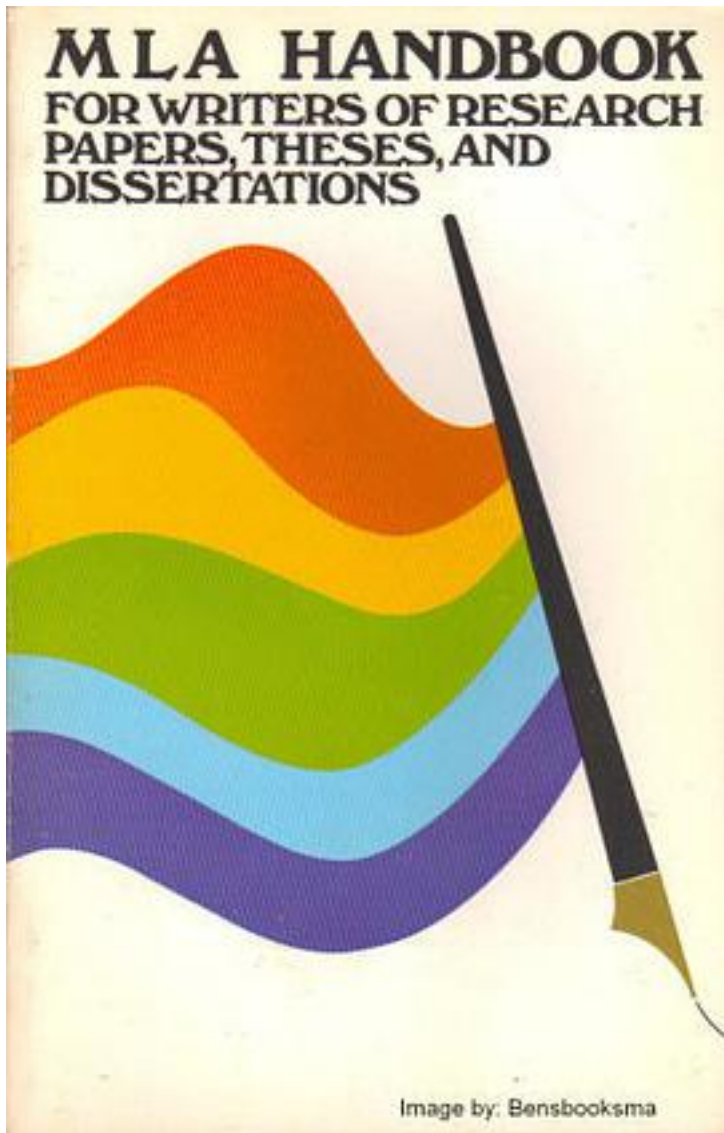


MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers Theses and Dissertations



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THE RESEARCH PAPER

Like other forms of writing, the research paper should be characterized by lucid, coherent exposition. No set of conventions for preparing a manuscript can replace lively and intelligent writing. Unlike some other forms of writing, however, the research paper requires writers to seek out and investigate sources of information other than their own personal knowledge and experience. Research into a topic will yield new information, sharpen perception of a problem, and lend authority to some hypotheses. The research paper, the final product of research, is not a collection of other persons' opinions but a carefully constructed presentation of an idea---or series of ideas---that relies on other sources for clarification and verification. Learned facts and borrowed opinions must be fully documented in the research paper, usually through endnotes or footnotes, but always in such a manner that they support rather than overshadow the paper itself.

2 SELECTING A TOPIC

All writing begins with a topic. If you have some freedom in choosing a topic, look for one that interests you and that can be treated effectively within the imposed limits of time and space. "Twentieth-Century Literature" would not be a suitable

able choice for a term paper or even a dissertation. Students
and scholars alike frequently begin with a fairly general topic
and subsequently refine it by research into
a more specific

one. The student whose initial topic is "The Imagery of Words-

worth s Prelude" for instance
might after some careful

thought and reading decide to focus on "Nature Imagery
in

Book I of Wordsworth s Prelude" the topic "Modern Avia-

tion" could be narrowed to "The SS2F an~ the Environment."

(On selecting a dissertation topic see
Appendix Sec.)

作者介绍:

目录:

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