Research Process & Writing Papers – Best Practices

This guide provides an overview of the steps involved in conducting research and writing research papers. Here, you will find general standards, organization techniques, and research tips that you can incorporate into your own research and writing process. We’ve listed only the main steps in an effort to keep this guide concise, but feel free to click on the “See Also” links provided for more extensive information and guidance.

During the research and writing process, have three items on hand:

1. **Assignment guidelines.** Review the assignment several times to ensure that you understand the purpose of the paper, formatting requirements, research guidelines, and other specifics that you must address.

2. **References.** This is a document that you will compile while conducting your research. It will eventually become a very lengthy document containing all the relevant citations and portions of text that you encounter while researching.

3. **Search terms.** This is another document that you will compile while conducting your research. It will list all the key terms and phrases that you encounter while researching. This will give you a place to keep track of ideas for new searches, such as jargon terms or subject headings used in a specific database.

In this guide, we’ll take you through the following steps:

- Choose your topic and find background information
- Develop a preliminary outline and a thesis statement
- Conduct your research (EBSCO, NAR State Issues Tracker, RU Library catalog, RU eBooks)
- Evaluate your research
- Develop a detailed outline
- Write a first draft
- Apply APA citation standards
- Revise, revise, revise
Choose your topic and find background information

- Review your assignment guidelines.
- Choose a topic that you’re interested in!
- Do some preliminary, informal research in to gain context.
  - Use Google, Google Scholar, Wikipedia, and other informal sources to gather background information about your topic, if needed.
  - Try to determine what the current dialogue is around your subject: Who are the leading authors on the topic? What news stories are relevant? What are the recent events, controversies, or issues to consider?
  - Write down key phrases and terms, and pay attention to jargon words that may be widely used in that industry or subject. Add these phrases and terms to your Search Terms document.
- Browse RU Library Research Guides for articles, reports, statistics, and more on topics like Appraisal, Brokerage Management, Commercial Real Estate, Economics, Law, Marketing, Property Management, and Sustainable Design.

I’ve got to write a paper for my commercial real estate class on the leasing environment within the commercial real estate industry. It has to be 10 pages long, and the professor wants us to focus on some aspect of the environment and analyze it.

I’m interested in leasing office space for my own brokerage, so I would be interested in learning how the commercial leasing environment has changed to adjust to the current economy, and how those changes impact tenants.

I’ll run a search in Google, Google Scholar, and Wikipedia first, using various forms of phrases like “commercial real estate leases impact on tenants.” Next, I’ll do a search in Google News to find current news stories on this topic.

There are lots of recent news stories, so I’ll have to keep an eye out for potential legislation changes and other recent issues.

I seem to be on the right track with these general search terms, so I’ll write those down.
Develop a preliminary outline and a thesis statement

- Review your assignment guidelines (again!).
- Determine exactly what your paper will evaluate, explain, or argue.
- Construct a preliminary outline, including general points that you’d like to make. The preliminary outline will help guide your research process. You will develop a detailed outline later in the process, which will assist you with writing your first draft.
- Develop an initial thesis statement. You’ll likely rework this throughout the process.

**See also:**
Tips and Examples for Writing Thesis Statements (Purdue Online Writing Lab)

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My assignment guidelines state that I must focus on some aspect of the commercial real estate leasing industry and analyze it.

I’ll get more specific with my timeframe, and focus on how leasing has changed since the economic collapse in 2008, and how tenants have been impacted.

So, in my paper, I’ll have to:
- **Prove that the economic collapse actually took place in 2008.**
- **Examine the leasing environment in 2008 vs. today**
- **Discuss the effects on property owners**
- **Discuss the impact on tenants**

**Initial thesis:** Tenants have benefitted from changes made in the commercial real estate leasing environment since the economic collapse in 2008. The commercial market is still in a challenged state, so property owners will offer incentives to attract tenants, though leases may be more restrictive.

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**Preliminary Outline**

I. **Introduction**
   a. Give context for the current economic environment
   b. Explain the paper and introduce thesis.

II. **Examine the leasing environment in 2008 vs. today:**
   a. Academic studies
   b. News stories
   c. Legal resources
   d. Lease costs
   e. Inventory statistics

III. **Discuss the effects on property owners and impact on tenants**

IV. **Conclusion**

Be sure to say what my paper was about, and summarize the impact on tenants.

Make sure I cite a couple academic studies that discuss the timing of the economic collapse in 2008.
I did a basic search for “commercial real estate,” but I get over 63,000 results! (That’s because it looks for “commercial real estate” in the article’s full text, but that may not actually be what the article is “about.”)

To find relevant articles, I’ll click on “Thesaurus” to find subject headings so I can search by the article’s subject, or what it’s really “about.”

That cuts my results in half. Next, I’ll limit my search to full text articles published in the last two years in trade journals.

EBSCO – For scholarly (peer-reviewed) articles, trade journal articles, and news

*EBSCO is the RU Library’s main article database, where we can locate scholarly articles and studies, trade journal and magazine articles, and news stories.*

- Run a few **Basic searches** in **EBSCO**. Add relevant citations to your References document, and relevant search terms to your Search Terms document.
- Basic searches may be helpful when beginning our search, but **Advanced Search** techniques will help us find the most relevant results.
  - Use the **Thesaurus** to find subject terms used by EBSCO to describe your topic, and search by “SU Subject Terms.” Record these subject headings on your Search Terms document.
  - After running a subject search, use **Sort** functionality at the left-hand side of the page to narrow results by scholarly journals (if you are looking for academic articles and studies), trade journals or magazines (looking for industry articles), or newspapers (looking for news).
  - Note that you can also **Sort** results to locate only peer-reviewed materials, or by a specific publication or location.
- After finding article that looks relevant, note that you can choose “**Cite**” at top-right to get an APA citation.
Conduct your research: State Issues Tracker

State Issues Tracker – For legal resources

NAR’s State Issues Tracker is the RU Library’s main database for legal information, but also note that there are many legal print resources in the RU Library. In addition, you should also be familiar with how to browse and view federal, state, and municipal statutes relevant to real estate in other sources, such as state code websites.

NAR’s State Issues Tracker analyzes core issues of importance to real estate practitioners that are regulated at the state government level, such as the law of Agency, License Reciprocity, and Seller Disclosure requirements. Most issues are updated yearly, and include an executive summary, frequently asked questions, and the law in each state. The database allows for state-by-state comparison of legislation.

Executive Summary

SELLER’S REQUIRED DISCLOSURES

ANNUAL REPORT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

June 2012

Overview

Seller’s disclosure rules vary dramatically across the surveyed jurisdictions. Approximately five percent of the surveyed jurisdictions have no apparent generally applicable seller’s disclosures provisions, while the other jurisdictions show remarkable variability in their disclosure rules.

Between mid-2010 and mid-2011, 48 percent of the surveyed jurisdictions revised their laws that address seller’s disclosures. During the past year (mid-2011 through mid-2012), 53 percent of the jurisdictions revised their relevant laws. Of the surveyed territories, only Guam requires real property sellers to make generally applicable disclosures.

Seller’s Disclosure Form

Of the states explicitly requiring a written disclosure, a majority specify the form in which this disclosure should be given. The remaining jurisdictions require the disclosure to meet certain requirements or offer a suggested, recommended, or optional form. From mid-2010 through mid-2011, 14 states revised their statutes or regulations that specifically address the seller’s disclosure form. During the past year, 11 states revised those laws, and another three states two states revised disclosure forms that are not contained in statutes or regulations. However, all of the above changes were either minor, not applicable to this survey, or involved revisions to previously existing seller’s disclosure laws that are summarized below in “Unusual Disclosure Requirements.”

Agent’s Obligations Regarding Seller’s Required Disclosures

Agents’ obligations regarding their sellers’ disclosures vary widely. Approximately 24 percent of the surveyed jurisdictions place no obligation on agents that are specifically related to a seller’s required disclosures, the remaining states, however, display a variety of regulatory plans.

Between the summer of 2010 and the summer of 2011, 13 states revised their laws regarding agents’ obligations. During the past year, another 12 states revised those laws, with the most significant change occurring in Delaware, which added a new regulation requiring licensees to obtains seller disclosure forms from a seller before accepting a listing contract.
Conduct your research: RU Library catalog

RU Library catalog – For print and digital materials
Use the RU Library catalog to find books, studies, guides, journals, and digital media on all subjects. Note that, when searching the catalog, you are also searching the RU Library eBook collection. Feel free to contact a librarian for assistance with catalog materials.

- Run a **Basic Search** in the RU Library catalog to find digital and print titles relevant to your topic.
- Choose **Advanced Search** if you’d like to run a more complex search, such as one that includes a specific author, title, or item type.
- Use the “**Refine your search**” options at the left of your search results to narrow your results by item type, collection, topic, or publication date.

I’ll run a basic search for “leases”, but I get 7,080 results. I can try limiting my search by **TOPIC**, so I get sources that are only about Commercial Real Estate.

I can also limit my search by **ITEM TYPE** to find relevant books, electronic books, or periodicals.

In the end, I found that searching for **SUBJECT: leases** and limiting my search to **TOPIC: Commercial Real Estate** gives me some good print titles.
Conduct your research: RU eBooks collection

RU eBooks collection – For RU student-only digital materials

Use the RU eBooks collection to find titles that you can access immediately on your computer, eReader, or MP3 device.

- From the RU eBooks home page, click “Sign In,” then choose the REALTOR® University library option. You will be prompted to enter your REALTOR® University ID.
- Once logged in, you will have access to digital titles on topics such as business, finance, law, management, and technology limited to RU students and staff.
- Be sure to download the (free!) required software programs before using the eBooks collection (click on “Help” at top-right to find software).
- Search the collection by title or topic, or browse the collection by format, subject, device, and more.
- When doing legal research, be sure to search for “law dictionary” to find several law dictionaries for RU students.
Evaluate your research

- When you locate a potentially-relevant article, review its Abstract and Conclusion. If it looks like it will support your paper, read the article and compile additional information:
  - Add the article’s full citation and portions of its relevant text to your References document.
  - Look at the article’s References section to find additional relevant articles there. Copy and paste citations into your References document. You can search for the full-text versions of those articles later.
  - Scroll down to the indexing details for the article. Record additional search terms and key phrases in your Search Terms document.
  - Also note that you can click on “Find Similar Results” at the left-hand side of EBSCO to find additional articles with related subject headings.
- Continue running searches and compiling information on all relevant articles.
- You will accumulate a lengthy list of citations and relevant text in your References document.
  - Arrange the relevant text into a cohesive order (be sure to note which citations belong to which text and note page numbers).
  - Identify holes in the logical flow of research: Do you need to do additional research on one particular issue, event, or idea? Do you need to edit your search? Try searching with other terms and subject headings.

See also:
Distinguishing Scholarly Journals from Other Periodicals (Cornell University Library)

References


Manufacturing and most service businesses lease dedicated space for their operations. Commercial landlords and tenants...


The primary mistakes stem from a deficit in three areas: 1. Tenant negotiators’ traditional lack of understanding about the impact of long-term lease issues that are now coming home to roost, such as a guaranteed rent increase set periodically, even if the trade area or economy deteriorates. 2. A tenant incentive system rewarding production rather than negotiating the best long-term deal for their company. 3. The decision-maker’s lack of discipline to remain true to his or her original business model.
Develop a detailed outline

- Using your References document, begin to develop a logical narrative:
  o Highlight the key statements that you’d like to quote in your paper. Build upon these quotes by explaining them more fully or by offering a different perspective.
  o Are there portions of cited text that you’d like to reword and explain?
  o Are there ideas that you’d like to expand upon, or even refute?
  o Add your own ideas throughout.

- Using your preliminary outline and your References document (now arranged into a cohesive order), develop a detailed outline:
  o Add headings to capture the purpose of every paragraph you will include.
  o Beneath each heading, add subheadings.

See also:
Four Main Components for Effective Outlines (Purdue Online Writing Lab)

Outline

I. Introduction
   a. The current economic environment

      “Krugman …attributed the failure of academic financial economists, and those employed by banks and Wall Street firms to predict the subprime mortgage crisis of 2008 on the reliance of their models on the EMH.”

   b. Explain the paper and introduce thesis.

II. Examine the leasing environment in 2008 vs. today
   a. Academic studies
   b. News stories
   c. Legal resources
   d. Lease costs
   e. Inventory statistics

III. Discuss the effects on property owners and impact on tenants

IV. Conclusion
Write a first draft

- Use your outline and References document to begin writing your first draft.
- Develop an Introduction, which explains the important points of your paper and states your thesis.
- Develop a Conclusion, which reiterates the important points of your paper and how the points you’ve made support your thesis.

Apply APA citation standards

APA is the standard style format of REALTOR® University. Standard APA style requires a title page, in-text references, and a References page, but be sure to check your assignment guidelines and follow instructions provided by your professor.

- Cite sources throughout your paper.
- Create a References page that lists all the sources you have cited.

See also:
APA Citation and Copyright Subject Guide (REALTOR® University Library)
A Sample RU Paper (REALTOR® University Library, Prezi.com)
The Basics of APA Style Tutorial (APA.org); Sample APA Paper (APAstyle.org)

Revise, revise, revise

- Review your assignment guidelines (again!). Are you meeting all the requirements? Are you addressing all the issues that your professor has noted?
- Edit and rewrite sections of the paper as necessary to develop a final draft.
- In addition to using spell-check, **proofread!**
  - Review your paper with the following in mind:
    - Logical flow: Do all paragraphs hang together to form a logical explanation or argument? Are your introduction and conclusion sections aligned with the points made in the body of the paper?
    - Grammar: Do you have any run-on sentences, sentence fragments, or disagreement in subject and verb tense?
    - Errors: Do you have any spelling errors, omitted words, or double words?
  - Walk away for an hour, or a day, then read the paper OUT LOUD. Make edits as needed.
  - Consider having a colleague, friend, or the RU Library Student Writing Center review your paper. Be sure to state what, specifically, you would like them to review, such as grammar, spelling/typos, syntax, APA formatting, or general flow and argument development.
  - Before turning your paper in, read it OUT LOUD again!
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