

Essential Research Paper Skills

The following is an outline of the **Basic Research Paper Skills** that the MCC English Department considers essential for a Research Paper assignment.

- I. Accessing Information
 - Searching for information
 - Using librarians as resources
 - Finding electronic and print resources

- II. Evaluating Information
 - For quality
 - For relevance
 - For authority
 - For currency
 - For coverage and depth

- III. Managing Information
 - Organization techniques

- IV. Using Information
 - Limiting and/or focusing the topic
 - Quoting
 - Summarizing/Paraphrasing
 - Building a position using supporting research
 - Integrating source material

- V. Documentation
 - Giving credit to sources within the paper according to MLA, APA, or Chicago standards
 - Understanding and avoiding Plagiarism
 - Accurately listing sources

If you assign a research paper in a course that carries a prerequisite of “eligibility for ENG 101” then please be aware that you’re expecting mastery of skills that your students have either never learned, or are currently in the process of learning.

Options to consider in a case like this are:

- a. raising your prerequisite to completion of ENG 101
- b. assigning a more limited, research-type assignment (see examples below)
- c. teaching the essential research skills as part of your course before the research paper is due
- d. providing a teacher-written or student-written model of an A grade level research paper, so that students will know what is expected

Limited Research-Type Assignments

All of these have the advantage of developing research skills, for research papers in the future:

1. Come up with a question, with an appropriately specific focus, they want to use research to discover the answer to
2. Summarize an article(s) that they find
3. Bring in a source(s) on a specific topic
4. Attend a classroom reference library presentation
5. Bring in one print and one electronic source on a topic
6. Apply quality standards to a source(s) they find
7. Come up with a helpful question(s) to ask a reference librarian etc.

If you assign a research paper in a course that has ENG 101 as a prerequisite, then you can expect your students to demonstrate the college-level research skills listed in this outline. To require less would convey the idea to students that these skills are only important for English classes. In order for students to believe that essay writing (research or otherwise) is a universally valued college skill, they need to get that message, and be held to that standard, in classes throughout the college.

This is why we have compiled this list of essential skills that go into a research paper. We hope it is helpful to you and we welcome any comments or questions that it raises.