What is a Term Paper ..?
(compiled from several web-resources)

A term paper is a kind of practice exercise in academic writing. In some ways it is a rather artificial exercise; real academic writing is designed to present original research and argument to the academic community, while a term paper is usually written for one person, your instructor. Despite this, it is a very useful exercise, for the following reasons:

1. By researching a subject in detail, you get a much deeper knowledge of that area than the lectures can provide.
2. Writing a term paper teaches you to give information and express ideas in a clear, systematic way. This skill is useful for almost all kinds of writing, not just academic writing.
3. Unlike exams, a term paper is an opportunity to show that you are capable of researching and arguing about a subject independently. In other words, it is a chance to show off!
4. If you continue your academic career after graduating, it is good practice for "real" academic writing.
5. If you produce a really outstanding term paper, there is always a chance that it may be suitable for publication in a journal or submission at a conference. You can also publish your paper on the Internet, so that other students and academics can benefit from your research.

Here are some things that you need to keep in mind:

1. Your paper should show that you have a good knowledge of the topic, and should show that you have done independent research; that is, it should be clear that you have looked beyond your textbook and lecture notes.
2. You should have an argument or perspective that is clearly explained and supported by suitable evidence. Your paper should not be pure description.
3. The organization should be logical and easy for the reader to follow. (see obligations to the reader section below)
4. Your language should be clear and accurate. If the reader has to stop to think "What is this student trying to say?", you will not get a good grade.
5. Your paper should be well-presented.

Obligations to the Reader:

The author of the term paper has an obligation to give the reader something beyond what the reader could obtain directly from the source materials. These services to the reader may include:

- Research and investigate. Seek out obscure and hard-to-find material, and unify it into a clear presentation.
• **Synthesize.** Draw together diverse things to show patterns and relations.
• **Organize.** Give logical continuity and structure to diverse materials.
• **Analyze.** Provide critical analysis in which arguments are examined for evidence, validity, logic, and flaws.
• **Clarify.** Make evidence and arguments clearer to the reader. Elucidate difficult material.
• **Examine in a broader context.** Show how a specific subject fits into a broader context, relates to another field, or relates to historic precedents.
• **Select and distill.** Weed out fluff and irrelevancies to get at the main issues of a complex subject.
• **Adopt a point of view.** Show how the preponderance of evidence and reason favors one side in a controversial issue.

Suggested Methodology:

**STATE THE OBJECTIVE**
You have picked your topic--you have some background information on it--and you have some idea of how you want to develop and present your paper. You must now come up with a point of view or a statement of objective. (This is called a thesis, or theme statement, and will be the controlling idea of your paper.)

While it is useful at this early stage to develop some kind of theme statement, you may find later as you begin to read and think your topic through more clearly, that you want to change your theme statement. It can be done, BUT do not procrastinate-- write a statement of objective (theme statement) now to provide yourself with a definite direction for your paper.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY AND STATE OF THE ART**
A bibliography is a list of sources (i.e. books, journal articles, reports, newspaper articles, and other publications) which relate to a particular subject, subject field, or author. A description of the same is provided with the earlier handout. Some tips for doing literature search (research): Use library computers to search material on your “key words” e.g., land use, transit bus, access management etc. Once you get some articles, follow the references contained in these papers for more material. The Transportation Research Records published by Transportation Research Board (TRB - www.nas.edu/trb/ ) are an excellent source for any subject on transportation. Searches on the internet are allowed too, the National Transportation Library (www.bts.gov/NTL) may be a good source also the ITE Journal ( www.ite.org ). Librarians can be a valuable resource. But before you consult them you should first have a general acquaintance with your specific subject (since they may not) so you can work with them most effectively.

The literature review is a compilation of what exists out there today. Being “state-of-the-art”, it includes the latest and greatest happening in the area of your subject. In writing
your literature review, be aware that you are expected to do more than simply string together unrelated summaries of others' work. You should make connections between the different strands of work so that each paragraph flows from the previous one. An outline is always useful in setting up the structure that best allows you to achieve this. Expect to do several drafts before you find one that works. **This part is due on October 22.**

**Plagiarism**

Beware of plagiarism. Do not use the words or ideas of another person without giving due credit to that person. Be warned of the dangers of plagiarism. It is very easy to plagiarize someone's work unintentionally; but this fact does not make plagiarism any less serious of an offense. Make certain that you either directly quote and attribute the quote, or paraphrase the source (no more than three consecutive words alike) and cite it very specifically in a footnote each time you use that person's work. Remember this: In general, direct quotation should be used sparingly in an engineering research paper. Repeated use of direct quotations gives the impression of laziness and is often disruptive of your own style and method of organization. Direct cutting and copying from web-based material could also be deemed as Plagiarism and if discovered by the instructor, can result in a serious penalty.

A good strategy is to make sure that you paraphrase the work when you are actually taking the notes from the source, in case you forget to do so later on. Remember that the whole point of a literature review is to present others’ work--your contribution will come a bit later. It is perfectly acceptable to say something like, "In his recent book on medical malpractice, Frank Sloan contends that ..." as long as it is properly attributed.

**YOUR CONTRIBUTION**

Once you have analyzed what others have done, it is now time for you to expand on your point of view or thesis. This may be one side of a controversial issue, where you need to defend your views with substantial arguments from existing literature and from any analyses you may have performed. For example in the topic of “are trucks paying their way…” after compiling the state of the art, an economic analysis comparing the cost of damages by trucks and what they are paying may be necessary to prove the point. In broader subjects, you may want to focus on something smaller in such a way that it is manageable. This required a lot of thought and analysis. Another example is if you want to disprove a popular belief or assumption that you noticed in the state of the art.

**WRITE A DRAFT**

Write a rough draft of your term paper using the above. You may choose to get your thoughts down on paper quickly and make revisions later, or you may want to write slowly and carefully, making whatever changes are necessary as you go along. Be sure to include your footnotes in the rough draft. Use a form and style and be consistent throughout your paper. A term paper is like a composition--it contains an introduction, a
body, and a conclusion. The introduction should present the ideas to be discussed in the paper, the body is an expansion of the outline; and the conclusion summarizes the findings and restates the thesis.

THE CONCLUSION
In the conclusion, your job is to give the paper's greatest hits. That is, you should restate your research question, give the high points of the literature survey and theory, remind your reader of the analyses you did and restate your conclusion. You may then go on to talk about the limitations of your analysis, any data you wish you could have garnered but couldn't, and what you would have liked to have done with your analysis but couldn't given the time limitations. This needn't be a long section--do not apologize for your work, but do suggest avenues for further research. Also, where appropriate, you may want to discuss the policy implications of your work.

"And then I turn it in?" No, not quite yet. The last thing you should do, is PROOFREAD your paper. Even after spell checking the paper with your word processor, you should take the time to read it one last time before turning it in. Fix typographical errors, improve wording, and make sure the numbers make sense.

"And then I turn it in?" No, there's one last step. Give it to a friend--somebody who's willing to do you a big favor--and ask them to read it. Encourage them to mark it up and suggest changes. Now you're finally ready to turn it in!