Writing a Research Paper
Deciding on Your Topic

If your topic isn’t specifically selected for you by your teacher, you will need to decide your own topic of research. Your topic should be broad enough to allow for a detailed discussion of your subject--yet specific enough that it can be addressed within the confines of a research paper.
Topics that are too limited:

- Can usually be covered in detail in far less space than the expectations of your assignment..
- Are often hard to find information on, because there is little information available.

Example:

What groups of people were targeted by Hitler during the Holocaust?

Topics that are probably too broad (for a middle school research paper):

- Usually can not be covered in detail within the assignment your teacher expects. You’d have to either write general statements with little detail—or you’d almost have to write a book!
- Are often hard to research because there is so much information.

Example:

What were the political and social events throughout Europe in the 1930s that led to the rise of Hitler and the 3rd Reich, and the targeting of various populations for genocide?
What is a “Just Right” Topic?

- You can find enough information to write about your topic in detail.
- You can create an assignment that fits your teacher’s expectations, and that is also interesting and informative.

Examples:
- *What changes took place in Germany’s schools, after Hitler rose to power?*
- *For what reasons were Jews targeted by Hitler, during the Holocaust?*
- *In what ways did average citizens try to help Jewish people during the Holocaust?*
Finding Good (Reliable) Sources of Information

Anyone can post almost anything on the Internet—accurate or not. How can you tell if the website you’ve accessed has reliable information?
**Signs the site is probably a good source:**

- The site is from a known and un-biased educational institution, organization or publication.
- The information on the website is current.
- The site’s contributors have expertise or authority in the subject matter.
- The site credits *other* sites and sources from which they got information.
Signs the site is likely NOT a good source:

- The site is a personal website, or run by a publication or organization with a specific, narrow viewpoint.

- The site is selling a product.

- The author’s viewpoints seem to be argumentative and one-sided.

- The site allows anyone to contribute to it, with inadequate or delayed “fact-checking” being done (for example, Wikipedia)

- No citation of sources is done; obvious use of copyrighted material not created by the website owners.
Writing in Your Own Words

When it comes to writing your research paper, you need to use your own thoughts and words. Simply copying straight out of a book or website is not really doing research—and it’s also plagiarism, which is illegal.
All of the following are considered plagiarism:

- turning in someone else's work as your own
- copying words or ideas from someone else without giving credit
- failing to put a quotation in quotation marks
- giving incorrect information about the source of a quotation
- changing words but copying the sentence structure of a source without giving credit
- copying so many words or ideas from a source that it makes up the majority of your work, **whether you give credit or not**.

**Plagiarism:**
the act of presenting another's work or ideas as your own.
How Can You Avoid Plagiarism?

Plagiarism vs. Cheating

Whaddya mean all my facts are wrong?!?

I copied everything straight off the internet!!

What is the difference?
Learn how to paraphrase

To paraphrase correctly, the main idea of the original content needs to come through—but the wording and structure needs to be your own.

**Book excerpt:**

Young children and kittens are an excellent match! They can explore and learn about the world together—and kittens that grow up around children, tend to become patient and content cats that can tolerate noisy households!

Remember: you still need to cite the original works that you take ideas from—even if you use paraphrasing!
Cite your sources!


There are many excellent sources to help you cite materials correctly—and almost effortlessly! Among them:

http://www.bibme.org
http://www.citefast.com
http://www.easybib.com
Make it clear in your writing who said what—and the source the statement was taken from.

Doing so will avoid any confusion over what may be your own thoughts, as opposed to the actual statements or ideas presented in a source you used.

In an address to the Canadian Farmer’s Association in July, 2012, the Minister of Agriculture for Canada, Mr. Gerry Ritz, stated, “Canada had record agricultural exports for the year 2011.”
What are some good sites to use for starting my Research Project?
“Through GALILEO, Georgia citizens have access to authoritative, subscription-only information that isn't available through free search engines or Web directories.”  (from the Galileo website main page)

If you don’t have the Galileo password for your school or library system, ask your teacher, librarian or media specialist.

LibrarySpot.com
Links to a huge number of research resources and websites such as encyclopedias, journals, image libraries and dictionaries. Most sources are available for free, but a few may require a subscription fee.

FindArticles.com
The text of articles from about 500 periodicals, dating back to 1998, is available completely free of charge.

Loc.gov
The Library of Congress online site offers an amazing array of articles, books, photos, maps and other documents.

For more places to start your research, check out the links at:

The Best Online Research Apps/Sites You've Never Heard Of

Click here!