INFORMATION LITERACY PROGRAM  
 of Robert W. Sterling Memorial Library

**WRITING A RESEARCH REPORT**

Commonly used in engineering, psychology, and the sciences, a research report is a very specialized type of research paper. In this kind of assignment, you are trying to explain how you have researched a topic, as well as the results of that research.

**STEP ONE:** Analyze the task. Make sure you know what you’re being asked to do. Keep the following questions in mind:

- What is your topic? Avoid going off on a tangent.

- What is your word limit? Note that in research reports, word limits usually apply only to the

body of the report, not additional elements like abstracts or appendices.

- What is the format? Do you need an abstract or an appendix?

**STEP TWO:** Develop a rough plan. Write your thesis, and jot down anything you already know about the topic, and how you plan to organize the report.

**STEP THREE:** Do the research. Keep referring to your plan, and remember the questions from Step One if you feel you’re heading in the wrong direction.

**STEP FOUR:** Draft the body of your report. A proper research report will have the following pieces:

**Introduction**. This includes your thesis statement, as well as an overview of your research and the structure of your report. It may also include a brief review of the topic.

**Methodology**. Explain your research methods – what you did, and how you did it. This should be written in a ‘passive’ rather than an ‘active’ voice, and have any material pulled from other sources clearly cited.

**Results.** What your research showed or uncovered. Do not interpret the results, just present them.

**Discussion/Conclusion**. Share how your findings fit into the larger picture, and summarize the most important results as you see them.

Your instructor may ask for other sections, but these four are almost always needed.

**STEP FIVE**: Draft any supplementary material. This could include a bibliography, reference list, or other appendices.

**STEP SIX**: Draft any preliminary material – the title and title page, a table of contents, or an abstract/synopsis. Which of these are needed will vary based on the assignment.

**STEP SEVEN**: Polish your report. Make sure the whole thing follows the guidelines laid out in the assignment, follows proper citation and composition rules (MLA, APA, or other). Check to make sure the spelling and grammar are correct.