

Everyone Can Have a Successful ILP, IRP, Capstone, or Other Research Paper Experience

These tips are based on experience with thousands of papers written by Cambridge College students. You can succeed, too!

Learn to do research and academic writing:

- Take an online tutorial on information literacy to review skills about searching the internet, evaluating sources of information, avoiding plagiarism, etc. Tutorials can be found at http://www.cambridgecollege.edu/library/research_help.cfm
- Take an online tutorial on Writing Research Papers. There's a great one at http://www.cambridgecollege.edu/library/writing_help.cfm

Learn to use the tools for research:

- To learn to use the Cambridge College Online Library, see the "How to Use Cambridge College Online Library Handbook" linked on <http://www.cambridgecollege.edu/library/instructions.cfm>
- Visit a local academic library and take a tour. Call and ask when orientation tours are scheduled
- To choose which local library to use: If you know the specific books or journal articles you need, use the Worldcat database to find which local library has what you want. WorldCat is on the *Direct to Databases* page of the Cambridge College Online Library
- If your campus site has an Academic Support Center, get help from tutors. They can help you with all aspects of online and library research as well as writing. For information about your site, see http://www.cambridgecollege.edu/library/writing_help.cfm
- If your campus site does not have writing tutors, your seminar advisor is responsible to teach you research and library skills

Set up an organizational system for storing your documents, articles, books, computer files, outlines, plans, and drafts:

- For documents, articles, and books: use project shelves or boxes, slash file pockets, looseleaf notebooks
- For computer files: plan folder names and filenames, keep paper records, keep disk backups, label disks. Keep a series of backup versions, giving each one the most current date, so you can always restore earlier work if you change your mind
- For outlines and plans: make an organized looseleaf notebook with slash file pockets as dividers
- For drafts of writing: print filename as header on drafts; print each draft on different colored paper; store in slash file pockets

Keep to a schedule for getting tasks done:

- List tasks and keep the list on disk so you can easily add/delete. Keep updating the list
- Plan sequence for doing tasks. Recommended sequence:
 - Do the Introduction last so that you don't promise more than you can deliver-- OR Do the Introduction first as a roadmap of where you plan to go and why
 - Do Literature Review before doing interviews or surveys, so your data collection is based on what you learned during the literature review
- Estimate date for completion of each task. Ask your advisor for major deadlines, then set your own subdeadlines

Be accountable to someone, such as your instructor, tutor, buddy, or group:

- Find out what support your instructor or seminar advisor is willing to give
- If possible at your campus site, schedule a writing tutor session.
- Find a buddy or writing group for motivation, support, feedback, resources

Learn the required format of the paper:

- Get the required instructions or manual from the instructor or department
- Not all instructors will use these, but if they do the School of Education and School of Management ILP Manuals are posted at http://www.cambridgecollege.edu/library/writing_help.cfm

Choose an appropriate researchable topic for your paper:

- Make sure it is relevant to your degree program
- Do research to make sure there are sufficient credible documents to both support and challenge your thesis statement.
- Ask your advisor how many articles, books, and documents you will need to cite

Construct a working thesis statement to help you research and organize:

- Brainstorm about your topic:
 - What do you want to find out about the topic?
 - What opinions do you hold about the topic?
 - What do you want to persuade your reader to believe?
 - What are at least three best reasons why the reader should agree with your opinion? Or, what are at least three main points you want to make about the topic?
- Construct a thesis statement that has a topic, your opinion on that topic, and three best reasons or main points you want to make. For example,
 - If your topic is decreasing school violence
 - If your opinion is that only some anti-violence programs can work
 - If you believe the best anti-violence programs respect the students' privacy; teach students to value non-violent solutions; and stress improving students' negotiation skills; then your thesis might be:

"An effective school anti-violence program must respect students' privacy, teach students to value non-violent solutions, and stress improving students' negotiation skills."

- Turn your thesis statement into a set of research questions. For example,
 - Which anti-violence programs don't invade students' privacy?
 - How can students be taught to value non-violent solutions?
 - How can students be taught better negotiation skills?
- Use the research questions to guide and focus your research. Use them to organize your writing. Each might become a chapter or section of your paper.

Make sure your plans are acceptable to your instructor or advisor by submitting a proposal that demonstrates that:

- your topic is relevant
- your topic is researchable (provide an annotated bibliography)
- your goal is clear (provide a thesis statement)
- you have a plan for research such as reading, interviews, survey, case study
- your paper will be organized (provide a preliminary outline)
- you can do it in the time available (provide a task timeline)

Ask your instructor for their recommended format for proposals.

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