



The Curious Researcher: A Guide to Writing Research Papers

Bruce Ballenger

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An appealing alternative to traditional research texts, 'The Curious Researcher' stands apart for its motivational tone, its conversational style, and its conviction that research writing can be full of rewarding discoveries. This guide shows that good research and lively writing do not have to be mutually exclusive.

The Curious Researcher: A Guide to Writing Research Papers Details

Date : Published June 5th 2009 by Longman Publishing Group (first published 1997)

ISBN : 9780205745265

Author : Bruce Ballenger

Format : Paperback 374 pages

Genre : Language, Writing, Nonfiction, Academic, School, Reference, Education, Textbooks, Teaching, Essays

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Adrienne says

This was my textbook for my English 201 class at the American College of Healthcare Sciences. It was so helpful, and I am still referencing it, months after completing the course. This is a book that I will be keeping close at hand on my desk for future classes and writing. Allow me to break it down with my favorite parts and most helpful parts.

The book is broken up into 5 weeks of writing a research paper, and is full of resources. It gives advice on how to choose a topic, and lists subject encyclopedias to look into. It also teaches how to use databases and search engines for optimum results, including a page specifically of Google tips and tricks. It explains what kinds of sources are best for research papers, and helps teach the researcher to think critically and evaluate the sources for quality.

The book helps you develop a research question, a tentative thesis with suggested prompts, and then the final thesis out of five possible prompts that can go in many directions. There is a section that discusses plagiarism, and then a section called The Notetaker's Triad: Quotation, Paraphrase, and Summary with explanations of each. I found the suggested notetaking techniques to be very helpful. I liked the Double-Entry Journal, especially when using a Table in a Word document. It gives advice on writing the draft and then polishing the manuscript; it describes different ways of beginning a paper, including a delayed-thesis structure.

I especially found the Endings to Avoid section to be helpful, which was the opposite of what I had been taught in my high school English classes. I also found the section about weaving in your sources with your own commentary to be useful. For example, I never would've thought to use different colors for my voice and my sources in my rough draft to determine if my paper was balanced or if it relied too much on my sources or if I was yakking too much. There was a suggestion to actually print out the paper and cut it up with scissors to play around with order of paragraphs and what should stay and what should be edited out, but I didn't particularly like that idea. I made an outline instead and played around with my outline.

There is a helpful section on finding quick facts on the internet with links to American Factfinder, FedStats, Refdesk, CDC, and other sites. I appreciated the paragraphs about active voice vs. passive voice in writing and varying sentence length to avoid chopiness. A table was included to help use strong, powerful verbs instead of weaker, more passive verbs. I also found the paragraph about avoiding stock phrases to be helpful, especially because it listed suggestions for alternatives. The book included sections on how to include images, graphs, subheadings, bulleted lists, block quotes, and underlining for emphasis for a reader-friendly format. There was also a section of 10 Common Things to Avoid in Research Papers. I appreciated the section on avoiding sexist language.

Finally, the best and most helpful parts of this book were in the appendices. Appendix B was a Guide to MLA style. Appendix C was a Guide to APA Style. Since my college uses APA style, I will describe Appendix C. It has a checklist of things to look for before handing in, right in the very beginning of the appendix, and has a table listing key differences between MLA and APA format. Then, there is a directory (or table of contents for the appendix) of what is in the APA guide. It has a detailed section on citing sources in the body of the paper, a detailed section on how to prepare the references list, and sections on how to cite articles in print and online, and other sources, such as a film/online video/DVD, a TV program, an audio podcast, a blog, a wiki, online discussion lists, and musical recordings. This appendix is what I turn to most frequently and has been enormously helpful to me. The appendix concludes with an example student paper in APA format, from the title page to the references page, which is a helpful example of how a research paper could look like.

Overall, I highly recommend this book, and I'm thrilled that it was a required text for my English class, because it taught me so much.

Nik says

I'd honestly give this 4.5 stars, but that's not an option. Good book that promotes everything I've been trying to teach for a while DESPITE what the textbooks say; it promotes more humanity, more personality, and more writing to find (versus writing to prove a pre-determined, often poorly researched point). Great resource for my classes.

Myriah says

This is for people who hate research papers. You may not like reading the book, but it is very insightful. It is written very casually and does move by very quickly

Casey says

Written to university students as a college text, but I'm finding it extremely useful in modifying research methods and developing continued inquiry with my high school students. A good mix between scholarly advice and relevant activities along the research path.

Sohaib says

One of the best guidebooks for writing research papers...

Alison K. Derus says

I had to read this for a college english course and it helped me out a lot. would recommend it for research writing but isnt something I would have chose to read on my own

Jeri Walker says

Bruce Ballenger's take on the research process goes where other books on the topic do not. His approach models an authentic writing experience for the student writer, but professional writers and teachers would benefit just as much from taking his engaging exercises to heart. The book promotes the tenet that curiosity drives academic reserach. Although marketed as a college-level text, I have used many of the techniques with high school English students. The tone of the book is personal, so that tends to rub some people the wrong way, but the text serves as an extension of the pedagogical beliefs to which the author adheres. The examples of professional writing do not adhere to MLA guidelines, but they do help make the point that people incorporate research into their lives in numerous ways. It's a given that academic writing will follow citation guidelines and the book provides guidance on MLA and APA. Ballenger's book will help any writer

go beyond writing old-school research reports to producing a research paper where the writer is using information to make meaning. High schools across the nation should adopt his books for use in the classroom.

JeriWB.com Teacher Writer Traveler
Let's learn together.

Dominic says

I've skim and scanned this book and praised Bruce Ballenger's approach for a few years now, but I can now say I've read through this entire textbook (about 250 pages or so) in order to tighten my senior English project. And no joke...this is one of the most accessible and engaging English textbooks I've ever read.

If you are a teacher, don't make the mistake of flipping through this book and thinking he has nothing new to offer. No, Ballenger's emphasis on the research *essay* rather than the research *paper* or research *report* (not to mention the many lessons and tips) is a lot more cutting edge than you might think, especially at the high school level.

This book has sat on my teaching essentials bookshelf next to the wonderful Birkenstein-Graff text *They Say / I Say* for years, and it isn't going anywhere—except when I'm carrying it back and forth from school.

sarah louise says

In fatuation w/ this text. Pedagogical approach to fostering curiosity and inquiry about topics and life w/ helpful ways to navigate the research process v. imposing research requirements, restrictions and assignment objectives that choke the inquiry before it's begun. Thanks to Tim Orme for the loan.

Patrick Salkeld says

A good resource for learning how to write research papers.

Shaylene says

An outstanding and practical approach to breaking down the research paper into manageable sections. This book has really challenged the way that I have approached teaching research and the research paper.

Tami Robertson says

I read this book for my last english class for my holistic practioner degree. It is clearly written and takes you step by step on writing a great research paper and finding the research you need. It is a valuable tool!

Adam Floridia says

In reading this, I was quite pleased to see that I already use many of the methods the author recommends: the importance of a Research Question, engaging with texts as if in a conversation, using dialectical notes. Of course, that's not because I'm a genius or anything; they're pedagogical practices that I simply stole from my peers, one of whom strongly recommended this book. There are also at least a few tidbits that I took away from the book, and I will be incorporating those (and probably a couple of the exercises therein) into my classes.

A good read for anyone teaching students to write a research paper. However, while it is written for students, I can't see ever making every student buy this as a required text for a course.

Sarah says

This might be the book that got me permanently hooked on research. Ballenger's whole premise is that research papers really could be fun, given the right topic and enough curiosity. Contains lots of helpful, hands on exercises.

Ray Ziemer says

Excellent book for my English 1102 college writing class. I believe I'll use it next semester. The lessons and examples are more relevant to teaching the research paper than the books about "argument" that seem to be the latest thing. Ballenger's practical text covers skills such as note-taking and paraphrasing, with exercises like the ones that I have been making up myself until now.
