



THE PAPER CHASE

A 21-day plan to help you complete your first big research paper of the year. A guide for students. **BY KAREN SUNDERHAFT**



Okay, you're about a month into the school year, and you're getting the hang of the new routine, new teachers, and different classes. You're doing okay—keeping up with the math reviews and reading assignments. But now your teacher throws you the curve ball you knew was coming—the first long research paper. The honeymoon is over! You want to make a great first impression and you want to show your parents—and yourself—that you can manage this long assignment. But where do you begin and will you be able to meet the deadline? Stop worrying. Follow these simple steps and you will!

Organization is key

1 Pick a topic that you enjoy. If the assignment is about, say, whales, choose a type that interests you—the humpback, the orca, the blue? It's easier to write about something that you find intriguing or that you already know something about.

2 Grab three pieces of paper and label each with the following headings: "What I know," "What I need to learn," and "Visuals to accompany the written report."

3 Write down your thoughts under each heading. If AD/HD impedes your focus, get the ideas out of your brain and down on paper before you lose them.

4 Find a desk calendar that displays the whole month at a glance. Using different colored markers, draw a star next to the day you're beginning the assignment and a star next to the day that the paper is due. Cross off any days you won't be able to work on the report because of other commitments, then count the remaining days until the due date. Divide the number of workdays into three-week sections.

WEEK ONE

► Go to your local library, look through your bookshelves at home, log on to the Internet, and collect as much information as you can about your topic.

► Collect and read through the materials. Skim through the books and magazines on the first day—don't take notes. Just look through for stimulating ideas.

► Group the many ideas into five, six, or seven topics that you want to cover in your report. For a paper on a whale, for instance, you might include Physical Features, Food, Mating and Offspring, Location and Migration, Endangered or Not, Interesting Facts.

► Use this week to make a list of materials you'll need for your special project—poster board, glue, photos of whales, and so

HELPFUL HINT:
If you need a visual aid, draw a circle on a separate piece of paper and label it "Humpback Whale." Extend lines from it and label each spoke with a topic area you'd like to cover. For instance, one line might be labeled "Physical Features," another, "Location and Migration."

HELPFUL HINT:
When you come home from school, make it your first priority to spend 20-30 minutes on your research report. If you break down the project into smaller pieces, the work becomes more manageable.

forth—and purchase them. Put these away for now; you will use them in week three.

WEEK TWO

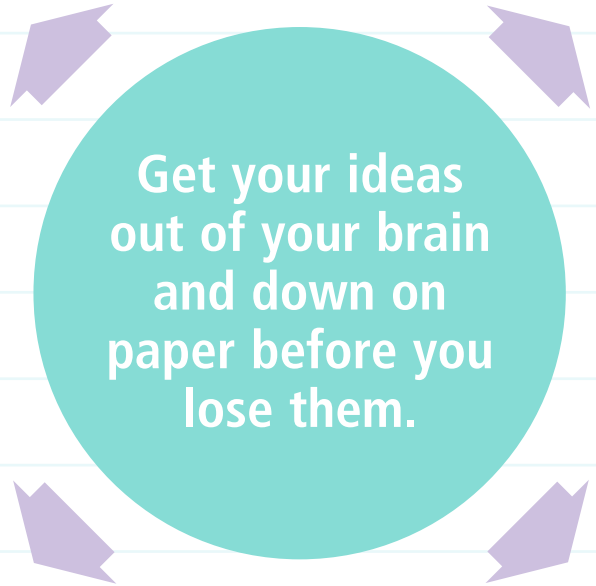
► Using different colored index cards for each topic—green for Physical Features and red for Food, say—read through your collected material and write down one fact on a single card. (Kids in the seventh and eighth grades can get several facts on one card.) Capture the fact in a simple sentence, using your own words. For example, under the Food category, you might write: “An orca whale eats a thousand pounds of krill in a day.”

HELPFUL HINT:
If you need more space to write on, use lined paper in a binder, with colored dividers to separate the topic areas. The colored tabs will make it easy to flip from one topic to the next as you write down additional facts.

► Place each category of cards in its own shoebox so that all information relating to that topic is at your fingertips. In other words, all green cards will go in one box, and so on.

► On a separate piece of paper, write down a list of the books/authors and materials you used. A bibliography is usually a part of a research report—and if it isn't, including one will impress the teacher.

HELPFUL HINT:
Include cards for introductory and concluding paragraphs for each topic area.



Procrastination is going to be your worst enemy. As a person with AD/HD, it's often challenging to recognize the importance of time or of meeting a deadline.



WEEK THREE

► Working with one shoebox at a time, lay all the cards on a table, paper-clip like information together, and number the packet of cards. For instance, under “Food,” you might group together the information about krill and the small fish that orcas eat near the surface of the ocean. Another grouping might be larger fish that orcas consume and how deep they have to dive to hunt them.

► Write or type your rough draft from the numbered, paper-clipped cards. Each grouping becomes a paragraph in your research paper.

► Show your rough draft to your parents or teacher to make sure that the information is organized clearly and makes sense. This is also a good time to check for misspellings and punctuation.

► Make a colorful cover page that includes a title, your name, and the date.

► Now that the written report is done, you can start working on the fun part—the visuals.

Karen Sunderhaft, ADDitude's education editor, is a fourth-grade teacher in Shaker Heights, Ohio.

Okay, you did it!

You picked a topic, collected and organized a ton of information, and created a fabulous, informative report. Now all you need to do is to hand it in, sit back, and wait for your grade. I knew you could do it!

