

Steps Towards a Paper

Stage 1: Focus the Assignment

- Annotate assignment sheet for key requirements
- Determine major components (format, length, expectations)
- Identify purpose of the assignment within context of overall course goals
- Connect assignment to concepts in class notes/discussions
- Connect assignment to class texts and handouts
- Review professor's explanations of the assignment (notes, emails, prompts)
- Compare this assignment to previous papers: What is new? What is the same?
- Contact professor to clarify expectations
- Propose a focus and plan for the professor

Stage 2: Follow a Process

- Define steps: What do I need to do and in what order?
- Create a timeline (write goals, calendar deadlines)
- Reread class notes for specific assignment-related purpose(s)
- Annotate text(s), write gist summaries (6 rhetorical questions—Who, What, Where, When, Why and For Whom) and paraphrases
- Freewrite and use charts and visuals to brainstorm and begin argument mapping and development
- Select appropriate evidence
- Analyze connections between evidence; use freewriting to generate ideas
- Develop a working thesis
- Skeletal outline—plan flow, topic sentences, transitions
- Plan introduction and conclusion

Stage 3: Draft the Paper

- Outline with evidence, source documentation, and transitions
- Draft one paragraph at a time; frame evidence in an analytical context; leave introduction and conclusion for last
- Connect ideas within paragraphs smoothly
- Develop new ideas and evidence as logical argument needs or opportunities arise
- Revise the working thesis
- Revise paragraphs for logical flow and meaningful transitions
- Write a “so what?” conclusion
- Establish the context or problem in the introduction that your thesis addresses
- Edit to eliminate repetition and vague language
- Proofread for punctuation, correct source documentation, and format