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.
- Includes unified paragraphs (only one focus for each paragraph).
- Includes transition sentences to connect main thoughts.

**The Conclusion...**
- Restates your thesis.
- Does not include any new information.
- Sums up your paper with a sense of completion.