



The Illinois Wesleyan WC | TS Presents:

Tips for Writing Research Papers

Use Your Resources!

[The Ames Library website](#) has multiple resources for students to explore, including documents with research tips and information and librarians to contact for specific help. The Mega Search feature and the collection of databases are also great ways to find reliable sources for any topic. Don't be afraid to use physical books as well! Professors and librarians will often have great recommendations. You can even [meet with an Ames librarian](#) to get support on how to find the most relevant, up-to-date sources for your work.

Stay Focused!

When exploring such a vast array of sources, it's easy to stray off topic and lose focus on what information is most important. If possible, start with a thesis statement, research question, or a loose outline of points important to you. Keep track of your sources, highlight parts that are most relevant to your point, and make sure to monitor yourself to make sure you stay on topic. We have lots of [resources](#) on the writing process available on our WCTS website.

Make an Outline!

Once you have your sources, plan how you will use them. You can plan your paper by paragraph or just general points, just be sure to be specific so as to avoid scope creep—expanding too far for the assigned length of your paper. Find quotations sooner rather than later to make sure all your points have evidence backing them up before you do too much work on them. Remember, the more you plan the easier it will be to write the final paper! We have lots of [resources](#) on outlines available on our WCTS website.

Don't Be Afraid of Change!

Sometimes what you find out during your research may cause you to revise your initial opinion on a subject. That fact is perfectly OK, and also why it is so important to continuously make connections between your sources and your thesis during your research. Don't get so attached to your starting beliefs that you resist an opportunity to grow and learn!

Cite Your Sources!

It can be sometimes tricky to remember where a source came from if you don't cite from the moment you start your paper. A lot of people fall into the trap of writing (cite) or highlighting material to come back to later, but those methods can lead to inadvertent plagiarism. Instead, we recommend either citing right then and there your source OR copying permalinks and hyperlinks to your materials and pasting them in to your paper wherever you need a citation for easy referrals later. You can even include the permalinks from Ames Library for print sources to make this work easier and more academically honest.

Additional Resources for Support

[Your writing center tutors](#): writing center tutors will help you at *any* stage of the writing process, including brainstorming, outlining, editing, and reading through multiple drafts. We recommend meeting with a tutor more than once to get as much support as possible throughout your writing process. You can meet with them online or in person.

[Your professor during his, her, or their office hours](#): talking over assignments with your professor can be really helpful to avoid scope creep, make sure you understand the prompt, and to get their advice on your topic. Professors usually post their office hours on their syllabus, Moodle, and our campus director. Check these places before emailing your professor to ask when their office hours are. If their hours don't work for you, email them to see if they are available to meet at another time.

[The Ames Library](#): in addition to our amazing librarians available for consultations and the wonderful databases IWU has that can help with the research topic of your choice, Ames Library also has a lot of wonderful e-books on the writing process itself, including this one, [The College Student's Guide to Writing a Great Research Paper: 101 Easy Tips & Tricks to Make Your Work Stand Out](#). You can also get great print writing handbooks at Ames that offer guidance, support, and best practices from writers in the know.