Organizing Research: 
A Strategy for Compiling Research

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Introduction

Writing a research paper is a cumbersome affair. It requires a variety of skills: reading, writing, problem solving, computer and library search techniques, and sorting through and organizing the research materials. While most students are familiar with the elements of an essay, many find that writing a research paper for the first time presents a new set of problems. This particular strategy addresses two of these problems—keeping information organized and writing a proper bibliography entry.

Step 1: Identifying the Strategy

This strategy is designed to help students organize research materials and to write bibliographies in the proper format. Students will use 3 x 5 cards to record the bibliography entry and the in-text citation example of a particular source on one side of the card. On the other side of the card, they can record any notes, key points, page numbers, or quotes. The use of 3 x 5 cards to record both bibliography entries and notes is an effective strategy that compels researchers to include all the necessary bibliographical information as they encounter it. Additionally, the cards are an easy way to later sort the information and plan an outline for the research paper. Before modeling this strategy, it is essential that students have their own copy of a style manual for the particular format they will be using for the assignment (MLA, APA, etc.).
Many school libraries have abridged copies of the MLA Handbook. These miniature versions are usually referred to as "style sheets."

The teacher will also provide instruction and modeling on what a research paper is, how to find and access information, what types of sources are reliable or valid, how to use the style sheet, and the mechanics of a bibliography and in-text citation. The strategy here is only one of many required to write a research paper.

**Step 2: Modeling the Strategy**

The teacher will hand out several 3 x 5 cards and a style sheet to students. Then, on either an overhead projector or a TV monitor, the teacher will display a sample 3 x 5 card with an example of a bibliography entry, the in-text citation example, and the notes. The teacher will point out the importance of using the exact format and punctuation required in a bibliography entry and the in-text citation. The teacher may then give some examples of notes for the back of the card. These may include quotes, page numbers, names, definitions, key ideas, abstracts, etc. It is important that students understand that this is not simply an exercise, but a strategy to make their research more effective and, more importantly, easier. It helps them accomplish the precise, systematic thinking necessary for responsible reference to research sources.

**Step 3: Scaffolding the Strategy**

Hand out magazines, newspapers, and books to students. Have them choose a quote from a section of the text. Then, have students write the quotations down on a 3 x 5 practice card. On the other side of the card, the students will write the bibliography entry for the quote and the in-text citation example. They will probably need quite a bit of guidance during this activity, especially when they use the style sheets to find out how to write the entry. The teacher may want the students to do several different types of entries before going to the library. A completed card may be a "ticket out" for the students.

**Step 4: Providing Additional Practice**

Close and continuous monitoring of students' use of these cards is crucial for the success of this strategy. If the students don't feel like the teacher is checking up on them, they may simply fall back on the bad habit of printing out every article they can find, then trying to sort through the mess later. As the
students conduct their research, the teacher must insist on seeing their cards to check for the proper format and variety of sources. This is also an excellent tool for checking the progress and quality of the students’ research.

Conclusion

Many strategies are designed to be eventually discarded after a particular skill or group of skills is learned. This strategy can be used with modifications throughout one’s lifetime. It is a useful technique at any level or content area.

Suggestions for Adapting the Strategy in other Grades or Content Areas

This strategy needs no adapting other than selecting the style sheet for the particular discipline (MLA, APA, etc.)

Thinksheet

Copy is attached.
Sample 3 x 5 card


Citation in text: (Sun Tzu 65)

p. 65—“If wise, a commander is able to recognize changing circumstances and to act expediently. If sincere, his men will have no doubt of the certainty of rewards and punishments. If humane, he loves mankind, sympathizes with others, and appreciates their industry and toil.”

Note: This may be used to support the idea about leadership.