

# How to Write an Outstanding Report in Grades 5 and 6

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Special thanks to Lucy M. for permission to use her shark report.

Note: The eBook version is in color. The paperback version is in black and white.

<https://writingwithsharonwatson.com/>

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## Chapter 1: Choose a Topic and Narrow It Down



You've been asked to write a report, and it is due pretty soon.

Here's the good news: This course will guide you step-by-step through the whole process. If you complete all the lessons, you will have a written report by the end of the course.

But what is a report?

You know quite a bit about many subjects. You even know details that go beyond what other people know.

However, there are experts that know much more than you do about any subject. When you write, you will share what you already know, but you also will gather and share information that is new to you so your readers can learn something, too. A **report**—or a **research paper**—is a paper in which you think deeply about your topic, decide what you want to say about it, look up facts, take notes, and then write it all up.

Generally, your teacher will give you the subject to write about and tell you how many words or pages your report should be.

In this chapter, you'll practice these two skills:

Narrowing down a topic  
Brainstorming

So let's go.

### *Lesson 1: How do I choose my topic and narrow it down?*

Maybe your teacher has given you a narrowed-down topic of, say, the life cycle of a pond, a biography of Madam Curie, why humans need sleep, which person you think has contributed the most to science, your opinion of the dumbest war ever fought, or five famous landmarks of the world. Lucky you. Your topic is all ready to go.

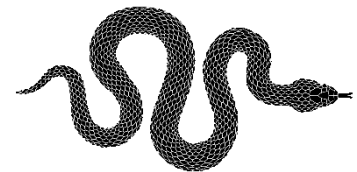
But what if your teacher has given you a broad subject like animals? How do you choose which animal you want to write about?

Here's the secret: Choose an animal you have strong feelings about. Do you shudder at the thought of spiders? Do you love elephants? It is much easier to write a paper on something you have a strong feeling about.

For instance, I happen not to be on friendly terms with snakes, so that might be a good option for me. But now I have a problem. My topic of snakes is still too large, too broad. There is too much to write about.

To narrow down my snake topic, I jotted down some ideas or categories I could write about:

How snake venom is made and why it affects humans  
How to tell a venomous snake from a nonvenomous one  
The most dangerous snakes on the planet  
Two or three snake species I never want to meet  
The life cycle of a snake



When I choose one of those smaller, narrower topics, it will give a direction or focus to my research.

**Now it's your turn.** Most likely, your teacher has given you a broad subject to write about. Write the subject in the blank space below:

Now jot down at least three narrowed-down topics within that broad subject like I did with the snakes. Make sure those topics interest you. Write your list below or on another piece of paper. For example . . .

- For a biography of a scientist → list scientists you respect or dislike.
- If you choose a country → list countries that fascinate you.
- If it is about a particular animal → list categories you could write about.
- If your report is on an event → list things about it that readers want to know.



Now choose one narrowed-down topic from your list that you would like to research for your paper and circle it or write it below.

Congratulations. You have taken the first step in writing your report. Do you feel comfortable with your choice? If yes, then relax. If not, don't worry. You can change it in the next lesson.

## Grading Grid for *How to Write an Outstanding Report in Grades 5 and 6*

Is the topic interesting and has it been narrowed down and focused to a manageable size? 1-10 points	<input type="radio"/>
Do the title and introduction interest the reader? 1-5 points	<input type="radio"/>
Is the main idea clear? Is it near the end of the first paragraph? 1-10 pts	<input type="radio"/>
Is each point strong? Does each support the main idea? Are the ideas clearly expressed and of value? 1-20 points	<input type="radio"/>
Does the student cite all borrowed facts, ideas, quotations, and so on? 1-10 points	<input type="radio"/>
Does each point have a clear topic sentence? Does each paragraph adequately support its topic sentence? 1-15 points	<input type="radio"/>
Are the paragraphs arranged in an effective order? Are there transitions between the paragraphs, if needed? 1-5 pts	<input type="radio"/>
Does the conclusion restate or sum up the main idea in a new way and give food for thought? 1-5 points	<input type="radio"/>
Is it clear that the student organized his/her material before writing? 1-10 points	<input type="radio"/>
Is it clear that the research was done well? 1-10 points	<input type="radio"/>
Extra credit: Is there something noteworthy in the writing, the expression of ideas, or in the research? 1-10 points	<input type="radio"/>
<b>Grade for Content</b>	<input type="radio"/>

Comments:

Are in-text citations correctly used where needed? Is the works-cited page correct? 1-20 points	<input type="radio"/>
How are the spelling, capitalization, punctuation, sentence fragments, run-ons, and so on? 1-20 points	<input type="radio"/>
Are there separate paragraphs for the intro, each point, and conclusion? 1-20 points	<input type="radio"/>
Was the paper handed in on time? 1-20 points	<input type="radio"/>
Did the student follow the written instructions? 1-20 points	<input type="radio"/>
<b>Grade for Grammar/Mechanics</b>	<input type="radio"/>