



Composition of a Paper

The Four Stages of Composition

1) Prewriting

- Understand the assignment.
- Determine one's interests; select a general topic.
- Brainstorm about the topic for ideas. (*See the Quick Reference Flyers "Literary Criticism" or "Interpreting Fiction."*)
- Narrow the topic.
- Organize the most interesting aspects of one's brainstorming.
- Try to divide one's 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 the thesis sentence, including the main points or categories, as a framework.
- Break down each main point into subpoints.

3) First Draft

- Follow one's outline to write a rough draft.
- Do not worry about mistakes at this point. Write freely, knowing one can go back and make changes.
- The goal is to quickly get the ideas down on paper.
- Leave plenty of room for notes during revision.
- Keep focused on the thesis statement.

4) Revising (*Also see the "Proofreading and Revising" Flyer.*)

- NOW worry about the mistakes.
- Does the thesis need to be reworded?
- Does the organization of the paper follow the outline?
- Spelling?
- Grammar?
- Punctuation, sentence fragments, verb tenses, agreement?
- Appropriate word choices? Too much repetition of a certain word, phrase, or idea?
- Check transitions. Does the paper flow naturally?
- Check the sentence patterns. Good variety? Too much passive voice?
- Check the formatting on the references, works cited, and title page.

Anatomy of a Paper

The Introduction...

- Grabs the reader's attention.
- Introduces the topic.
- Starts general and becomes specific.
- States the thesis.

The Body...

- Expounds upon the topic and thesis.
- Includes unified paragraphs (only one focus for each paragraph).
- Includes transition sentences to connect main thoughts.

The Conclusion...

- Restates the thesis.
- Does not include any new information.
- Sums up the paper with a sense of completion.