

# Writing Academic Papers

- First...**Plan**. Read the assignment. When is the paper due?
- Then...**Organize**. Break your project into the steps outlined below. Look at your calendar, and divide the remaining days. Set target dates for completing each step.
- Next...**Start** working on the first step.

## 1. **CHOOSE** a topic.

If you may choose your own topic:

- Choose one that interests you.
- Choose a topic you either know something about already or want to learn about.
  - ◊ To find ideas, check the index of your textbook, brainstorm, consider your interests or career.
  - ◊ Ponder possibilities as you read, jot down ideas as they occur to you, and keep them

in one place. If your instructor assigns the topic:

- Be sure you understand it. If you're not completely sure, ask the instructor for clarification.
- If you're not initially interested in the topic, develop an interest by finding a personal connection or reason for doing the assignment.

## 2. **FOCUS** your topic.

- Limit the scope so you can include appropriate detail within the space you have.
- For example, narrow the topic from "history of art" to "history of French art from 1895 to 1900" to "a comparison of the use of light in Impressionism and Symbolism in French art, from 1895 to 1900."

## 3. **COLLECT** your ideas.

- Brainstorm by writing your own ideas connected to your topic.
- What do you already know? What do you want to find out?
- Collect ideas from reading, or ask a librarian for help locating materials.
- Keep notes about ideas from your reading on 3x5 cards. Include the author, title, and page # on each card.
- Talk to other people for more ideas.

## 4. **ORGANIZE** your ideas.

- Make an informal outline or written plan. This is essential. There is no better way.
- Put similar ideas together by organizing your note cards or highlighting related material.
- Draft an initial thesis statement, a sentence that states your topic and the points you want to make about it. For example: Impressionist art in 1895 (topic) was unique (claim) in its subjects, composition, and techniques (specific points to be explained).
- Be sure that each paragraph has a controlling topic sentence and is directed toward developing this thesis.

## 5. **WRITE** your ideas on paper.

- Gather the materials you need: notes, paper, pencil, computer, etc.
- Allow yourself a block of time.
- Start writing. No excuses!
- Work quickly to get the main ideas, details, and examples in the order you've determined in your outline.

- Don't worry about exact word choice or refinements of grammar; you can edit and revise later.
  - If you freeze, discuss your ideas with someone.
    - ◊ Explain as simply and clearly as you can what you want to say.
    - ◊ Try writing out any ideas you have, even if you scrap them later.
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6. **REVISE** your rough draft several days or at least 24 hours before the due date.

- Check your thesis statement.
  - ◊ Does it need to be revised or adjusted?
- Check organization.
  - ◊ Does one paragraph follow another logically?
  - ◊ Are there transitions between ideas and paragraphs?
- Check unity.
  - ◊ Do all of the paragraphs develop the thesis?
  - ◊ Is the thesis clearly stated, usually at the end of the introductory paragraph?
  - ◊ Is each paragraph unified around a topic sentence?
- Check sentence structure.
  - ◊ Are sentences grammatically correct?
  - ◊ If you're not sure, make an appointment to see a writing tutor in the Learning Center.
- Check that sentences are varied in length and structure, designed to emphasize key ideas.
  - ◊ Do they indicate relationships clearly?
  - ◊ Are they punctuated correctly?
- Check word choice.
  - ◊ Are your words concrete?
  - ◊ Is your language appropriate?
  - ◊ Is the tense consistent?
- Read the paper aloud or tape it and play it back.
  - ◊ Does it sound awkward?
  - ◊ Have a friend or tutor read the paper to see if s/he can follow your thoughts.
  - ◊ Make necessary changes.

7. **TYPE** a final draft, run spell check, read it one more time, and

8. **TURN IT IN** on time!

9. **CONGRATULATE** yourself!