

# Managing Your Research Project

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## WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn the importance of outlining the scope and sequence of a research project and of developing a plan for completing the project on time. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

## 1. Planning Your Project

Each step of a research project requires time and attention. Careful planning helps ensure that you will keep your project running smoothly and produce your best work. You will thus want to set up a project schedule that shows when you will complete each step.

This will involve thinking about how you will complete each step and what project resources you will use. Resources may include anything from library databases and word-processing software to interview subjects and writing tutors.

To develop your schedule, use a calendar and work backward from the date your final draft is due. Generally, it is wise to devote half of the available time to the research phase of the project, and half to the writing phase.

### IN CONTEXT

If you have a month to work, plan two weeks for each phase. If you have a full semester, plan to begin research early and to start writing by the middle of the term. You might think that no one really works that far ahead, but try it. You will probably be pleased with the quality of your work and the reduction in your stress level. Even in a self-paced course like this one, it is important to have a plan so that you are prepared to complete the project by the course's end date.

As you plan, break down major steps into smaller tasks if necessary.

➞ **EXAMPLE** The process of conducting research involves locating potential sources, evaluating their usefulness and reliability, reading, and taking notes. Defining these smaller tasks makes the project more manageable by giving you concrete goals to achieve.

Plan your schedule realistically, and consider other commitments that may sometimes take precedence. A business trip or family visit may mean that you are unable to work on the research project for a few days, so make the most of the time you have available.



#### HINT

Another strategy many writers find helpful is to finish each day's work at a point when the next task is an easy one. That makes it easier to start again.

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## 2. Staying Organized

Although setting up a schedule is easy, sticking to one is challenging. Even if you are the rare person who never procrastinates, unforeseen events may interfere with your ability to complete tasks on time. A self-imposed deadline may slip your mind despite your best intentions. Organizational tools—calendars, checklists, note cards, software, etc.—can help you stay on track.

Throughout your project, organize both your time and your resources systematically. Review your schedule frequently and check your progress. It helps to post your schedule in a place where you will see it every day.

Organize project documents in a binder or electronic folder, and label project documents and folders clearly. Use note cards or an electronic document to record bibliographical information for each source you plan to use in your paper. Tracking this information throughout the research process can save you hours of time when you create your references page.



#### HINT

Some people enjoy using the most up-to-date technology to help them stay organized. Other people prefer simple methods, such as crossing off items on a checklist. The key to staying organized is finding a system you like enough to use daily. The particulars of the method are not important as long as you are consistent.

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## 3. Anticipating Challenges

Do any of these scenarios sound familiar?

- You have identified a book that would be a great resource for your project, but it is currently checked out of the library.
- You planned to interview a subject matter expert on your topic, but she calls to reschedule your meeting.
- You have begun writing your draft, but now realize that you will need to modify your thesis and conduct additional research.
- You have finally completed your draft when your computer crashes, and days of hard work disappear in an instant.

These troubling situations are all too common. No matter how carefully you plan your schedule, you may encounter a glitch or setback. Managing your project effectively means anticipating potential problems, taking steps to minimize them where possible, and allowing time in your schedule to handle any setbacks.

Many times a situation becomes a problem due only to lack of planning.

➔ **EXAMPLE** If a book is checked out of your local library, it might be available through interlibrary loan, which usually takes a few days for the library staff to process. Alternatively, you might locate

another, equally useful source. If you have allowed enough time for research, a brief delay will not become a major setback.

You can manage other potential problems by staying organized and maintaining a take-charge attitude. Take a minute each day to save a backup copy of your work on a portable hard drive. Maintain detailed note cards and source cards as you conduct research—doing so will make citing sources in your draft infinitely easier.



## SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned about the importance of **planning your project** when you receive a research-based writing assignment. This includes creating a schedule and determining which resources you will need to use. Additionally, you learned that **staying organized** and **anticipating challenges** are necessary to keeping a research project on track.

Best of luck in your learning!

Source: This content has been adapted from Lumen Learning's "Managing Your Research Project" tutorial.