

A Thesis Statement

What is a Thesis?

“A single sentence that gives your topic and your point of view” (MLA, earlier edition).

“The point of view the writer wants readers to adopt” (St. Martins 526).

Two factors:

1. **Purpose** : describe, explain, argue, persuade?
2. **Audience**: is your reader a specialist, or someone like you?

The reader in the case of most of your RBC assignments will be your instructor. Some RBC instructors might require to you write for a secular audience.

A thesis for a research paper is generally not argumentative or persuasive. Normally it will be informative—reporting what you have learned about a topic.

Don't start research until you have a *provisional* thesis statement. It will help to write it down. Be prepared to modify or even abandon this statement as you research, BUT do it deliberately! Before you start writing for a final draft have a *clear* thesis.

It is never too late to modify your thesis. If research leads you in a different direction than you supposed, or, if in writing, your focus or opinion changes, by all means, modify your thesis!

Adapted from ***Write for College (Sebranick, Meyer, Kemperer):***

- Select an interesting subject. If it interests you, it will be easier to research.
- Think about your subject. Write down very briefly what you do know and what you don't know about it. Start with who, what, when, where, why, and how questions. Read a very general entry in an encyclopedia or reference work.
- Limit your subject. Be specific. Consider what kind of research will be required and whether you can handle the topic in a timely manner.
- Write a thesis statement.
 - Put your thesis in the form of a question, but then turn it pack into a declarative sentence.
 - For example in question form: “What are the early differences between the Southern (and Swiss) Anabaptists and those in Northern Germany and Holland?”
 - In declarative form it might read. “The Northern Anabaptists differed from those of the South by holding a stricter interpretation of shunning and an unusual doctrine with regard to the incarnation.”

“A good thesis statement tells readers what your subject is and more importantly, it tells them how you plan to treat your subject. The statement is usually a single sentence with two main elements: a limited subject plus a specific feeling or attitude toward the subject.” (*Write for College* 287-288).

Here is another approach adapted from Cambridge Rindge and Latin School, a high school in Massachusetts.

http://www.crlsresearchguide.org/13_Thesis_Statement.asp

- Create a statement of purpose using an “I want to find out...” formula.
- For example, I want to find out if there were ever Amish groups in Russia.
- Create the thesis after you’ve learned something.
- Thesis: “The only Amish settlements in Russia were in Volhynia (now in the Ukraine) in the early 19th Century. They are now extinct.”

The RESEARCH Process
Rosedale Bible College Library
Reuben Sairs, Director of Library Services

Get Ready for the Research Process.

Human nature & research:

1. We're lazy and naive.

- We underestimate the time and effort research takes.
- We expect it to be easy.
- We assume that all we need is information.
- We assume the information we want is available in the form we expect.

2. In fact, good research:

- takes time and effort,
- is often difficult,
- getting information is just part of the story.

and, sometimes the information is simply NOT available, or not available in the forms we expect.

Expect some confusion, frustration & anxiety, especially as you move further into the research process.

- *We start confidently, but as we research, confidence disappears and we experience uncertainty. Uncertainty is normal and to be expected.*
- *Uncertainty increases because you encounter new information that doesn't fit with what you already know or believe.*
- *After some time, we form a new perspective, a new personal focus, and then we feel better! We needed more than information—we needed a perspective that allowed*

meaning to be drawn from the new information.

When You Research

- Don't be surprised. Be prepared:
 - to experience frustration & confusion as you dig in. *Remember it will not last.*
 - to take a few wrong turns.
 - to refine your research questions.
 - to need to read background material.
 - to document your sources and your process.
 - to examine materials that won't be used.
 - to be delayed over availability issues.

Note-taking for your Research Papers.

- When you research, do not take extensive notes.
 - You will not need to document basic information that is non-controversial and would be found by looking in most basic sources. But *be careful about plagiarism—any use of another person's ideas or words must be cited.*
- You will need to back up with quotations and or citations anything that requires an authority:
 - information that is not commonly known.
 - unique, apt, pithy, especially effective wording,
 - interpretations,
 - controversial claims,
 - expert opinions,
 - analysis.

Research Paper Format

The MLA 8 print guide doesn't offer page layout direction, but their Web site, <https://style.mla.org/formatting-papers/> does.

Basic:

- One-inch margins at top, bottom, sides. (1/2 inch from headers)
- Standard fonts like Times New Roman. Size 12.
- Justified left. No right or full justification.
- Double-spaced.
- No title page.
- Staple or paper clip your paper (except electronic submission).

Use this form for the heading on the first page only. It is double-spaced.

Merle Swartzenyoder

Instructor Jones

Introduction to Apiary Science

30 February 2025

The heading is followed by a double space, and then the centered title.

Merle Swartzenyoder

Instructor Jones

Introduction to Aramaic

30 February 2025

Aramaic Usage in the Book of Ezra

There are actually three languages to consider...

*The title is **not** italicized, boldface, underlined or all in capital letters.*

On the first page and all subsequent pages place a header in the upper right-hand corner with your last name and a page number.

Most word processors have a "header" command.

Swartzenyoder 1

Merle Swartzenyoder

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There are actually three languages to consider...

The Works Cited Page:

- Appears at the end of the paper on a new page.
- 1 inch margins as in the rest of the paper.
- Entries are in alphabetic order.
- Double space entries and between entries.
- The Works Cited Page always has the title Works Cited (centered).
- It also has the same page header with continuous numbers. If the last page of the paper is page 5, then Works Cited page is page 6.
- The Works Cited page is only for those works referenced in your paper. It is assumed you will work with other sources that you have not cited and which do not appear.

Swartzenyoder 6

Works Cited

Arrangement of Entries.

Begin each entry on the left margin.
Entries requiring two lines use a ½ inch hanging indent.

Swartzenyoder 6

Works Cited

Conrad, Ross. *Natural beekeeping: Organic Approaches to Modern Apiculture*. White River Junction: Chelsea Green, 2007.

Morse, Roger A. *Bees and Beekeeping*. Ithaca: Comstock, 1975.

Emergency Guide to MLA 8

MLA 8 is much simpler than its predecessors. It has little information on page layout, margins, fonts, headings, etc. Those are the easy part, and they are addressed in our RBC documents.

What follows is the critical part. Don't get lost in details.

2 essentials:

1. A works cited page.
2. In-text citation.

2 Goals:

1. Attribution—to cite authority, give credit, and eliminate plagiarism.
2. Documentation—to allow your reader to find your sources.

WORK CITED PAGE:

Core elements in order. You may not have all of this information. Each element followed by the punctuation indicated below.

- Author .
- Title of Source.
- Title of Container,
 - What is this? It may be a book that is a collection of essays, stories, etc., a periodical with articles. A television series, a Web site.
- Other contributors,
- Version,
- Number,
- Publisher,
- Publication date,
- Location.
 - What is this? Print sources it is the page number(s); online sources it is the URL.

Examples:

Keil, C. F. "The Prophecies of Jeremiah." *Commentaries on the Old Testament*, translated by David Patrick, vol. 1, Eerdmans, 1956. p. 119.

Augustine. "The Nephilim Are a Race of Giants." *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, Old Testament 1 Genesis 1-11, edited by Andrew Louth, InterVarsity, 2001. p. 125.

"Hasidic Movement: a history." *My Jewish Learning*, <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/hasidic-movement-a-history/>

Dilbeck, D.H. "The Radical Faith of Frederick Douglass." *Christianity Today*. Vol. 62, no. 1, January /February 2018, pp. 46-50.

IN-TEXT CITATION:

"PUQ is a pigment for the eye, prepared from silver-glance, sulfur-antimony--the Cohol, yet much esteemed by Arab women, a black powder with a metallic glitter." (Keil 117-119)

"They served a divine purpose in that they reveal to anyone who is wise that mere bodily magnitude and might have no more value than bodily beauty." (Augustine 125-126)

"Though black outerwear and white shirts are standard for men and long-sleeved and high-necked clothing are typical for women, several groups have subtly distinct clothing for men identifying them as members of a particular Hasidic sect." (Hasidic)

"He had good reason, then, in 1889 to mourn how the 'malignant prejudice of race' still 'poisoned the fountains of justice, and defiled the altars of religion' in America." (Dilbeck 50)

The author's name may appear in the text of your paper.

Keil describes the eye paint referred to in Jeremiah 4.30, "PUQ is a pigment for the eye, prepared from silver-glance, sulfur-antimony--the Cohol, yet much esteemed by Arab women, a black powder with a metallic glitter." (119)

Although Douglass was undoubtedly happy with the 13th amendment, as Dilbeck put it, "He had good reason, then, in 1889 to mourn how the 'malignant prejudice of race' still 'poisoned the fountains of justice, and defiled the altars of religion' in America." (50)

Ohio Web Library will give you citations—look for the icon in the faceted "Tools" links to the right side of the page of an article you have cited. You will need to scroll to the MLA format, but then can easily copy the citation. You might need to edit it for your paper's Works Cited page.

Pre-edit:

MLA

(Modern Language Assoc.)

Works Cited

Chan, Esther and Elaine Howard Ecklund. "Narrating and Navigating Authorities: Evangelical and Mainline Protestant Interpretations of the Bible and Science." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, vol. 55, no. 1, Mar. 2016, pp. 54-69. EBSCOhost, doi:10.1111/jssr.12245.

Post-edit: (Copy the relevant portion, create a hanging indent.)

Chan, Esther and Elaine Howard Ecklund. "Narrating and Navigating Authorities: Evangelical and Mainline Protestant Interpretations of the Bible and Science." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, vol. 55, no. 1, Mar. 2016, pp. 54-69. EBSCOhost, doi:10.1111/jssr.12245.

Evaluating Web Sites for Use in Research Papers

How valuable is the information for your purposes?

- ✓ Some sites go wide; some go **deep**. For most papers at RBC, you'll want "deep."
What is deep?
 - Does the article have citations? What kind of documents does it cite?
 - Is it written for college-level research, or for casual reading?
 - Does it have vocabulary that makes you pause, or look up words in a dictionary (maybe it should)?
- ✓ Some sites are interesting but not suitable for citation. Wikipedia is useful, and not a bad place to start, but it is best left out of research papers.
- ✓ Some sites are parodies. Make sure you don't take the bait.
- ✓ Some sites are simply out of date. **When was the last update?**
- ✓ Some sites are **inaccurate**.
How can you tell? You can't always. For writing a paper though, avoid sites with:
 - spelling errors,
 - extreme and controversial claims,
 - writers that claim to have exclusive knowledge or unlock or reveal secrets,
 - sites that state upfront that everyone else is wrong,
 - sites that are polemic in nature (looking for a fight).

It could be that you will miss some good information by applying some of these criteria, but you will usually avoid problems and make your own life easier by being a little more exclusive.

Authority. Is the site suitable for citation in an academic paper?

Consider the source:

- ✓ Who sponsors this site?
- ✓ What is the site's domain? Prefer .edu or .org and .net domains. **.com** might be shaped by commercial interests. *Be flexible about this criterion.*
- ✓ Affiliation with an institution—a college or university, a professional organization or society, a think-tank, a flagship institution, a headquarters, etc. *Be less flexible about this.* An unaffiliated Web site with no board of reference or directors might be a poor source for research.

(Some RBC instructors do not allow citation from sources with no board, unless cleared by the instructor.)

- ✓ Are these signed articles by authors with verifiable credentials?

(Some RBC instructors do not allow citation of unsigned articles unless cleared by the instructor.)

- Do an independent Web search on the author's name. Who is this person: unknown, well-known, a self-promoter? Do the author's credentials match the field in which the author is making authoritative statements?
- Credentials might include advanced academic degrees from accredited universities, historical acceptance, recognized experience, leadership in appropriate organizations and movements, writing that has been reviewed professionally, biographical authority (life-story, say a holocaust survivor or eyewitness). What kind of credentials a writer needs depends upon the nature of the material you are citing. Be leery of self-proclaimed authority—look for endorsements.

Academic Writing.

A little background with regard to scholarly or academic writing might help you understand what is required to research for a college paper.

As you research at RBC you will encounter academic writing. It may be different from what you are used to, and you may find it difficult. Academic writing is largely what you should be consulting for your papers.

Your instructors will steer you toward Evangelical Christian scholars, but there are times when you will need to research using non-Christian scholarship. If you have questions about perspectives, especially those that seem contrary to biblical faith, ask your instructors—they are well aware of the issues and will have helpful responses.

Some other things to keep in mind.

- Nonacademic or popular writing usually goes in a straight line. In contrast, academic writing often zigzags, because it has to address various viewpoints and consider opposing perspectives.
- Nonacademic writing doesn't usually include citations. There may be a reference to an expert, but in academic writing you will see many footnotes and a bibliography. Often before academics get to their point, they will review all the current literature on the topic.
- In nonacademic writing the author does not purport to be an expert. The author speaks from the perspective of the layperson who has learned just a bit more than you know. Academics, on the other hand, often are experts or aspiring-experts in their field. They have spent considerable energy researching and learning.
- Nonacademic writing avoids or explains jargon, assumes the reader knows little, considers emotional responses and tries to make itself easy to read. Academic writing might be the opposite—full of tough vocabulary, assume that you know references, be indifferent to your emotional response, and be hard and maybe even boring to read. Academics don't guarantee that their writing will be easy.
- Much popular Christian literature is written with a perspective of personal authority, but isn't academic as such. It is devotional by nature, and though it is the thinking of a trusted or respected leader, it may not be taken at face value in all cases.

What is peer review?

- Peer review is at the heart of scholarly communication. It simply means that others with authority have reviewed the work and decided it should be given a voice (even if they don't agree with it). Peer review makes things easier for researchers—if an article appears in an important peer-reviewed journal, then it is deemed worthy of a researcher's attention.

About Journals

- Most journal content is not available for free on the Web, but you may find an article at an author's personal site, in reprints, or databases. An article from a peer-reviewed journal is a good find when you are doing academic research.
 - *If you are using Ohio Web Library's Ebsco search, on the same page where you find your full text button, you can also find a peer-reviewed limiter.*
- In days gone by there were relatively few journals, and each academic discipline had just one or a few journals that all the researchers in the field consulted. Things have changed. Sometimes the new situation is referred to as a crisis. Journals have proliferated, and the Web has opened up new possibilities. There are still, of course, very important journals in different academic fields. RBC subscribes to several of these, but the range and variety is much greater.
- Good things have come out of the proliferation of sources. More voices can be heard, and no single establishment controls so much of the flow of information. [Open Access Journals](#) are an especially welcome development for a small library like RBC's which can't afford many journal subscriptions. The RBC library homepage has links to directories with open access journals in many fields. Many scholars now publish, sometimes only because they have to, in free open access databases and electronic repositories at their institution.

The Book is Not Dead

A balanced use of sources might include books of several types:

- *Monographs* (books with a single author); *reference books* (books that are consulted for specific content—not usually read in their entirety); *anthologies* (books that are compiled of other sources); books with *more than one author*.

It doesn't matter at all if a book is found in print or in another format. What matters is the quality of the writing. For research you need to find books that approach topics academically and give evidence of the features listed above.