

The Seven Steps to Writing Success

Get Motivated & Start ~ Make a Plan ~ Do the Research ~ Organize ~ Get it to Paper ~ Edit ~ Celebrate

1. Get Motivated and Start

1. **Don't put it off!** Get started the day the paper is assigned. Think about the topic, and write down any ideas that come to you.
2. **Find your Interest or Passion** If you're interested or passionate about a topic, it will help to keep you motivated and working on the assignment. Think of a question or group of questions that you'd like to be able to answer.
3. **Try one of the following exercises.** Using one of the exercises will help you to find your interests or direction to begin researching or writing.

Brainstorming or Focused Free-Writing

- Set a time limit of 5 - 15 minutes.
- Summarize the topic in a phrase or sentence.
- Write down everything that comes to mind, the crazier the better.
- When your time is up, review: Are there words or ideas you can grab onto for the topic? Is there a main idea within the sequence of ideas?

Mind-Mapping

- Write the most important word, short phrase, or symbol in the center and circle it.
- Write other important words outside the circle.
- Work quickly without analyzing your work.
- Continue working outward.
- Freely and quickly add other key words and ideas. Don't limit your thinking or be limited by the size of the paper.

2. Make a Plan

Now that you have a lot of ideas written down, what do you find interesting or in need of additional exploring? (Usually, narrowing a subject down makes writing a paper easier).

- Get the specifics, such as:
 - When is the paper due?
 - How many words or pages?
 - Do you have to include a bibliography?
 - Do you have to follow a set of rules or style, such as MLA or APA?
- Break the paper down into steps, such as locating resources, doing the research, writing a draft, etc.
- For each step, establish a timeline of when each step will be completed.

3. Do the Research

- **Look for resources.** Your resources may include: Books, Magazines, Newspapers, Encyclopedias, Atlases, Microfilm, Microfiche, Journals, Government documents, Informational pamphlets, Videotapes, The Internet
- **Use 3 x 5 cards** to record and organize your research.
- **Research by skimming** through the material you've gathered, locating the useful information and reading it, or by interviewing, experimenting, etc.
- **Write each separate idea on a new card.** That way you can easily shuffle them around as you need.
- **Use one card to list the bibliographic information of each resource**
- **Take good notes** from your material.
- **Be accurate and honest.** Be sure that you do not distort the author's message.
- **Don't ignore other facts or opinions.**
- **Evaluate your resources.**
- **Keep your audience in mind.** What do they already know about your topic? What do they need to know?

4. Outline and Organize

- **Outlining is a structured and sequential overview of your work to date.**
- **Review the ideas, topics, themes, and questions**
- **If you used 3 x 5 cards, shuffle them around into groups** until there seems to be a natural flow of ideas.
- **Write the key words or ideas to describe each group** and what's important about the group to create your outline.
- **Sequence topics** in order of importance, chronologically, sequentially, etc.
- **Keep organizing and reorganizing** until you're left with an outline that makes sense.

SAMPLE OUTLINE

1. INTRODUCTION - OPENING PARAGRAPH

- a. Begin with a general statement. Introduce the topic.
- b. Narrow it down to the controlling idea (or thesis statement). This is your point of view.
- c. Focus on three main points to develop.
- d. Entice the reader to continue with the rest of the paper!

2. BODY - THREE DEVELOPING PARAGRAPHS

In each paragraph:

- a. Use transitions (repetition of key words and ideas) to connect paragraphs together.
- b. Develop the topic sentence with details, definitions, illustrations, comparisons, and contrasts. Continue to prove your point of view!
- c. Conclude the paragraph with a summary of the main idea.

3. CONCLUSION - FINISHING PARAGRAPH

- a. Restate the thesis.
- b. Briefly restate the main ideas, reflect on the argument, and finish with a logical conclusion.

5. Start Writing

- **Start writing the rough draft** at least a week before the assignment is due.
- **Follow your outline.**
- **Look over your notes for each part and work them into the paper.** Keep going until you're finished.
- **Tie up loose ends.** Do research to fill in the gaps or answer new questions.
- **Write a second draft of the paper.**
- **Just get it down.** Don't worry too much about spelling, grammar or other mistakes at this point.
- **Print out a copy** when you're done.

6. Edit

- **Read the paper aloud** to be sure that the language is not awkward, and that it "flows" properly.
- **Vary your sentence structure.**
- **Re-read your paper** a day or two after having written the first draft.
- **Write any headings or sub-headings as nouns, not verbs or phrases.**
- **Check for spelling, grammar, and punctuation.** Reading backwards can help you find mistakes.
- **Edit, correct, and re-write as necessary.**
- **Get someone to proofread your paper.** Trade this task with a classmate.
- **Make sure that the final draft is neat and clean.**
- **Keep at least one copy for your records.**

Use this check list to be sure your writing is as good as it can be.

- I have a good concept and design because I stayed focused on the topic.
- I used specific details to support my ideas.
- I used interesting words in new ways.
- I used capitalization and punctuation correctly
- I organized my writing with a beginning, middle, and end.
- I proofed my work and corrected spelling.

7. Celebrate...You're Done!