AI to summarize a highly complex, 40-page report so you can decide if it is worth reading manually.
- Pasting a dense paragraph of academic jargon into an AI and asking: "Explain this methodology in simple terms."

Bad uses of AI in this step:

- Asking an AI to write your literature review or synthesis matrix for you. AI often misses the subtle nuance between two scholars' arguments, leading to a shallow or inaccurate paper.

> **Academic Integrity:** Never paste unpublished interview transcripts, sensitive company data, or copyrighted book chapters into public AI tools. Always review the library's guide on Making the most of Generative AI before proceeding.

Next Steps

Now that you have extracted, managed, and synthesized the data from your sources, you are ready to outline your argument and begin writing your paper.

Continue to: Write and Cite

Write and Cite

Overview

Writing an academic paper or thesis is the final step in the research process. It is the moment you enter the scholarly conversation by presenting your own argument, supported by the evidence you have gathered. This step covers how to structure your writing, integrate your sources effectively, and cite them correctly to maintain academic integrity.

Prerequisites

Before you begin writing, you should have:

- A clear, refined research question.
- Thematically organized notes and a synthesis of your sources.
- A basic understanding of the citation style required by your faculty.

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1. Structure Your Argument

Do not start writing without a plan. An outline acts as a roadmap, ensuring your argument flows logically and every paragraph serves a purpose.

Most academic papers follow a standard structure:

- **Introduction:** Introduce the topic, provide necessary background context, and state your thesis clearly (your main argument or the answer to your research question).
- **Body Paragraphs:** This is where you present your evidence. Each paragraph should focus on one central idea (a theme from your notes). Start with a clear topic sentence,

provide evidence from your sources, and explain how that evidence supports your thesis.
- **Conclusion:** Summarise your main points and restate the significance of your argument. Do not introduce new information here. Instead, point out the implications of your findings or suggest areas for future research.

2. Integrate Your Sources

Research writing is a conversation between your ideas and those of other experts. You must integrate their work smoothly to support, challenge, or contextualise your own arguments.

There are three ways to use a source:

1. **Summarizing:** Condensing a large amount of information (like an entire book or a long methodology section) into a brief overview in your own words.
2. **Paraphrasing:** Rewriting a specific point or finding in your own words. This is the most common and preferred method in academic writing because it proves you understand the material.
3. **Quoting:** Using the author's exact words, enclosed in quotation marks. Use quotes sparingly, only when the original phrasing is so unique, powerful, or specific that changing it would ruin the meaning (e.g., a specific definition or a controversial claim).

> **Avoid "Quote Dropping":** Never drop a quote into a paragraph without context. Always introduce the author or the context first, provide the quote, and then explain how it connects to your argument.

3. Cite Your Sources (and Avoid Plagiarism)

Whenever you summarize, paraphrase, or quote another person's work, you must provide a citation. This applies to books, journal articles, websites, interviews, and even visual precedents like architectural plans or corporate logos.

Failing to cite your sources, whether intentionally or accidentally, is plagiarism, which is a serious academic offence.

Faculty Citation Requirements

Different academic disciplines use different rules for formatting citations and bibliographies. You must follow the style mandated by your faculty:

- **Faculty of Architecture and Design (FoAD):** Uses **Chicago Style** (Notes and Bibliography). This uses footnotes or endnotes, which is preferred in the humanities because it leaves the visual flow of the text uninterrupted.
- **Faculty of Business Administration (FoB):** Uses **APA Style**. This is an "author-date" system (e.g., Smith, 2024), designed to highlight the currency of the research.

> **Detailed Examples:** For specific examples of how to format books, articles, and websites in your required style, see the library's guides on Citation Examples: APA and Citation Examples: Chicago.

4. Cite as You Write

Do not leave your citations and bibliography until the very end. Trying to remember where a specific idea came from three weeks after you read it usually leads to accidental plagiarism.

Insert your citations (or footnotes) immediately as you draft each paragraph. The most efficient way to do this is by using a citation management tool like **Zotero**, which integrates directly with Microsoft Word or Google Docs to insert citations and format your bibliography automatically.

5. Review and Proofread

The first draft is never the final draft. Writing is a process of revision.

- **Check the flow:** Read your paper aloud. This is the fastest way to catch awkward phrasing, missing words, or sentences that are too long.
- **Check the argument:** Does every paragraph connect back to your main thesis? If a paragraph is interesting but irrelevant to the core question, cut it.
- **Check the formatting:** Ensure your margins, font size, and bibliography match the requirements set by your professor or the Thesis guidelines.

Using Generative AI for Writing and Proofreading

Generative AI can be a powerful tool during the writing phase, but it must be used transparently and ethically.

Acceptable uses:

- Pasting your own draft into an AI and asking it to check for grammar, spelling, and tone (e.g., "Make this paragraph sound more academic").
- Using AI to help you overcome writer's block by generating transition sentences between two ideas you have already researched.

Unacceptable uses:

- Asking an AI to write entire paragraphs or sections of your paper from scratch.
- Asking an AI to generate citations or a bibliography (it will invent fake sources).

> **Declaration:** If you use AI to assist with your writing or proofreading, you may be required to declare this in your methodology or appendix. Always follow your professor's instructions and the library's guide on Making the most of Generative AI.