

RESEARCH WRITING SKILLS

Scaffold Pack

Grades 6 - 10

- 8 Comprehensive Lesson Plans •
- Source Evaluation Checklist (CRAAP Test) •
 - Note-Taking Graphic Organiser •
 - Plagiarism vs. Paraphrase Practice •
- MLA & APA Citation Practice Worksheets •
 - Final Research Project Rubric •

UM Printables

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the **Research Writing Skills Scaffold Pack**, designed for students in Grades 6 through 10. This comprehensive resource provides step-by-step guidance through every stage of the research writing process - from selecting a topic to submitting a polished final paper. Whether your students are writing their first research paper or refining advanced skills, this pack offers the scaffolding they need to succeed.

What's Included

- **8 Lesson Plans** - Each lesson includes objectives, direct instruction, guided practice, independent practice, and closure activities.
- **Source Evaluation Checklist** - A ready-to-use CRAAP Test checklist for evaluating the credibility and relevance of any source.
- **Note-Taking Graphic Organiser** - A structured template helping students record source information, key ideas, and paraphrased notes.
- **Plagiarism vs. Paraphrase Practice Sheet** - Guided exercises that teach students to distinguish between plagiarism and proper paraphrasing.
- **Citation Practice Worksheet** - Hands-on practice formatting MLA and APA citations for books, websites, journal articles, and more.
- **Final Research Project Rubric** - A detailed, standards-aligned rubric covering all aspects of the research paper.

How to Use This Pack

This pack is designed to be used sequentially, as each lesson builds upon the skills introduced in the previous one. However, individual components can also be used independently to target specific skill areas. Suggested pacing is 1-2 class periods per lesson, depending on grade level and class length. All reproducible sheets may be printed for classroom use.

Teacher Tip: Before beginning, distribute the Final Research Project Rubric so students understand the end goal. Refer back to it throughout the unit to keep students focused on expectations.

LESSON 1

Choosing a Research Topic

Objectives

- Identify the characteristics of an effective research topic.
- Narrow a broad subject into a focused research question.
- Apply the Goldilocks Rule to evaluate topic scope.

Materials

Whiteboard or chart paper; sticky notes (optional); Topic Selection Worksheet (students create in independent practice).

Key Concepts / Direct Instruction

1. What Makes a Good Research Topic?

A strong research topic is the foundation of a successful paper. Students should look for topics that are:

- **Interesting** - You will spend significant time on this topic, so choose something that genuinely engages you.
- **Appropriate in scope** - Not so broad that you cannot cover it in depth, and not so narrow that you cannot find enough information.
- **Researchable** - Multiple credible sources of information must be available.
- **Relevant** - The topic must fit the assignment guidelines and purpose.
- **Specific** - A focused topic allows for deeper analysis and a more compelling argument.

2. The Goldilocks Rule

Just like Goldilocks searching for the porridge that is 'just right,' researchers must find a topic that is neither too broad nor too narrow:

Scope	Example	Problem
Too Broad	"The environment"	Impossible to cover thoroughly; lacks focus
Too Narrow	"The height of the redwood tree in my backyard"	Not enough sources available; overly personal
Just Right	"How deforestation in the Amazon affects global carbon emissions"	Specific enough for depth, broad enough for ample research material

3. From Topic to Research Question

A research question gives your paper direction. It narrows your topic into a specific, answerable question that guides your investigation.

Example: Topic: "Social media and teenagers" → Research Question: "How does daily social media use affect the academic performance of middle school students?"

4. Brainstorming Strategies

- **Mind Mapping** - Write your broad topic in the centre and branch out with related subtopics.
- **Questioning** - Apply Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How to your topic to find a specific angle.
- **Freewriting** - Write continuously for 5 minutes about a potential topic; review what emerges.
- **Listing** - Create a rapid list of everything you know or want to know about a subject.

Guided Practice

Present the following topics. Students classify each as **Too Broad**, **Too Narrow**, or **Just Right** and explain their reasoning:

Topic	Classification	Explanation
"Sports"	Too Broad	Covers every sport in history - far too wide to research effectively.
"The invention of the basketball hoop in 1891"	Too Narrow	Extremely limited scope; unlikely to find enough sources.
"How the Olympic Games changed from ancient to modern times"	Just Right	Specific enough to explore, broad enough to find ample material.
"History"	Too Broad	All of human history cannot be covered meaningfully in one paper.
"Why my dog likes to play fetch"	Too Narrow	Personal and anecdotal; no scholarly sources available.
"The impact of the printing press on education in Renaissance Europe"	Just Right	Focused time period, specific technology, clear impact - excellent scope.

Independent Practice

Students create a Topic Selection Worksheet by completing the following steps:

1. List three potential topics of interest.
2. Evaluate each topic using the Goldilocks Rule (Too Broad / Too Narrow / Just Right).
3. Select one topic and formulate a research question.
4. Share your research question with a partner for feedback.

Closure

Students share their research questions with a partner. Partners offer one compliment and one suggestion for improvement. Select several pairs to share with the whole class.

Assessment

- Research question is specific, researchable, and appropriate in scope.
- Topic Selection Worksheet is complete and demonstrates thoughtful evaluation.

SOURCE EVALUATION CHECKLIST

Use this checklist to evaluate any source before including it in your research paper. Rate each criterion on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = Poor, 5 = Excellent). Write a brief justification for your rating. A high-quality source should score mostly 4s and 5s.

Source

Being

Evaluated:

Criterion	Questions to Ask	Rating (1-5)	Justification / Notes
Currency	When was the information published or last updated? Is it current enough for your topic? Are the links functional?		
Relevance	Does the information relate to your research question? Who is the intended audience? Would you be comfortable citing this source?		
Authority	Who is the author or publisher? What are their credentials? Is there contact information? What is the domain (.edu, .gov, .com)?		
Accuracy	Is the information supported by evidence? Has it been reviewed or refereed? Can you verify the claims in another source? Are there spelling or factual errors?		
Purpose	Why does this information exist? Is it to inform, teach, sell, entertain, or persuade? Is the information fact, opinion, or propaganda? Are there potential biases?		

Overall Assessment

Total Score: _____ / 25

Decision: ■ Use this source ■ Do NOT use this source

Scoring Guide: 25-21 = Highly Credible; 20-16 = Acceptable; 15-11 = Use with Caution; 10 or below = Not Credible. Always consider the context of your research when making your final decision.

NOTE-TAKING GRAPHIC ORGANISER

Use this organiser to record notes from your sources. Complete the source information at the top for every source you use. In the main body, record main ideas on the left and paraphrased details on the right. Remember: do not copy text directly unless you are quoting!

SOURCE INFORMATION		
Author(s):		Date:
Title of Article/Chapter:		
Title of Book/Website:		Page #:
Publisher / URL:		

NOTES

Main Idea / Question	Paraphrased Notes / Evidence

FINAL RESEARCH PROJECT RUBRIC

Use this rubric to assess the final research paper. Each category is scored on a scale of 1 to 4. Multiply the total score by 4 to calculate a percentage grade (Maximum: 100%).

Category	4 - Exemplary	3 - Proficient	2 - Developing	1 - Beginning
Thesis Statement	Thesis is specific, arguable, and clearly expresses the paper's main argument.	Thesis is present and clear but may lack specificity or be somewhat arguable.	Thesis is vague, overly broad, or merely states a fact rather than an argument.	Thesis is missing or does not relate to the rest of the paper.
Organization & Outline	Paper follows a logical structure. Introduction, body, and conclusion are seamless. Paragraphs are well-ordered.	Paper has a clear structure. Most paragraphs flow logically. Minor lapses in organization.	Structure is inconsistent. Some paragraphs lack topic sentences or seem out of order.	No clear organizational pattern. Ideas are disjointed and difficult to follow.
Evidence & Support (ICE)	All evidence is introduced, cited, and thoroughly explained (ICE method used flawlessly).	Evidence is usually introduced and explained, but one component of ICE may occasionally be weak.	Evidence is dropped in without proper introduction or explanation. ICE method is inconsistently applied.	Little to no evidence provided. Quotes stand alone without any context or explanation.
Paraphrasing & Plagiarism	All source material is effectively paraphrased in the student's own words and structure. No patchwriting.	Most material is paraphrased effectively. May contain minor instances of patchwriting.	Several instances of patchwriting or reliance on direct quotes where paraphrasing was expected.	Significant plagiarism or patchwriting present. Original source text is copied without alteration.
Source Quality (CRAAP)	All sources are highly credible, current, and relevant. Demonstrates thorough CRAAP evaluation.	Most sources are credible and relevant. One source may be outdated or slightly biased.	Several sources lack credibility or relevance. Over-reliance on popular vs. scholarly sources.	Sources are not credible, appropriate, or relevant. No evidence of source evaluation.
Citations (MLA / APA)	In-text citations and Works Cited/References page are 100% accurate with no formatting errors.	Minor errors in citation formatting (e.g., missing punctuation, slight capitalisation errors).	Multiple citation errors. In-text citations do not always match the reference list.	Citations are missing, fundamentally incorrect, or a mix of MLA and APA styles.
Conventions (CUPS)	No errors in capitalisation, usage, punctuation, or spelling. Academic tone maintained.	Few minor errors that do not interfere with meaning. Generally maintains academic tone.	Noticeable errors in grammar, spelling, or punctuation that occasionally distract the reader.	Frequent errors severely interfere with readability and comprehension.

SCORING SUMMARY

Category	Score (1-4)	Comments
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