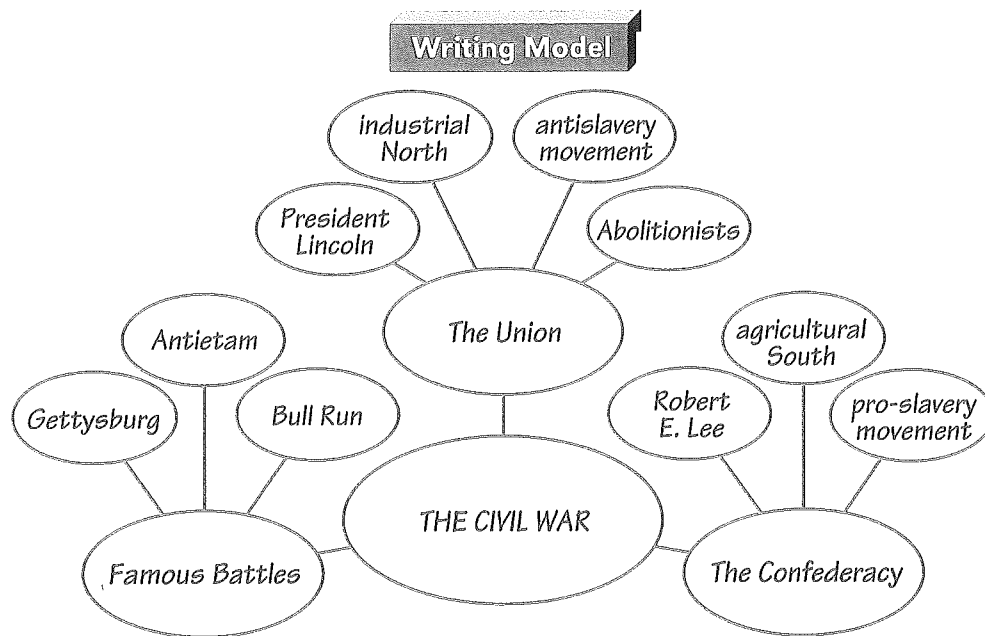


**Writing Strategies** The purpose of a research paper is to provide in-depth information on a limited topic. The following specific strategies apply to all three types of research papers.

1. **Choose and limit a topic.** First of all, choose a topic you would like to know more about. Look through your writer's notebook for ideas or ask *What If?* questions. Also make sure you choose a topic for which you can find sufficient sources—about five listings in a library index. On the other hand, narrow your topic when there are so many sources that you hardly know where to focus. One way to do this is to name a large topic and list as many smaller topics related to it as you can in order to come up with a limited topic for your paper. Use the following cluster map as an example.



2. **Make a schedule.** Budget your time to keep your focus, and pace yourself through each of the following steps in writing a research paper: (1) choosing and limiting a topic; (2) finding and evaluating sources; (3) taking notes; (4) drafting a claim and title; (5) developing an outline; (6) writing a first draft; (7) documenting sources; (8) revising; (9) proofreading; and (10) preparing the final manuscript.

For a six- to eight-week assignment, most steps take one to three days; allow about a week and a half for taking notes, writing a first draft, and revising.

**3. Look for several sources.** Make sure you include both **primary** and **secondary sources**.

A **primary source** is an original text or document, such as a literary work, a diary, a letter, a speech, an interview, or a historical document.

A **secondary source** presents the writer's comments on a primary source. Reference books, biographies, literary criticism, and history and science textbooks are secondary sources.

You can use a computer to gather relevant information from primary and secondary sources. For example, entering the term "Triangle Shirtwaist Company Fire" into an Internet search engine can help you find both print and digital sources of information on the topic. Using an online database is another way to locate reliable sources, such as relevant magazine and newspaper articles and excerpts from encyclopedias and other reference materials. Technology such as the Internet not only allows you to access information easily, but it can also help you update your research findings based on feedback or new information. In addition, you can use the Internet to share your research with others and to produce and publish your report.

**4. Review and evaluate sources.** Before you rely on a source, check its timeliness, accuracy, and relevance.

**Timeliness** Look for up-to-date information. For example, an article in last month's *Atlantic* magazine is a better source for information about juvenile crime than a ten-year-old book.

**Accuracy** Evaluate your sources for accuracy, and don't believe everything you read. For example, an Internet source from a government or university database is more reliable and unbiased than an individual's home page. You can trust major newspapers (*The San Francisco Chronicle* or *The New York Times*) more than a tabloid.

**Relevance** Look for information directly related to your limited topic. Stay focused, and make sure the information you gather is appropriate for your purpose and audience.



**Some Sources  
to Explore**

- Periodicals (newspapers, magazines, journals)
- Books
- Reference books (encyclopedias, specialized books such as an atlas)
- Government publications
- Publications by nonprofit organizations
- The Internet
- Online databases
- Other media (movies, television, radio, CD-ROMs)
- Museums, zoos, and other institutions
- Published interviews and surveys
- Original interviews you conduct

**5. Track sources and cross-reference notes.** Record essential publishing information for each source either in an electronic document or on a **source card**. Each card or entry should include all the bibliographical information you'll need for your Works Cited list. This includes author, title, publisher, date, and place of publication as well as any other pertinent information. Assign each source card or entry a number. Then, when you take notes, just indicate the source number on your notes, and you won't need to rewrite all the source data.

**SAMPLE SOURCE CARD**

1

Stein, Leon. *The Triangle Fire*. Ithaca: ILR Press/Cornell UP, 2011. *Google Books*. Web. 19 Oct. 2012.

**6. Take notes.** You may quote a source directly (using quotation marks) or use your own words. Be sure to include the page number of each note you take on your note card or entry.

When you **summarize**, you state only the most important ideas in your own words.

When you **paraphrase**, you spell out every idea in the same order as in the original, using your own words.

**SAMPLE NOTE CARD**

1

*Fire in top three floors of Asch building, corner of Washington & Greene streets, New York City, March 25, 1911 (p. 7)*

*Worst fire in history of New York City (p. 8)*

**7. Map ideas in outline form.** Sort your notes according to main ideas. Based on the information, create an organizational pattern that shows at least three main ideas, in order, with at least two supporting points for each one.

**8. Draft a claim.** Your **claim**, or statement of your controlling idea, comes at the end of the introduction. It tells your readers the main point you're going to make in the rest of the paper.

DRAFT After the Triangle Shirtwaist Company fire, a commission was appointed.

REVISED After the Triangle Shirtwaist Company fire, a commission investigated factory conditions and proposed laws to ensure worker safety.

**9. Acknowledge sources.** Always credit sources whenever you directly quote a phrase, sentence, or passage; or whenever you summarize or paraphrase someone else's original idea.

The research paper model on pages 79–82 follows The Modern Language Association (MLA) style for citing sources.

- Use **parenthetical citations** wherever you make reference to a source in your paper. Each citation should include the author and page number of your source.
- Give complete information about each source at the end of the paper in a **Works Cited** list.

For specific rules about citations and bibliographical references, consult the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 7th edition. Some instructors prefer that students use footnotes or endnotes rather than parenthetical citations. Follow your instructor's guidelines or those in the *MLA Handbook*.

**10. Do not plagiarize.** Using someone else's words or ideas without giving credit constitutes **plagiarism**, which is a serious offense. Plagiarism has prompted lawsuits, job firings, and expulsions from colleges and universities. Borrowing or buying a research paper written by someone else is also plagiarism. Teachers can tell when the writing in a paper isn't your own.

### **EXERCISE 27 Prewriting: Choose a Limited Topic**

Your teacher may specify a general subject (for example, how the life of a famous American writer or artist influenced his or her work), or you may be free to choose your own topic. Keep in mind the number of pages you have to write when you choose, and limit your topic. If you can choose your own topic, start