How to Write the Perfect Paper

Prepare For Writing

1. Set a schedule
   - Estimate how long each step will take
   - Allow ample time for each step

2. Choose a general topic
   - Based on Instructor’s requirements
   - Choose a subject that interests you

3. Do initial reading
   - Review reference materials: books, articles, encyclopedia
   - Ask yourself: “What do I want to know about this topic?”

4. Narrow your topic
   - After initial reading, you can focus on a specific topic
   - Instead of “health problems in America,” try “cigarette smoking among teenagers”

5. Write a thesis statement
   - Capture the main idea of your paper in one unified, clear sentence
   - Describe your topic and what you want to convey about it: “Cigarette smoking among teenagers is on the rise.”

6. Take notes on note cards
   - Jot down quotations & ideas that clarify your research
   - Write a summary of information covered, a brief statement, or a direct quotation

7. Prepare a bibliography
   - List books, articles, Internet sources, and other resources you plan to use as support for points in your paper

Organize a Writing Plan

1. Generate main ideas about your topic. For a standard essay, 3 main ideas are plenty.
2. Organize your note cards using an outline format. Make sure each main idea has supporting information.

Write Your First Draft

1. Write the introduction with a strong opening. Ideas for starting beginning paragraphs with a BANG!
   - Start With –
     - A Question
     - A Hard-hitting Fact or Statistic
     - An Appropriate Quotation
     - Images – Description of a “Snapshot”
     - An Anecdote – A Personal Experience
     - A Problem
     - A Concisely Stated Thesis statement that states the main idea for the entire paper
     - A Contradiction or Inconsistency
     - An Odd, Ridiculous, or Unbelievable Fact
2. **Write the body of the paragraph.**
   - Present each main point logically
   - Use supporting information from your note cards
   - Write strong, focused opening sentences with details
   - Add sentences with more specific details; expand with more information

3. **Write the conclusion & tie together important points.** Ways to conclude with STRENGTH:
   - Issue a Call to Action -- Urge the reader to take action about your topic
   - Discuss the Consequences of Your Argument
   - Explain the Applications of Your Argument – Describe how your topic would work in the real world
   - Make Recommendations
   - Speculate About the Future
   - Tell an Anecdote that Illustrates a Key Point
   - Describe a Key Image – Describe a scene that illustrates a main idea about your topic
   - Offer a Quotation that Expresses the Essence of Your Argument
   - Ask a Rhetorical Question – A Question Asked for Effect that Neither Expects nor Requires an Answer

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**Edit Your Draft**

- Keep your audience in mind. Step back and review your paper from a reader’s perspective.
- Sharpen your focus wherever possible. Revise your thesis and supporting paragraphs to reflect your narrowed topic.
- Check that key terms are adequately defined. Make sure your audience knows what you are trying to say.
- Revise for punctuation, grammar, & style
- Read your paper out loud to get a sense of the flow of your words
- Rework paragraphs for clarity & appropriate transitions
- Recheck your outline. Have you addressed all the points you wanted to make?

**Prepare Your Final Draft**

- Have a classmate, friend, or family member review your paper
- Have your instructor proof your paper
- Cite your sources
- Re-type your paper, making any necessary changes
- Make a copy for yourself, in case something happens to the copy you give your instructor
How to Generate Topic Ideas

- Brainstorm – For 10 minutes, write down as many ideas as you can without judging them
- Go to the library – look through newspapers, magazines, and new books
- Search on-line
- Keep a journal – Write down ideas, feelings, opinions, summaries of books and articles, and reactions to other papers or speeches
- Keep a file – Collect articles, poems, and a list of topics you find interesting
- Develop observation skills – Be aware of life around you. What topics are in the news? What are people talking about?
- Complete a sentence – The world would be better if...? A major problem today is...?
- Relax – Allow plenty of time for topic generation

Helpful Websites

Fact Monster Homework Center
http://www.factmonster.com/homework/writingskills1.html

Purdue University’s Online Writing Lab (OWL)
http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/general/#planning

University of Richmond’s Writing Web – links to many aspects of the writing process
http://writing2.richmond.edu/writing/wweb.html

http://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/EngPaper/index.html

Essay Info – guide to writing several different types of essays
http://essayinfo.com/