

From Jacks of Science, http://www.jacksofscience.com/wp-content/uploads/2008/05/mad_scientist.gif

Welcome to my la-BO-ratory! Bwa-ha-ha-ha HA!

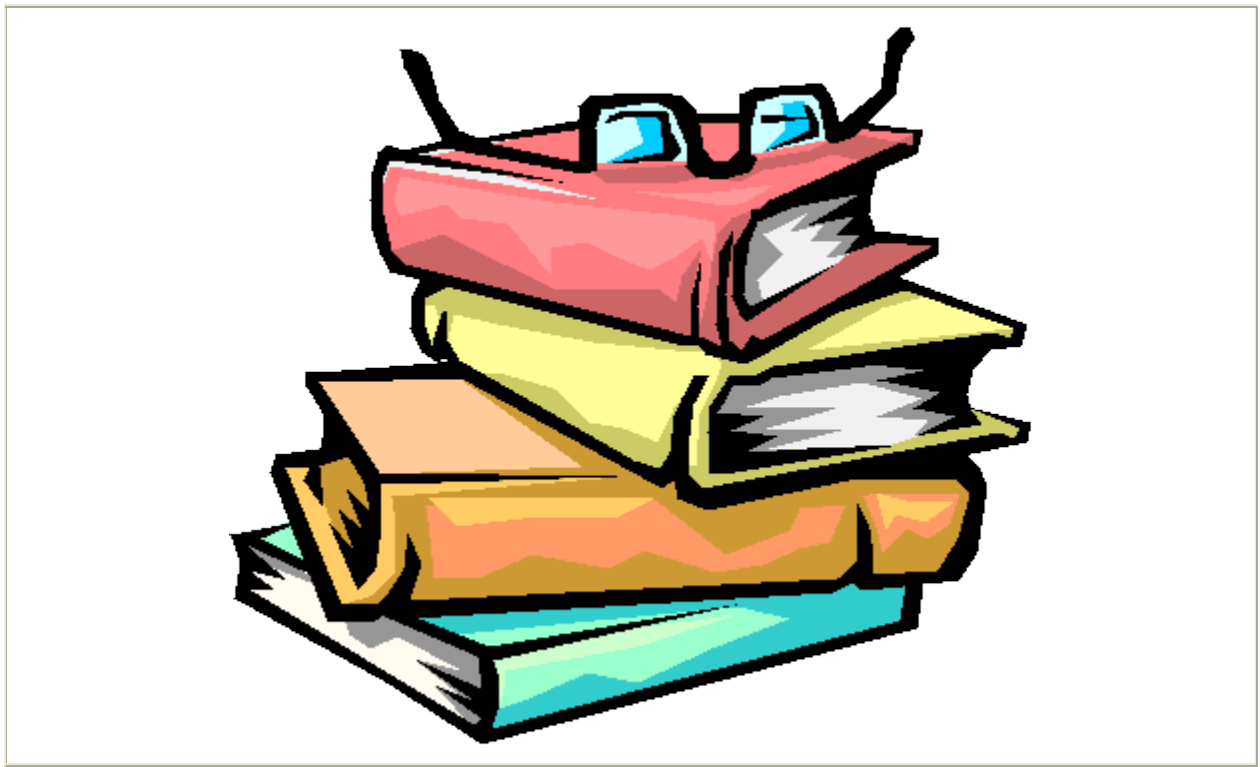
Just kidding.

But only partly.

We're not going to be working in some drafty castle or hidden tropical island, but we will be doing research. Research is what happens when people try to answer a complex, challenging question. Sometimes they go into a lab. Sometimes they design and administer a poll or survey. Always they read, read, read. And think. They think. Why do they think so much? Because they have to put together all the pieces of information into some kind of coherent answer, even if the answer is only a partial one.

The university is all about research. Your textbooks are based on it, as are your professors' lectures. Your profs may do research (and publishing) themselves, and university administrators base their decisions on research.

In fact, when you're in a university setting, you're expected to be able to back up any opinion you have by referring to (called "citing") some kind of factual data or the opinion of a recognized expert (These are called "sources"). Just having an opinion doesn't matter all that much in college. You need sources to support your opinions if you want to be taken seriously.

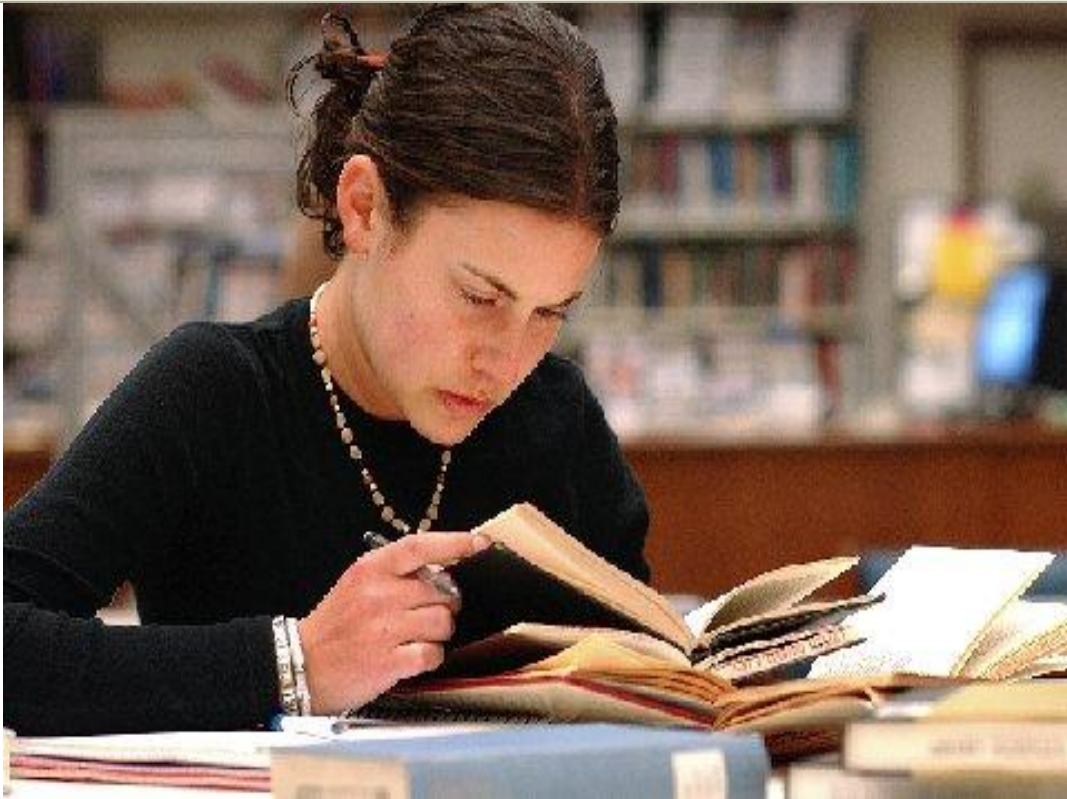


There are three parts to college-level research writing:

The **first part** is the research question.

The university is the place where you get to ask the big questions: what is life, what causes cancer, what political system is best for human happiness, what is human happiness, anyway? And on and on and on. You will be given the opportunity in this course (after we make sure you understand the basics) to explore questions that are meaningful to you. Students from other years have told me not only how much they have enjoyed their research in this course, but also

how beneficial it has been for them. We will talk more about this as the course progresses.



Stern College for Women

http://www.yu.edu/uploadedImages/STERN/ACADEMIC_LIFE/ACADEMIC_ADVISEMENT/girls%20studying.jpg

The **second part** of research is the gathering of facts.

For us, that means reading, with maybe some interviewing or survey taking thrown in. We don't have a big cyclotron, so we can't smash atoms, but we can read the research of those who do. When researchers gather facts, they comb through data, testing information against other information, rejecting what seems to be weak or false, adding important pieces from different authoritative sources, putting them together in new ways, and coming up with something unique.

Good research is always unique in some way. Think you can't write a piece of research that is unique to you? Yes you can. I see it all the time. All you have to do is sift your information through your own unique mind. The rest is inevitable.



The **third part** of research is writing it up so that your readers will understand and believe what you have come up with.

This is where documentation comes in: giving us (citing) your sources to back up your discoveries. Each field of study has its own rules for citing and listing sources. These different sets of rules have two things in common First, your reader must be able to go back and find the original sources for him/herself. Second, your reader must know which words and/or ideas come from others and which come from you. Both of these are very important, and we will talk about them throughout the course.