Process of Writing a Research Paper
Getting Started

- When given an assignment:
  - Take note of specific requirements
    - When is it due?
    - What do you need to do?
    - What should you avoid?
  - Highlight, circle, underline important information
  - Ask your professor for clarification if needed

Assignment

Non-traditional medicine and therapies are a growing phenomenon in the United States, with an increasing number of individuals turning to these treatments, seeking remedies for various problems. These treatments and their origins vary widely, often steeped in ancient practices from around the world or currently taking advantage of new technologies. People use these therapies to treat any and every problem in their lives. Please research a non-traditional therapy of your choice to discuss in detail.

Your mission, if you choose to accept it, is to write a research paper that follows these guidelines:

- Five full pages in length (not including the Works Cited)
- Four outside sources drawing from books and EFSC database sources
- MLA Format
- Due in class one month from today

The purpose of this paper is to explore the topic as fully as you can, using examples, professional research, case studies, history, or belief practices. You must discuss the following:

- What the therapy is
- Where it originated
- How it was originally practiced
- How the modern, Western interpretation of the therapy has changed, if at all.
Assignment Timeline

- Pictured is a sample calendar to demonstrate how to spread out the assignment workload over time.

- The most difficult part of a research paper is the process of collecting and evaluating your research.

- To do this well, you must start early and not procrastinate.
Brainstorming

Ask yourself some questions...

- What are the first words or ideas that come to mind when considering a topic?
- Do you have any prior knowledge of any of these ideas? What do you already know?
- Are you particularly interested in any of these topics? What do you need to know for your assignment?

Make sure you...

- Choose a manageable topic. Avoid topics that are too...
  - Too Broad: you may have trouble getting through all of the information you find
  - Too Narrow: you may have trouble finding enough information to meet your assignment requirements

- Start brainstorming and doing preliminary research early!
- Stay flexible and keep your mind open to new ideas

Try to pick a topic that you are interested in and that has enough information.

Interesting topics will help you stay engaged during the researching process.
Understanding Your Topic

- After you have a few ideas from your brainstorm, start getting a better idea of what kind of information you can find on these ideas by...
  - Skimming the internet for keywords related to your topic
  - Talking to a Reference librarian
  - Browsing the Library shelves and skimming book titles and tables of contents for information on your topic and your assignment requirements
  - Asking your professor for ideas if you are stuck

Do not use information from your first Google search in your paper.

College-level work requires college-level research, a.k.a. not Google
Being Flexible

Remember that this early in your research process,

- **Nothing is set in stone**. If you are overwhelmed by how much information you are finding or are coming up short, you can adjust your paper topic.

- **Keep your mind open to new ideas**. If you find something more interesting, you can pursue it instead.

- **Be mindful of your assignment’s due date** and your calendar if considering changing ideas. Make sure that you have enough time to reconsider a topic and start over. Do not change topics too close to your deadline!

You can change your topic, but only if you have enough time!

Make sure you are giving yourself enough time to make adjustments.
Once you’ve settled on a topic...

Start finding peer-reviewed information by accessing the...

- EFSC Databases
- EFSC Library
- Reference Librarians

Other options include:

- Inter-library loans- having another library send you a relevant book
- Sources your professor deems appropriate (always ask first!)

Use Google or other search engine to get...
- General information on your topic
- Clues for what to research further
- Information that sparks your interest to take a different direction.

Do not use what you find in Google!
Evaluating Sources

When finding sources, ask yourself some questions:

Who wrote the source?
- How is the author qualified as an authority on this subject?
  - Is the author a professor at a college/university? Is he/she a professional with experience with the topic, i.e., research, participation, leadership?
  - Avoid sources that do not provide listed authors or sponsors.

Where is the source coming from?
- Is the location of the information a reputable source?
  - All college-level assignments require peer-reviewed sources.
  - These are sources that have been verified for accuracy by relevant professionals.
  - You can find them in the EFSC Databases or Library

What is the source saying?
- Is the information in the source relevant to what you need for your paper?
  - Choose sources that answer the questions you need about your topic.
  - Avoid sources that are not relevant or that you cannot understand.
  - Always skim through the entirety of the source to see if there is anything useful.

If you are ever unsure of a source’s quality or usefulness, you can ask...
- your professor
- the Writing Center
- the Librarians
Evaluating Sources, cont’d.

Ask yourself some more questions:

Is the author’s claim biased or imbalanced?

- Stick with sources that provide unbiased, balanced information.
- Avoid sources where the author gives their opinion, i.e., “This is better than that because…”

Can I interpret what the author is saying accurately?

- Sometimes authors write in a language that is specific to their field. Example: Economists understand economics jargon, while you may not.
- Avoid sources that you cannot readily understand and move on to ones that you can.

Is the author’s claim/thesis well supported with evidence?

- You want to take information from authors who have done their research.
- Look for sources with lots of in-text citations, references to other authors and their studies, etc. to ensure that the source you are using is well researched.

If you are ever unsure of a source’s quality or usefulness, you can ask…
- your professor
- the Writing Center
- the Librarians
Collecting Information

While researching...

- Maintain a working bibliography/works cited page of each source.
  - Write down the citation information for every source you interact with (read, watch, listen to). This way, you will not lose them.
  - When you are done and have decided what you will use for your paper, use the citations you have already created in your finals works cited.

- Keep track of your source material-Print articles, email links to yourself or download files and save it to a folder.
  - Working with physical copies of your sources allows you to highlight and take notes.
  - You can also reduce your risk of plagiarism because you will have a copy of the author’s words in front you so can compare for similarity.

- Take notes as you read-Keep notes on what you read to help you organize your information into an outline.
  - Do not take notes while looking at your source to avoid accidental plagiarism—except while deliberately copying a quote.

Plagiarism occurs most often while collecting information from sources.

Avoid it using these techniques and suggestions.
Bringing it All Together

Here are the steps to follow after finding a source you plan on using:

- Copy down the source’s citation information, preferably in proper citation format (aka, MLA, APA or Chicago).
- Read the article, book chapter or website section thoroughly.
- Take detailed notes (no copying!) on the information you find there.
  - This is a key step to avoiding plagiarizing, i.e., taking the author or creator’s words or ideas and presenting them as your own.
- Highlight important and useful quotes you may consider including in your paper.

Make sure you do these steps for every source. That way, you will not lose track of sources or their information.
Starting an Outline

At this point, you have...

- Found relevant and peer-reviewed sources
- Evaluated their quality and usefulness
- Taken notes on the information they present and highlighted important quotes

Now, you need to start creating a **preliminary outline** of what research you have found and how you may be able to arrange them in your paper.

To do this, start **brainstorming**.
Arranging Information

Revisit the research collected and the notes taken:

- Look back over your assignment guidelines. Does your research answer all the questions posed in your assignment?
- Consider what research you have found and how they connect.
- Brainstorm ideas you have about how your research information relates.
  - Jot down any and every idea you have about the research you collected.
  - Do not focus on organization yet, at this point just focus on giving categories to the research you found.
  - Ex: You research feng shui’s ability to improve depression symptoms

Sample brainstorm:
  - feng shui  -chi
  - depression  -ancient China
  - state of mind  -Western application

Try to put your ideas into a logical progression that works well for what your assignment asks of you.
Expanding the Outline

Expand on the outline created from your brainstorm.

- Revisit the research under each category from your brainstorm
- Expand on each topic until the outline is more robust
  - Where is the research repetitive, thin or imbalanced?
- Draw connections between similar ideas that do not have enough support

Example:

- Feng shui
  - History
  - Definition
  - Philosophy
- Depression
  - Definition
  - Case study
  - Mood & feng shui
- State of Mind
  - Mood & feng shui
- Chi
  - Definition
  - Spirituality and feng shui

- Ancient China
  - Feng Shui
  - Superstition
- Western Applications
  - Case study
  - History
  - Cultural Changes

Draw Connections:

Feng shui Mood becomes Feng Shui and
Depression Mood
State of Mind
Finalizing the Outline

Keep expanding the outline and drawing connections between ideas until you have a finalized outline that is well-balanced and organized along a logical progression that follows your assignment’s requirements.

Example:
Feng Shui
- Definition
- History
- Philosophy
Chi
- Definition
- Spirituality
- Ancient Chinese Superstition

Feng Shui and Mood
- State of Mind
- Depression
- Case Study

Western Applications
- History
- Cultural Changes
- Case Study

All of the preparation and work you have put in up to this point should make writing your paper very easy! Follow your outline closely while writing.
Tips for Writing the Draft

Remember,
- Stick to your outline closely.
- Put in your in-text and parenthetical citations while writing, i.e., if you are using information from a source, cite it while you write it, not after!
- Start and finish your first draft with enough time to revise it before the paper is due.

Sometimes,
- Your argument will change slightly as you write
- You may think of a new angle to your argument, or run out of things to say for something you wanted to include
- You have too much to say and create an imbalance of information with other parts of your paper.

Do not panic! This is normal. Leave yourself enough time to work out these issues early!
Revision Strategies

Once you have finished your first draft...

- Read over your draft critically, actively looking for errors
- Read it aloud to yourself (you will find errors more easily this way)
- Bring your draft to the Writing Center for a thorough review and edit
- Ask yourself some questions:
  - What do/don’t you like about the draft?
  - Are any paragraphs too long, underdeveloped or in the wrong spot?

Suggestions...

- Give yourself enough time to walk away from your assignment for a few hours or a day.
  - This will help you get a fresh perspective on your writing.
- Do not turn in your first draft to your instructor! Always leave time to revise!
- Remain calm throughout the entire process of researching and writing your paper.
- If you have any questions, come to the Writing Center!
Congratulations!

For additional help, please visit the Melbourne Writing Center, located in Building 2, Room 125.

(321-433-5605)
melbournewritingcenter@titans.easternflorida.edu

Things to Remember:

- Understand your assignment’s requirements and expectations.
- Get an early start on evaluating your sources and collecting information.
- Keep track of your sources by creating a working bibliography.
- Take detailed notes on the information in your sources for your paper.
- Bring your drafts to the Writing Center for help while revising!