



Overview of the Procedure for a Research Assignment

You're listening to a piece of music and an idea strikes you. You have a question and need to find an answer. Or your professor has assigned a paper. Here's how to start:

1. Listen to the piece of music. Take notes about how it sounds. Collect your own thoughts first.
2. Find out what other people have said about the piece of music you're working on. This means using the library. Assemble a bibliography, and assess your sources to figure out which ones look the most important and the most useful.
3. Read the works you select (or, more likely, read passages of them by using the index or the table of contents to point you to the right places), and take notes about the most important ideas. As you take notes, be sure to put the ideas into your own words. HINT: By the end of an article, you should be able to answer this question: What is the ONE most important thing the author wanted me to learn
4. Close your books, and take a short break. Use this time to formulate your own thoughts about the subject. Do you like any of the ideas you read? Do you agree or disagree with any of them? Do those ideas mesh with your own ideas upon listening to the work?

Sit down to write your thesis. Ask yourself: What is the ONE thing I want my reader to learn from my essay?

5. Come up with a structure for your paper. Use an outline, index cards, and a "tree" structure—whatever works for you. But make sure your ideas are organized, to follow logically from one step to the next! (More on

organization later.) Now you just need to fill in the blanks by turning your outline into full, clear sentences and paragraphs. If you find yourself having trouble putting your ideas into words, please meet with your professor or contact the staff of the [writing center](#).