

UNIVERSITY VS HIGH SCHOOL RESEARCH

You may have been told that university research is different than in high school. That's true. But what are the differences?

In high school, many of your papers tended to be personal in nature, and presented your thoughts and opinions on a topic. You were given or came up with an argument first, then found sources to support it.

In university, papers are usually based in research. For most papers, you are expected to start with your sources, then form your arguments based on what you've read. This is the exact opposite of the process you used in high school.

Research in university is a process of inquiry. First, you ask a question about something that you want to find out more about. Then, you find some sources that help you learn about it, read them with an open mind, and see what they tell you. You pull out the key points and combine them into an answer to your question, which forms your argument. That means your arguments are the result of your analysis and synthesis of your sources. They are still your opinions, it's just that your opinion comes from your analysis of what you've read.

The type of sources you used in high school were often not too important. You may have searched using Google and used web sites or Wikipedia.

In university, those sources are not generally seen as acceptable. You are expected to use scholarly or peer-reviewed sources, which present original research done by experts in their field. These sources are hard to find in Google. Normally you'd find them in specialized search tools that are offered through the Library.

Once you've done your research and analysis, your paper is structured differently at university than at high school. In high school, you wrote 5 paragraph essays, with an introduction, 3 paragraphs each covering a different point, and a conclusion. Your thesis contained the 3 main points you covered in your paragraphs.

In university, there is no set number of points. Three might make sense, but it might not. You're expected to have as many points as you need to support your argument properly. For a long paper,

you'll need more than 3, and for a short paper, you might need fewer. Your thesis also doesn't need any specific number of points.

In many high school papers you wrote about 3 different points underneath a broader topic and only touched briefly on each of the points. At university you need more need more focus. You should pick one narrower topic, and go into depth about it, rather than talk about more things without much detail.

In summary, the process for doing research and the way you use your sources is different.

- In university first you read and think about your sources, then you come up with arguments.
- You need to use scholarly sources that you find through the Library web site.
- You need to focus on in-depth discussion of one small aspect of your topic, and
- The number of points you make depends on how many you need to support your argument.

If you have any questions, ask us at library.wlu.ca/help/askus.

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