



Composition of a Paper

The Four Stages of Composition

1) Prewriting

- Understand the assignment.
- Determine your interests; select a general topic.
- Brainstorm about your topic for ideas. See our Quick Reference Flyers "Literary Criticism" or "Interpreting Fiction."
- Narrow your topic.
- Organize the most interesting aspects of your brainstorming.
- Try to divide your thoughts into three or more points or categories.
- Develop a working thesis sentence.
- Do any research required.

2) Outlining

This step is helpful for an organized paper!

- Use your thesis sentence, including your main points or categories, as a framework.
- Break down each main point into subpoints.

3) First Draft

- Follow your outline to write a rough draft.
- Don't worry about mistakes at this point. Just write freely, knowing you can go back and change what you don't like.
- The goal is to quickly get your ideas down on paper.
- Leave plenty of room for notes as you revise.
- Keep focused on your thesis statement.

4) Revising (See also "Proofreading and Revising" Flyer.)

- NOW worry about your mistakes.
- Does your thesis need to be reworded?
- Does the organization of your paper follow your outline?
- Spelling?
- Grammar?
- Punctuation, sentence fragments, verb tenses, agreement?
- Appropriate word choices? Repetition?
- Check transitions. Does your paper flow naturally?
- Check your sentence patterns. Good variety? Too much passive voice?
- Check your format. References? Works Cited? Title Page?

Anatomy of a Paper

The Introduction

- grabs the reader's attention.
- introduces your topic.
- starts general and becomes specific.
- states your thesis.



The Body

- develops your topic and thesis.
- should include unified paragraphs (only one focus for each paragraph).

The Conclusion

- restates your thesis.
- does not include any new information.
- sums up your paper with a sense of completion.

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