Steps for Writing a Research Paper

Step 1: Find sources and visit the library.
Objective: Figure out what information is available to you.

☐ Do some initial research.
  ☐ Skim the internet for keywords related to your topic. Googling the topic will give you a brief, general knowledge and help you identify keywords for further research.
  ☐ Talk to a Reference Librarian. If you have a topic in mind, but you aren’t finding much information on it, Reference Librarians at EFSC are here to help.
  ☐ Browse the library shelves. Open books with titles that contain key words related to your topic and look at their indexes and tables of contents.

☐ Find more sources than you need.
Your paper may develop in unexpected directions as you write. Giving yourself several options to choose from will make it easier to incorporate appropriate sources into your writing.

Step 2: Read the sources and take notes.
Objective: Identify sources and information that you can use.

☐ Evaluate each source. Throw out anything unsatisfactory.
  ☐ Is the source from a reputable author and/or institution?
  ☐ Is the information in the source relevant to what you need for your paper?
  ☐ Look closely. Does the source actually contain anything valuable to your paper?
  ☐ Make sure the source is not outdated. Is the source current with the most up-to-date information?

☐ Take notes.
  ☐ Build a bibliography as you work by keeping a record of any sources you decide to consult and their citation information.
  ☐ Be very careful to avoid plagiarizing by clearly identifying borrowed words and phrases as quotations.
Step 3: Outline.
Objective: Decide exactly what you will say.
☐ Develop a thesis.
☐ Decide what each body paragraph will be about.
☐ Determine what source information you want to use and what paragraph each piece of information belongs in.

Step 4: Draft the Paper.
Objective: Explain your perspective.
☐ 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!)

Step 5: Revise.
Objective: Write well by making corrections to your paper.
☐ 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!