



Step 4: Planning the Paper

This worksheet will help you create a plan for your paper. Think of this as a roadmap for your essay. You wouldn't go on a long road trip without a map – who knows where you would end up? The same thing goes for writing papers. You must have a plan.

Since writing is a process, we have broken planning into several steps. Write your responses to the following questions in the spaces provided or keep track of your steps on a separate sheet of paper. (Remember to keep all your notes together!)

1. Has the instructor given any specific guidelines about the organization, thesis, introduction, or conclusion? Write the instructions here. Put them in a to-do list format or another way that seems most helpful to you. Be sure to copy all of the guidelines so you don't forget to do something. Refer back to this often.

2. Write a list of points to make in your paper. This is an informal list that will allow you to examine and revise your ideas before you finalize your thesis and make a plan. Look back over your brainstorming and research notes and highlight the ideas that you think would be effective in the essay. Don't worry about relationships between ideas just yet; try to be as inclusive as you can. Copy what you highlighted below.

At this stage, don't worry if the items are not all related to each other, if there are too many of them, if they are too broad/narrow or irrelevant, or if they are opinions. Also, don't try to make a thesis quite yet. Right now you are only trying to review all your options.

3. Now review the list you made and narrow it; are certain items related to each other? Group these together. Are there some items you don't have any evidence for or that seem irrelevant or uninteresting? Omit them.



4. Order the remaining items from most important to least important.

5. You should now be able to decide which of the most important items you would like to include in your essay. Remember, you cannot cover all aspects of any topic, so focus on what you find most effective for your essay. (Think about your page limit.) List the items you would like to cover, keeping in mind that they should represent paragraphs or sections in your essay.

Also, do you need to provide background in your essay? Do you need to recognize opposing views? Do you have to incorporate research? Don't forget these items.

6. Form a thesis and write it below. (See the *Step 3: Writing a Thesis Statement and Thesis Development and Outlining* handouts.) Your thesis and the items from #5 *must* be clearly related.

7. Decide how you would like to order the paragraphs (items from #5). Where will all these things go? Write a tentative order below.



8. Look at the order above. Are you satisfied with it? Show it to another person and ask his/her opinion. Is the organization logical and clear?

9. Plug your ideas from #7 into an outline. You can provide as much or as little detail here as you desire; it depends on your preference. Look in your grammar handbook for more ideas for outlining. Remember, you don't have to create a perfect formal outline; use a format that works for you.
 - I. Introduction
 - a. Attention getter
 - b. Topic
 - c. Thesis
 - II. Body Paragraph 1
 - a. Topic sentence/Claim
 - b. Support for claim (evidence)
 - c. Explanation of support/evidence
 - III. Body Paragraph 2
 - a. Topic sentence/Claim
 - b. Support for claim (evidence)
 - c. Explanation of support/evidence
 - IV. Body Paragraph 3
 - a. Topic sentence/Claim
 - b. Support for claim (evidence)
 - c. Explanation of support/evidence
 - V. Body Paragraph 4
 - a. Topic sentence/Claim
 - b. Support for claim (evidence)
 - c. Explanation of support/evidence
 - VI. Conclusion

Note: The outline template here is only a guide; there are infinite ways to organize an essay. Feel free to experiment! Many of us learn the five-paragraph essay, but you can (and often will) have more than five paragraphs. In addition, some people will devote the first body paragraph



to background and history, while others will not cover these items at all. Some writers will refute opposing views in different places in the essay. It depends on your topic and audience.

Be sure to only have one main topic per paragraph. Too many topics in a single paragraph will only confuse the reader.

10. Finally, go over your outline and think about what kind of information you might need to support your points. Add notes about the type of information needed and where to find it. (Use audience information from your Step 1 worksheet to help you decide what kind of information would work for your paper.) This will lead into the Step 5 worksheet on conducting research.

Example:

- I. Body Paragraph
 - a. Topic sentence/Claim
 - b. Support for claim (evidence) – *Need to find a statistic on _____!*
Look for articles using Academic Search Complete.
 - c. Explanation of support/evidence