



### Help With: The Writing Process

There is no one way to prepare an academic research paper. But you need *some* system for planning your paper, or else you should be realistic about your chances of ever producing something scholarly or extended in length. Here is some advice for making a workflow for writing a research essay.

1. Research the subject. Do some reading on the subject, trying to find what you can about the subject. As you read books and articles and websites, you will start to get a feel for what interests you or what is useful, and what seems boring or irrelevant. The object at this point is to narrow your focus to make your topic clearer and more manageable.
2. Formulate a rough argument. After conclusions and connections start to jump out at you, jot down on a piece of paper: what specifically do I want to write about? Sometimes this takes a long time, but it's imperative to have your paper be *about* something. Some people need to ride a bicycle or wash dishes or just sit and think. Do whatever works to help you decide on a working idea or main point.
3. As you read more, you might scribble notes on sheets of paper. Write down the source name, the idea or gist of the quote, and the page number so that you have your information and sources organized later. This will help you when you're writing and you remember that great quote you wanted to use and don't remember where it was.
4. Make a working thesis. At this point you might try to generate a three-point or one point standard thesis statement to help organize your ideas into a framework. Do not get so married to your thesis that you become unable to change or reject it later if the information leads you in a different direction or interest.
5. Outline. Divide the ideas, topics, and arguments you want to cover into sections in an outline. You can have a standard point or number-based outline; but circles, flowcharts, or random scribbles on a paper are fine as well. There is no right way to make an outline if it helps you organize the parts of your paper.
6. Divide the notes. If the paper is shorter, usually an outline will be enough to keep you on track as you write. If the paper is longer, you might assign numbers or marks to the notes you have made on your text sources so that you know which section of the paper they will fit.
7. Writing. Once you have a plan, you can write the paper fairly quickly as you know where it's going, and you will be less likely to get stuck or run out of ideas. Now, as you write the paper and need some evidence or support for your arguments, you can quickly go to your sheets of paper and pick something which goes with that section.
8. Editing. Editing makes the difference between a good paper and a great one. Correct errors, clarify vague ideas or terms, and chop out unnecessary words or sentences. In the long run, try to think of the paper as *yours* and not one you wrote for Dr. X. Feeling that the paper is your property not only gives you pride in writing it but gives you a more confident and focused style while polishing it to its final form.