Preparing a Research Paper

“We’re going on an adventure!” - Bilbo Baggins, The Hobbit

This packet will use a mock assignment to walk you through the steps of preparing and organizing a research paper along the proposed assignment guidelines.

Mock 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 it, if at all.

Use relevant and trustworthy sources like peer-reviewed journals, database sources, documentaries, relevant newspaper/magazine articles, or books/ebooks.

Sources NOT acceptable for this assignment include:

- Dictionaries
- Encyclopedias
- Wikipedia

Though this is an expository paper (presenting information), you must write with an angle that your paper attempts to prove. Do NOT just state facts. Find a position and ARGUE it.

Do NOT argue the effectiveness of the treatments or argue what kind of people would seek it out.

*Shape your argument around the treatment itself and how it fits into the modern, Western world of health.*
Sample Calendar for Research Assignment
This calendar shows you how to spread out the work involved in preparing and drafting a research paper over a full month.

The time consuming aspect of research papers is in the preparing and researching component, not the drafting portion. Be mindful of this fact when working on your assignment and **NOT PROCRASTINATING**.
**Brainstorming**

When thinking about a topic, ask yourself some questions to help guide your brainstorming:

- **What are the first words or ideas that come to mind when considering a topic?**
  - Write down your first ideas and keep writing and thinking until you come close to something you feel is a good topic for your assignment and for you.

- **Do you have any prior knowledge of any of the ideas that came to mind? What do you already know?**
  - Do you practice a non-traditional therapy? Do you know someone who does? Do you know anything about a non-traditional therapy that can help guide your research?

- **Are you particularly interested in any of these topics? What do you need to know more about them?**
  - Being interested in the topic you choose will help fuel your research. It can be very challenging to keep researching and writing on a topic that you are completely disinterested in or dislike. Try to choose something that interests you.
  - Review your assignment requirements; what do you need to know about this topic? Choose a topic that you can use to fulfill all of your assignment requirements. Specific to this assignment, 5 full pages and answering all questions posed.

**Tips:**

- **Choose a manageable topic.** If you choose a topic that is too broad, like the term aromatherapy, you will have a hard time reading through and understanding everything you find on that topic.
  - Instead, choose a topic that is not quite as broad, but still has enough depth and components that you can reasonably answer the questions posed by the assignment in your paper.

- **To help you limit your topic to something manageable, ask yourself questions about your topic:**
  - What is it about aromatherapy that made you choose that topic?
  - What smaller aspect of this topic interests or puzzles you?
  - What more do you need to know about this topic?

- **You may have trouble limiting your topic until you do some early research on it.** This process will take time, so start early. Do a quick internet search with increasingly limited search queries (what you type into Google). Does anything you come up with spark your interest?
**Beginning Your Research**

After choosing your topic, you now need to begin your research... but where to begin?

- What do you consider useful resources? Where do you think you could turn first upon starting your research?
  - Consider all of your options. You can use search engines like Google first to get a good idea of what your topic is about, but after that you will need to move on to peer-reviewed sources.
- What keywords come to mind that will help you find some *general* information on your topic?
  - Think about the questions your assignment asked you or simply the title or name of your topic.
  - Get some general information first then move deeper into your research.

If you are very unfamiliar with your chosen topic, it will be helpful to do some initial research prior to diving into the databases. You may consider:

- *Skimming the internet for keywords related to your topic:* This will not provide all the answers; it will only give you a brief, general knowledge of your topic of choice.
- *Talking to a Reference Librarian:* The Reference Librarians at EFSC are here to help you find what you are looking for. If you are unfamiliar with how to find relevant books in the library or how to use the college’s databases, they can help. Ask anything and everything!
- *Browsing the Library Shelves:* Open books with titles that contain key words related to your topic and look at their indexes and tables of contents. This will help you find what you are looking for quickly, instead of reading cover to cover.

**Finding Sources**

Start your initial research in Google to get a general sense of what information is available on your topic:

*Note: You should not use information from your first search in your paper! This initial step is to help you understand your topic. You will need to dig deeper for information worthy of inclusion in your paper!*

Your chosen topic: **Feng Shui**

Here are the first search results that come up in Google:

- Wikipedia article discussing essential information about feng shui.
- *About.com* article describing basic aspects of feng shui, including history and application.
  - Note: There is no way to verify the accuracy of what these websites say. Therefore, you cannot use them as sources in your paper!
Though these results can help you get a better understanding of your chosen subject, searching the term “feng shui” alone yields extremely broad results. However, we have learned that feng shui...

- Is an ancient Chinese practice focusing on manipulating energy, or chi, in people’s environments to improve their lives.
- Is used by people for interior designing purposes in their homes and offices.

We know that there is much more to learn about feng shui than what is present in our first search. Therefore, we are going to have to dig a little deeper...

Here are some angles to approach this topic as we research further:

- feng shui in Western culture
- feng shui in mental health
- feng shui history

These new searches will provide a more detailed look at different aspects of feng shui.

While you always want to keep your research question in mind, i.e. how your chosen topic fits into modern Western health, you must also be flexible.

Remember,

- Nothing is set in stone yet. If you are overwhelmed with information or are not finding anything, switch to something more manageable or interesting.

- Keep your mind open to new ideas. You may come across something in your research on one topic that makes you interested in another. It’s okay to pursue that topic instead if you like it better.

- Be mindful of your assignment’s due date. You do not want to be unsure of your topic choice or choose a different route too close to your deadline. Once you have found something that works, try to stick to it. If you start to have trouble finding sources or narrowing your topic, talk to your professor or the Writing Center to get help.
Looking Beyond Google
Now that you have some understanding of your topic, it is time to take your research to the next level. For this assignment, and for all college-level research assignments, you will be expected to utilize peer-reviewed and trustworthy sources for your information.

EFSC has a host of resources for your use, including:

- Databases (found under “Library” on the EFSC homepage and on the myEFSC site)
- Books within the EFSC library or through inter-library loan—you can request books from other libraries connected to this school, and they will send them to you!
  - Note: Inter-Library loans can take time, from a few days to weeks, so keep that in mind when considering making a request.
- Professional podcasts (recordings of interviews or news reports found on iTunes, NPR, etc.)
- YouTube videos from reputable sources—interviews with experts, documentaries, etc.
- EFSC Librarians—the school Librarians are professionally equipped to answer all of your research questions. They are a very valuable source to use while researching. Just ask!

If you are unsure about how to access or use the databases or library, ask a Librarian! They are always there to help you with anything related to using the school’s resources.

Evaluating Sources
Titles of peer-reviewed sources that come up when searching “feng shui” in the databases in MLA Format:


Before you dive into these articles and start taking notes or copying citation information and putting what you find in your paper, we have to determine whether this source is worthy of your time.
How do I know if this source is any good?
There are a few questions to ask yourself when evaluating your sources:

- **Who wrote it?**
  - How is the author qualified to be an authority on this subject?
    - Is the author a professor at a college or 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. It is important to verify qualifications of who you are referencing.

- **Where is it coming from?**
  - Is the location of the information a reputable source?
    - For all college-level research assignments, you are required to cite peer-reviewed sources exclusively. These sources are what they sound like, journals or publications that have been questioned and verified by relevant professionals.
    - Peer-reviewed sources include professional and academic journals as well as many published books. Their content has been evaluated by other professionals and scholars to certify accuracy.
      

- **What is the source saying about my topic?**
  - Is the information in the source relevant to what you need for your paper?
    - Choose sources that answer questions you have about your topic, or questions you need to answer in your assignment guidelines.
    - Avoid sources that are not relevant.
  - Have you looked closely enough at the source to see if there is anything valuable in it?
    - Always skim through the whole article, chapter, etc. to see if there is anything that may be useful.

Look back at the titles of the articles found:


These sources must meet certain criteria for us to use them:

- Qualified author, i.e., college professor, professional, etc.
- Peer-reviewed source, i.e., academic/professional article
- Relevant information

We also have to *skim the entire source* before making any judgments about whether to use it or not.

These sources pass the initial criteria, but some have problems...

1. Dr. Ho is a professor of Marketing in the Department of Administration at Providence University in Taiwan. His study was published in a peer-reviewed, academic journal. However, based on the article title, one might now know that *this article contains a well-written description of feng shui’s history and cultural relevance in China.*
   Lesson: Do not discount a source just based on its title. *Always skim a source entirely before discarding it!*

2. Dr. Bruun is a professor of Religion at Cambridge University. His study was published in a peer-reviewed academic publication. The content of his article is relevant, but the language of the article is too complicated to decipher and easily understand.
   Lesson: Avoid sources that are *too dense or inappropriate for your paper’s purpose.*

3. Dr. Mills is a professor in the Department of Geography at the State University of New York in Oneonta. His article was published in a peer-reviewed academic source. His information is *very relevant and useful* and therefore can be used for your research paper!

When collecting and evaluating your sources...

- Verify the quality and author of the source
- Ensure the source’s relevance to your topic and its clarity
- Check your assignment requirements to make sure you have everything you need.

**Avoiding Plagiarism While Collecting Information**

What is Plagiarism?
Taking an author or creator’s words or ideas and presenting them as your own.

Maintain a Working Bibliography

- Keep a record of any sources and their citation information you decide to consult.
- Use the same documentation style (MLA, APA, CMS) in your working bibliography as you will in your final works cited.
Your working bibliography will probably contain more sources than you will actually include in your list of works cited in your final paper.

**Keep Track of Source Materials**
- Save or print a copy of each of the sources you read.
  - The EFSC Library Databases have the option to email, save, or print citations or full text articles.
- Working with physical copies and printouts of sources allows you to highlight key passages and take notes in the margins.
  - You could use small post-it notes as tabs or place markers.
- Printing source material reduces the risk of plagiarism by allowing you to compare the author’s words to yours and make necessary changes.

**Take Notes as You Read**
- Be very careful not to use language from your sources unless you clearly identify borrowed words and phrases as quotations.
  - Resist the temptation to look at the source as you take notes—except while deliberately copying a quote.
  - Run your draft through turnitin.com. This site will flag plagiarized material that you can fix before you submit your assignment.

Plagiarism is a grave offense. Eastern Florida State College takes academic dishonesty very seriously and has a strict policy and disciplinary procedures outlined in the Student Code of Conduct manual:

**Academic Dishonesty** - *Cheating, plagiarism and any other misrepresentation of work are prohibited. Students who are found to be in violation of this standard may receive severe sanctions including a failing grade in their respective course and, depending on the circumstances, possible expulsion from Eastern Florida State College.*

**Strategies to Avoid Plagiarism**
The following examples use different methods of avoiding plagiarism to restate the following:

**Original Source:**
In some respects, the increasing frequency of mountain lion encounters in California has as much to do with a growing human population as it does with rising mountain lion numbers. The scenic solitude of the western ranges is prime cougar habitat, and it is falling swiftly to the developer’s spade. Meanwhile, with their ideas habitat already at its carrying capacity, mountain lions are forcing younger cats into less suitable terrain, including residential areas. Add that cougars have generally grown bolder under a lengthy ban on their being hunted, and an unsettling scenario begins to emerge.
Summarize your source after you read it thoroughly
Summaries condense information from a source written in your own words.

Summary:
Encounters between mountain lions and humans are on the rise in California because increasing numbers of lions are competing for shrinking habitat. As the lions’ wild habitat shrinks, older lions force younger lions into residential areas. These lions have lost some of their fear of humans because of a ban on hunting (Rychnovsky 40).

Paraphrase your source after you read it thoroughly, noting important quotes
Much like a summary, a paraphrase is written in your own words, but usually matches the original text in length. If you find useful quotes, use quotation marks.

Paraphrase:
Californians are encountering mountain lions more frequently because increasing numbers of humans and a rising population of lions are competing for the same territory. Humans have moved into mountainous regions once dominated by the lions, and the wild habitat that is left cannot sustain the current lion population. Therefore, the older lions are forcing younger lions into residential areas. And because of a ban on hunting, these younger lions have become bolder—less fearful of encounters with humans (Rychnovsky 40).

Integrate quotes into your sentence
A quotation is the exact words from a source. Copy the author’s words exactly, including punctuation and capitalization as well as page number if available.

Partial Quote:
Rychnovsky explains that as humans expand into residential areas into mountain ranges, the cougar’s natural habitat “is falling swiftly to the developer’s spade” (40).
**Bringing It All Together**

Now that you have evaluated the quality and usefulness of your sources, you will need to start collecting information for your paper.

Remember, after you decide that you may use a source follow these steps:

- ✓ Copy down the source’s citation information, even if this information is not in proper citation format yet.
  - If you don’t know what citation information you will need, consult *A Writer’s Reference* or ask the Writing Center!
- ✓ Read the article, book chapter, or website section *thoroughly*.
- ✓ Take detailed notes (no copying!) on the information you find there.
  - Note: This is a key step to avoiding plagiarism, i.e. taking the author’s words or ideas and presenting them as your own.
- ✓ Highlight important or useful quotes you may consider including in your paper.

After taking this step for each source, you may have more information on your hands than you know what to do with. While this may seem overwhelming, this is great news and the best position for you to be in!

Now it’s time to start putting together a preliminary outline of what research you have found and how you may be able to arrange it in your paper.

Don’t be surprised if you get a bit of déjà vu from this part. It will be a lot like the brainstorming you did earlier. At this stage, jot down any and every idea you have about this topic. Don’t worry about organization just yet—the ideas are the only thing that matter.

Let’s say you found lots of research about **feng shui’s ability to improve depression symptoms**.

A sample brainstorm may look something like this:

- Feng shui
- Depression
- State of mind
- Chi
- Ancient China
- Western Applications

You’ll notice that this is fairly bare bones. You will need more than this to fulfill the assignment requirements and write your paper.
From here, look back to your research. What, from that, could you use to support each idea? Turn your scattered ideas into some scattered lists! Eventually, it will look something like this:

- **Feng shui**
  - History
  - Definition
  - Philosophy
- **Depression**
  - Definition
  - Case Study
  - Mood and Feng Shui
- **State of Mind**
  - Mood and Feng Shui
- **Chi**
  - Definition
  - Spirituality and Feng Shui
- **Ancient China**
  - Feng Shui
  - Superstition
- **Western Applications**
  - Case Study
  - History
  - Cultural Changes

From this, you can see:

- ✓ Your research categorized under each of your ideas
- ✓ How much research you have on each topic

Doing this now, before you outline or even write your paper, will prevent you from realizing too late that your research might be repetitive, thin, or imbalanced.

Looking at your idea, you can **draw connections** between some of the similar ideas, such as Depression and State of Mind in the previous example. Both share the same sort of research idea as Feng Shui and Mood. Instead of separating them, since they already have a common factor, we can create a new idea under the subheading of Feng Shui and Mood.
Feng Shui and Mood

- Mood
- Feng Shui
- Depression
- State of Mind

Applying this principle to the rest of your ideas, suddenly, you will see the idea taking shape:

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

Look at that! With just a little bit of tweaking, this becomes a pretty decent outline for your paper!

Now, once you feel like your outline is as good as it’s going to get, feel free to start writing your paper.
Tips for Writing the Draft

Remember...

✓ Stick to your outline closely. There is little room for variations at this point, given that your research is complete.
✓ 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 changes 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 may have too much to say and create an imbalance of information with other parts of your paper.

Regardless, do not panic. These are normal occurrences and are why you are writing a draft first! This is why it is so important to leave enough time to work out potential kinks!

You’ve written the first draft... Now what?

Read over your first draft critically. Read it aloud to yourself, give it to a friend whose opinion you trust, or, better yet, bring it into the Writing Center!

Ask yourself some questions...

▪ What do you like?
▪ What don’t you like?
▪ Are any paragraphs too long, underdeveloped, or maybe even in the wrong spot?
▪ Do you need to go back and research some more?

All of these are possibilities you should take into account when writing a research paper. At this point, don’t worry too much about getting it perfect on the first draft.

If you’re stuck, reach out to your instructor, the Librarians, or the Writing Center for help. That’s what we’re here for!

And don’t be discouraged if your paper goes through several drafts before the final version is turned in. That is a crucial part of the writing process, and every paper and everyone is going to be different.

What matters is that the more you practice writing and researching, the better you will be at it. Like anything, it is a skill that needs time and practice.