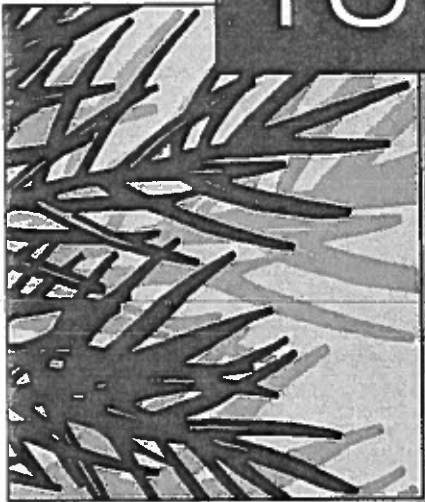


Strengthening an Essay with Research



PART A Improving an Essay with Research

PART B Finding and Evaluating Outside Sources:
Library and Internet

PART C Adding Sources to Your Essay and
Documenting Them Correctly

You will have opportunities in college to prepare formal research papers with many outside sources. However, you should not limit your definition of “research” to just such assignments. Whenever you have a question and seek an answer from a source outside yourself, you are doing research. Most of us research every day, whether or not we call it that—when we gather facts and opinions about the cheapest local restaurant, the college with the best fire science program, the safest new cars, or various medical conditions. In this chapter, you will learn skills valuable both in college and at work: how to improve your writing with interesting information from outside sources.

Part A

Improving an Essay with Research

Almost any essay, particularly one designed to *persuade* your reader, can benefit from the addition of outside material. In fact, even one outside source—a startling statistic or a memorable quote—can enrich your essay. Supporting your main points with outside sources can be an excellent way to establish your credibility, strengthen your argument, and add power to your words. Compare two versions of this student’s paragraph

Inexperienced hikers often get in trouble because they worry about rare dangers like snakebites, but they minimize the very serious dangers of dehydration and exposure to cold. For example, my brother-in-law once hiked into the Grand Canyon with only a granola bar and a small bottle of water. He became severely dehydrated and was too weak to climb back up without help.

- This paragraph makes an important point about the dangers that inexperienced hikers can face. The example of the brother-in-law supports the main point, but the paragraph needs more complete support.

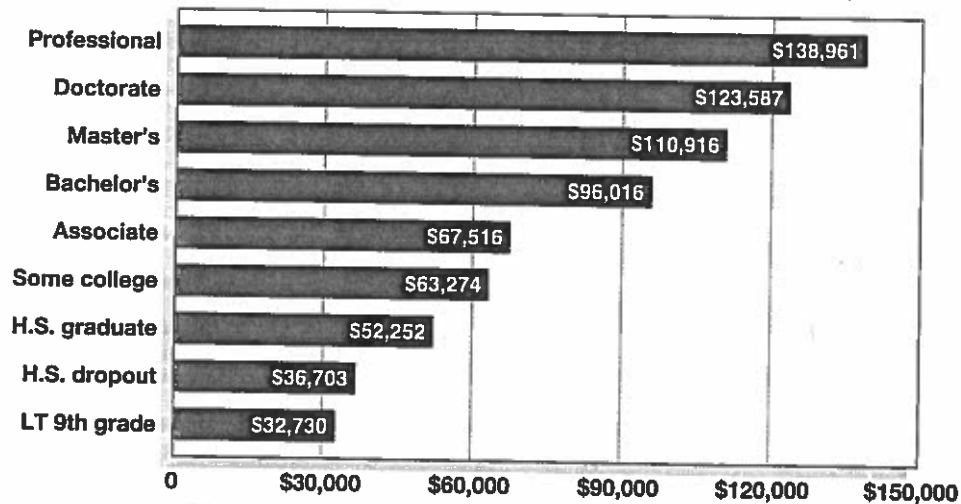
Now read the paragraph strengthened by some relevant facts from an outside source.

Inexperienced hikers often get in trouble because they worry about rare dangers like snakebites, but they minimize the very serious dangers of dehydration and exposure to cold. For example, my brother-in-law once hiked into the Grand Canyon with only a granola bar and a small bottle of water. He became severely dehydrated and was too weak to climb back up without help. He was lucky. According to the National Park Service (NPS) web site, over a hundred hikers die every year because they are not properly prepared for the environment. In addition, the NPS reports that over \$1.7 million was spent last year to perform 5,843 search-and-rescue operations to save poorly prepared hikers like my brother-in-law ("Search and Rescue Report 1998").

- What facts from the National Park Service web site support the main point and add to the persuasive power of this paragraph?
-
- What sentence of transition does the writer use to connect his example of the brother-in-law with facts from the outside source? What transitional words connect the fact about hikers' deaths each year?
-
- Remember that just one well-chosen outside source can improve and enliven a paper.

Consider the facts in this chart:

Average Family Income by Education of Householder, 2000



- What patterns do you see in this chart?
- How might you use this information in an essay?

Facts and statistics can make a strong statement, but there are many other ways to enhance your writing. Consider adding a good quotation to emphasize one of your key points. You can begin by looking through the Quotation Bank at the end of this book or an online version of *Bartlett's Quotations* at <http://www.bartleby.com/100/>. Or find and quote an expert on the subject you are writing about. For example, if your subject is the lack of recycling receptacles on your campus, an opinion from a Sierra Club official would give authority to your essay. And don't forget experts closer to home; details about a student you know who has begun a recycling campaign on campus would add life and emotion to your work. If your essay is about your family history or the school's registration system, you could interview a relative or a school administrator and use that material to add authority to your paper.

A good way to begin using research is to pick an essay you have recently written. Reread it, marking any places where outside sources might make it even better. Write down any questions you want answers to or information that you would like to find:

- What would I like to know more about?
- What outside source might make my essay more interesting?
- What information—fact, statistic, detail, or quotation—would make my essay more convincing?
- What people are experts on this topic? Where can I find them or their opinions?

Carmen's Research Process

Student Carmen Gevana is learning to use outside sources. She plans to add research support to a favorite essay. She selects a cause-and-effect paper that examines the reasons her best friend went into credit card debt and the devastating effects this debt had on her friend's life. In her paper, Carmen named two causes: credit card companies using gifts to encourage students to apply for cards and students getting higher credit lines than they can realistically handle. The consequences Carmen discussed were unmanageable debt and ruined credit. Now Carmen wants to add two or three sources to support her own ideas. Her first question is whether heavy credit card debt is a problem unique to her friend or more widespread among college students. She also wonders how much debt a typical college student carries. Finally, she hopes to find an expert opinion about the effects on college students.

PRACTICE 1 Choose one of the following: either your favorite paper written this term or a paper on a topic assigned by your instructor. Then read through your paper, marking any spots where an outside source—fact, statistic, expert opinion, or quotation—might strengthen your essay. Write down any questions that you want to answer.

Part B

Finding and Evaluating Outside Sources: Library and Internet

The next step is finding the information you seek—or something even better. This section will show you how to find sources in the library and on the Internet.

Doing Research at the Library

Visit your college library, with your notes from Practice 1 in hand. Ask about any print guides, workshops, or web sites that show you how to use the library facilities. Introduce yourself to the reference librarian, tell him or her what subject you are exploring, and ask for help finding and using any of these resources in your search:

1. **Online Catalog or Card Catalog.** This will show you what books are available on your topic. For every book that looks like it might be interesting, jot down its title, author, and call number (the number that lets you find the book in the library).
2. **Periodical Indexes.** The more current your topic, the more likely you are to find interesting information in periodicals—magazines, journals, and newspapers—rather than books. *The Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature* is a print resource, listing articles by subject. The library will also have computerized indexes like *InfoTrac*, *EBSCOhost*, and *Lexis-Nexus*. Ask the librarian to help you explore these exciting resources.
3. **Statistical Sources.** If you are looking for statistics and facts, the library has volumes like *The Statistical Abstract of the United States* with fascinating information on population, education, immigration, crime, economic issues, and so on.
4. **Encyclopedias and Reference Books.** General books on subjects like geology or psychology can be helpful. Special reference books and encyclopedias exist for almost every area—for example, world soccer statistics, terrorism, or the birds of South America.

As you explore, you might see why experienced researchers often love what they do. They never know what they will find, and they learn the darnedest, most interesting things. However, they must evaluate each source. If you are writing about the space shuttle, a current article in *The Chicago Tribune* would more likely impress readers as a truthful source than, say, a story in *The National Enquirer* called "Space Aliens Ate My Laundry." Look at the date of a book or article; if your subject is current, your sources should be too. Is the author a respected expert on this subject? Is the information balanced and objective? The librarian can help you find strong sources.

Once you discover good information that will strengthen your essay, take clear and careful notes, using 4 × 6 note cards or your notebook. Use the techniques you learned in Chapter 17 to summarize and quote directly and indirectly; these will help you avoid accidental plagiarism. Write down everything you

might need later. Print or buy copies of an article or book pages that are important. Don't leave the library without this information:

Book: Author name(s), title and subtitle, year of publication, publisher and location of publisher, exact pages of material quoted or summarized.

Magazine: Author name(s), title of article, title of magazine or journal, year, month, day of publication, volume and number, page numbers.

Carmen's Research Process

Carmen visits her college library and gets help from the librarian using the computerized database *EBSCOhost*. Because Carmen's topic—student credit card debt—is current, she assumes that newspapers and magazines will give her the most up-to-date information. Searching "credit card debt," she finds a recent *Business Week* article called "Congratulations, Grads—You're Bankrupt." She is surprised and excited to learn that credit problems like her friend's are a growing national problem. She copies the article and adds it to her source folder.

PRACTICE 2 In your college or local library, find the answers to the following questions; write the answers and the complete source for each piece of information. Your instructor might wish to have you work in competing teams.

1. List the full titles of five novels by Toni Morrison. What major prize did she win and in what year?
2. How many acres of rain forest are destroyed every day in Brazil?
3. What is the average hourly wage of men in the United States? Of women?
4. How many murders were committed in your town or city last year? Is the number up or down from ten years ago?
5. What was the newspaper headline in your hometown or city on the day and year of your birth? What stories dominated page 1?

PRACTICE 3 In your college or local library, find at least two excellent additions from outside sources that will improve your essay: a fact, statistic, example, quotation, or expert opinion. Write the information from each source precisely on 4 × 6 note cards, using quotation marks as you learned in Chapter 17, Part C, or make copies. Write down everything you will need later to cite the source: the book or magazine, article name, author name(s), and so on. Spell everything perfectly; copy exact punctuation of titles, and don't forget page numbers.

Doing Research on the Internet

The Internet is a wonderful source of information on just about everything—a great place to brainstorm, get ideas as you research, and find certain facts. However, it is harder to evaluate information on the web than in print, as this section will explain, so be careful.

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843

If you have Internet access at the library or at home, use one of the search engines below. Type in search words that narrow your subject the same way you narrow a topic in writing—for example, *credit card debt*, *college students*. Spell correctly, and try different words if necessary. Chances are, you will have too many “hits,” rather than too few.

Google	http://google.com
AltaVista	http://www.altavista.com
Northern Light	http://www.northernlight.com
HotBot	http://www.hotbot.com
All the Web	http://www.alltheweb.com

Evaluate each web site carefully. Who sponsors the site? How balanced and unbiased is the information? Notice also the date of the site and article; many web sites come and go in the night. With practice, web researchers get better at spotting good and not-so-good sources of information. One tip is the web address, or URL (Uniform Resource Locator) of each site. The last part of a URL says who owns the site:

.com	=	company (aims to sell something and make a profit)
.org	=	non-profit organization (aims to promote a cause)
.gov	=	government (provides many public information sites)
.edu	=	college or educational institution (aims to inform the public and promote itself)

For instance, if you are researching *asthma in children, treatments*, a government-sponsored health site might give more unbiased information than a company that sells asthma medications or a personal web site called *Troy's Asthma Story*. For more help evaluating web sites, see <http://www.lib.vt.edu/research/evaluate/evalbiblio.html>.

As in the library—to avoid plagiarism later—take good notes, clearly marking words and ideas taken from your sources. Before you leave a web site you wish to quote, cut and paste or print the material you want, and make sure you have full information to cite the source later in your paper:

Web site: URL address, owner of site, author name(s), title of article, date written (if available), and date you accessed the web site.

Carmen's Research Process

Carmen chooses the Google search engine and types the search words, “college students, credit card debt.” The search engine returns several thousand sources! Carmen scrolls quickly through many different “hits,” until she finds one that looks promising. It's the web site for Nellie Mae, a federal loan provider for college students. Carmen takes notes on a number of useful statistics and makes sure she has the URL address and other pertinent information before she logs off the computer.

PRACTICE 4 Go to www.fedstats.gov and learn how to find statistics quickly and easily. Answer these questions:

1. How many people live in the United States?
2. What is the leading cause of death in American men? Women?
3. What is the leading export from your state?
4. How many different ethnic groups live in your state?
5. How many new AIDS cases were reported in your state last year? What groups were most hard-hit?

PRACTICE 5 Using one of the suggested search engines, find at least two good pieces of information to strengthen your essay—facts, statistics, expert opinions, and so on. Hone your search words and see what you find. Take careful notes, and cut and paste or print the information you need. Did you find any good material that you were not expecting? (Did you find exciting information on another subject that you might use in another paper? Be sure to take down any information you might use in the future.)

Part C

Adding Sources to Your Essay and Documenting Them Correctly

Now, reread your original essay and the new material you found in your research process. Did you find other or better material than you looked for? Where in the paper will your outside sources be most effective? The next step is to use any of the three methods you learned in Chapter 17, Parts B and C—summary, direct quotation, or indirect quotation (paraphrase)—as you revise your essay and add your outside sources. This section will show you how.

The MLA style (named after the Modern Language Association) is one of the easiest methods for documenting sources quickly and clearly. MLA style is also called *parenthetical* documentation because it puts source information in the body of the essay, in parentheses, rather than in cumbersome footnotes or endnotes.

A correct citation does two things:

- It tells your reader that the material is from an outside source.
- It gives your reader enough information to find the original source.

A correct citation appears in *two places* in your essay:

- inside the essay in parentheses
- at the end in a Works Cited list

Inside Your Essay: Summarize or Quote and Give Credit

When you quote an outside source in an essay, indicate that the material is not yours by introducing the quote with one of the phrases that you practiced in Part C of Chapter 17. If you use the author's name in this phrase, you will put only the

page number in parentheses. If you leave the author unnamed, be sure to include both the author's last name and the page number in parentheses. If your source is a web site, no page number is needed—just the author or first word of the title.

Here is the introductory paragraph from Carmen's original essay about credit card debt.

In her second year of college, when she was supposed to declare her major, my best friend Maya almost had to declare bankruptcy. In just two years, she had racked up \$7,000 in credit card debt. Starting with necessities such as textbooks and car repairs, Maya soon began charging everything from midnight pizza parties to shopping sprees at the mall. It didn't take long before she had accrued a debt far greater than her part-time campus job could cover. What caused this intelligent student and perhaps others like her to get into so much debt?

- This is a catchy introduction on a good topic. You can probably see why Carmen chose to do more with this paper.

Now read the same paragraph, strengthened and expanded by facts that Carmen found on the Internet:

In her second year of college, when she was supposed to declare her major, my best friend Maya almost had to declare bankruptcy. In just two years, she had racked up \$7,000 in credit card debt. Starting with necessities such as textbooks and car repairs, Maya soon began charging everything from midnight pizza parties to shopping sprees at the mall. It didn't take long before she had accrued a debt far greater than her part-time campus job could cover. Yet Maya's is not an isolated case of bad financial management. According to a 2001 report on the web site of Nellie Mae, the student loan provider, 78 percent of all college students had credit cards in 2000, and the typical student's credit card balance grew 46 percent, to \$2,748, just from 1998 to 2000 ("Credit"). What has caused this jump in credit card debt among college students nationwide and what can be done about it?

- Through her research online, Carmen learned that students all over the country are carrying higher credit card balances. This information adds power to Maya's story.
- What transitional sentence moves the paragraph from Maya's personal story to the bigger picture? _____
- What transitional expression introduces the Nellie Mae report?

- Because this article has no listed author, the first word of the title, "Credit," is shown in parentheses. The full title and web site will be listed in Works Cited.

Note: Electronic resources do not have set page numbers because everyone's printer is different, so no page number is shown in parentheses as it would be with a book or article.

At the End of Your Essay: List Works Cited

The last page of your essay will be a list of all the sources you summarized, directly quoted, or indirectly quoted in your essay, in alphabetical order by the author's last name. If there is no named author, list the entry alphabetically by its title (in quotation marks). Title the page *Works Cited*, and center the title. Use the models below to format each source properly. (Don't worry about memorizing the forms; even experienced writers often have to check an MLA manual for the correct form.) If a citation goes beyond one line, indent any following lines five spaces to make it clear that the information belongs together.

Books

One author:

Erdrich, Louise. The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse. New York: HarperCollins, 2001.

More than one author:

McClelland, Deke and Katrin Eismann. Real World Digital Photography. Berkeley, CA: Peachpit Press, 1999.

Encyclopedia:

"Geneva Convention." Encyclopedia Britannica. 15th ed. 2002.

Periodicals

Article in a newspaper:

Asimov, Eric. "Peruvian Cuisine Takes On the World." New York Times 26 May 1999, late ed.: F1.

Article in a magazine:

Alexander, Charles P. "Death Row: Our Relatives in Peril: an Exclusive Look at the 25 Most Endangered Primates." Time 17 Jan. 2000: 76+.

Article in a journal:

Lockwood, C. J. "Predicting Premature Delivery—No Easy Task." New England Journal of Medicine 346 (2002): 299–300.

Electronic Sources

Because the World Wide Web is a rapidly changing environment, include the date the source was published or updated, as well as the date you accessed the information.

Web site:

Links to Advertising Resources. 2002. Department of Advertising, University of Texas, Austin. 3 Jan. 2003 <<http://advertising.utexas.edu/world/Ads.html>>.

Article in an online periodical:

Thurer, Shari. "The Working Mom Myth." Salon.com 6 April 1999. 12 August 2002 <http://www.salon.com/mwt/feature/1999/04/06/childcare_study/index.html>.

Work from a subscription service (give the name of the library you used):

Schacter, Daniel. "The Seven Sins of Memory: How the Mind Forgets and Remembers." *Psychology Today* May 2001: 90–99. Expanded Academic ASAP. InfoTrac. City College of San Francisco Lib., San Francisco, CA. 22 Jan. 2002.

Multimedia

Film or video:

Dancing in One World. Dir. Mark Obenhaus. Perf. Raoul Trujillo, Peter Sellars, Falakika Mauvaka, Judy Mitoma, and Little Crow. Videocassette. RM Arts, 1993.

Radio or television program:

"Machismo." Sixty Minutes. Narr. Morley Safer. CBS. WCBS, New York. 6 Aug. 1993.

Personal interview:

Santos, Mariela. Personal Interview. Mar. 31, 2003.

These models cover the most common outside sources you will encounter in your research. If you need assistance with another source, you can find other models in one of the many web sites that publish MLA guidelines. Try Purdue's Online Writing Lab at http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r_mla.html. (If your instructor requires APA style instead of MLA, click *APA* at the site above or try <http://www.wisc.edu/writing/Handbook/DocAPA.html>.)

Carmen's Research Process

During her library and Internet research, Carmen had carefully copied the quotes and facts that she wanted to use in her essay onto index cards or copied relevant pages. Now, as she revises her essay to add these sources, she makes sure that she quotes her sources accurately and avoids unintentional plagiarism. As she rewrites her essay, she refers to Chapters 17 and 18. She uses transitional expressions to weave the outside sources smoothly into her essay. Then she prepares a Works Cited list, referring to the models above, as the last page of her paper.

Read Carmen's completed essay with research, "Drastic Plastic: Credit Card Debt on Campus," at the end of this chapter.

PRACTICE 6 Below are five sources a student has compiled for a research essay on the history of the Olympics. Using the models above to guide you, prepare a Works Cited list for the paper that includes all five sources, properly formatted and in alphabetical order.

- A book by Susan Wels called The Olympic Spirits: 100 Years of the Games that was published in Del Mar, California by Tehabi Books in 1995

- An article in the February 25, 2002 issue of Newsweek called “Going Extreme: Snowboarding and Moguls” written by Devin Gordon and T. Trent Gegax and appearing on page 48
- A web site called The Ancient Olympic Games Virtual Museum that was presented by Dartmouth College and last updated on January 11, 2002 (the student viewed it on March 12, 2003 at <http://minbar.cs.Dartmouth.edu/greecom/olympics/>)
- A book by Allen Guttman titled The Olympics: A History of the Modern Games published by the University of Illinois Press in the city of Champaign in 2002, 248 pages long
- An article from the New York Times called “15,000-Mile Olympic Torch Route Gives Lots of People Reasons to Feel Good” that was written by Dirk Johnson and appeared on page 12 of section 1 on May 26, 1996

Works Cited

PRACTICE 7 Now, using two of the three methods—summary, direct quotation, or indirect quotation—add your research findings to your essay. Review Chapters 17 and 18 if you need to. Aim to achieve two things: First try to add the new material gracefully, using introductory phrases so that it relates clearly to your ideas in the essay. Second, be careful to avoid plagiarism by documenting your sources correctly, both inside the essay and in your Works Cited list.

Following is Carmen’s final essay strengthened by research.

Carmen Gevana
 Professor Fawcett
 English 100
 10 May 2001

Drastic Plastic: Credit Card Debt on Campus

Introduction

In her second year of college, when she was supposed to declare her major, my best friend Maya almost had to declare bankruptcy. In just two years, she had racked up \$7,000 in credit card debt. Starting with necessities such as textbooks and car repairs, Maya soon began charging everything from midnight pizza parties to shopping sprees at the mall. It didn't take long before she had accrued a debt far greater than her part-time campus job could cover. Yet Maya's is not an isolated case of bad financial management. According to a 2001 report on the web site of Nellie Mae, the student loan provider, 78 percent of all college students had credit cards in 2000, and the typical student's credit card balance grew 46 percent to \$2,748, just from 1998 to 2000 ("Credit"). What has caused this jump in credit card debt among college students nationwide and what can be done about it?

Indirectly quoted facts from Nellie Mae expand the topic; short title given, no page for web site.

Thesis statement, phrased as a question

Topic sentence: cause #1

Developed by author's ideas, observations

A major cause of growing student debt is that credit card companies bombard college students the minute they step on campus. Targeting a profitable market of young consumers, these credit companies use many tactics to lure new college students into applying for their cards. Smiling salespeople stand behind tables offering free goodies like candy bars, school sweatshirts, and even airline tickets. They flood students' mailboxes with credit card offers and pay the college bookstore to stuff applications into every plastic book bag. For my friend Maya, the temptation was too great. Before she had been in college a week, she had already applied for two cards, each with a large credit limit.

Topic sentence: cause #2

Developed by author's ideas, observations

Maya's credit card behavior illustrates the second cause for the widespread crisis in college debt—most college students spend more than they can repay. Companies that extend credit typically offer higher limits than their customers can handle. After all, the company makes its profit through charging interest, and interest only accrues if the customer cannot pay off the full balance every month. New credit card users, especially college students who don't have a lot of extra cash and often lack training in how to handle money responsibly, may rapidly build a balance beyond their means. When this occurs, students may be able to cover little more than the minimum monthly payment of \$15 to \$25. With high average interest rates, the outstanding balance can grow quickly until the student ends up paying more interest than she originally charged.

Topic sentence: effects of heavy debt

Developed by author's ideas; suicide case source is author's cousin

The drastic effects of a reliance on plastic are clear. Some students end up with debts in the thousands that trail them for years. If they have to default on their cards or declare bankruptcy, a bad credit report can follow them into adulthood, hurting their chances to rent an apartment or purchase a home or car. Some students have even fallen into depression and, in one or two extreme cases, suicide. At my cousin's college, the University of Oklahoma, a student committed suicide after being overwhelmed by a \$3,000 credit card debt. Thankfully, Maya avoided such serious consequences; however, her dependence on credit seriously affected

her education. To avoid bankruptcy, she had to leave college for a semester to work full-time and pay off her debt.

Topic sentence:
consequences gaining
attention and actions taken

Indirect quote from
Business Week article and
direct quote from Kobliner's
book clearly cited.

Fortunately, the consequences of students' ever-increasing credit card debt are gaining more widespread attention. Lawmakers and colleges are taking action. A May 21, 2001, article in *Business Week* entitled "Congratulations, Grads—You're Bankrupt," reports that over a dozen schools have simply banned all credit card marketers from campuses (48). Yet, students should not wait for others to act on their behalf. Financial expert Beth Kobliner, in her book *Get a Financial Life*, advises, "Limiting your access to credit is a smart move whether you're a binge shopper or a model of self-control" (49). In short, any student can practice self-discipline with credit by following three simple rules: 1) carry just one card, 2) use it only for emergencies; and 3) pay your entire balance every month.

Advice to credit card users
forms conclusion

Works Cited should start
a new page

Works Cited

- "Congratulations, Grads—You're Bankrupt." *Business Week* 21 May 2001: 48.
Credit Card Usage Continues among College Students. Nellie Mae. 2001. 26 Apr.
2002 <http://www.nelliemae.com/library/cc_use.html>.
Kobliner, Beth. Get a Financial Life. New York: Fireside/Simon & Schuster, 1996.