Take the Stress out of Short Paper Writing

- Divide it into easy-to-manage steps
- Plot the steps on a calendar
- Stick to your deadlines
- Spend a significant amount of time on prewriting

### Stress-Free Writing Schedule: 3-6 page paper

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DAY</th>
<th>TASK</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-3</td>
<td>Research (develop topic/ explore topic/ compile sources)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-6</td>
<td>Create outline with thesis, topic sentences, and details included.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-10</td>
<td>Rough Drafts (at least two progressively more complete drafts)</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Create a polished draft with completed references</td>
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<tr>
<td>12-13</td>
<td>Put your paper away; do not look at it at all</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Final Review: check for basic mistakes</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>Turn it in!</td>
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**Research**

Develop a topic

- Is it prescribed by the professor?
  - Use keywords found in the prompt for your research
- Is it a free topic?
  - Where do your interests overlap with what is being covered in the class?

Explore a topic

- What do you know about the topic without doing any research?
- What does a brief google search tell you? (be very careful—this is just a brainstorming tool)
- What does an hour’s worth of library research tell you?
Compile sources

- Make a list of your sources—either in a word document with hyperlinks, or as full citations
- Under each citation, write a very brief summary of what the article is about and how it applies to your research
- Don’t delete anything!

**Outline with Thesis and Topic Sentences**

**Thesis**

- A thesis is a one sentence summary of your entire paper.
- It needs to cover every single thing that’s brought up in your paper without being too wordy or too general.
- A good thesis will direct the organization of your paper.
- Your thesis is likely to change

**Outline**

- An outline should function as a detailed overview of the topic, but it does not have to fully explain what will be covered in the essay
- Be sure to use either bullet points or numbers to organize your outline
- Be as detailed as possible without writing the entire essay in outline format. For details, you can summarize them in just a few words
- If there is a direct quotation from a source that you want to use, begin the quotation and cite it correctly in one of the bulleted points
- Label your paragraphs at least as body, intro, and conclusion
- Type your outline using the format style of your paper as much as possible
- List your supporting details on the outline
  - Make sure that you have details under every claim you make on your outline.
  - These should research-based facts that can be supported with a citation. Once you write your essay, you’ll take these claims and details, and add an explanation to them.
Sample Outline Format

Title
Introduction
  • Introductory material
    o Detail #1
    o Detail #2 (etc.)
  • Thesis:

Body Paragraph 1 (etc.)
  • Topic sentence:
    o Detail #1
    o Detail #2 (etc.)

Conclusion
  • Restatement of thesis:
  • Closing material
    o Detail #1
    o Detail #2 (etc.)

Topic sentences:
  • Your topic sentences serve as mini thesis statements for your paragraphs
  • They should cover everything you talk about in your paragraph and can be far more specific than your thesis statement
  • Your topic sentences are crucial to having an organized paper that tells your audience exactly where you are moving with your research, claims, or argument

Below is an activity for creating stronger topic sentences:

Key Words and Summary Check:
1. Write out your thesis.
2. Identify the key words in your thesis.
   Ex:
3. Rewrite each topic sentence to incorporate at least two key words identified in your thesis (or their synonyms).
4. Now, read through your revised topic sentences as if you’re reading a summary. Do they make sense as a summary of your paper? Does the “summary” very basically explain everything that you want to cover in your paper?
Rough drafts

- The messy rough draft: Write without worrying about mechanics
  - Stick to your outline as much as possible at the paragraph level
- The less-messy rough draft: Once you have the length that you need for full credit, then you should move in and start checking the mechanics and organization in a copy of your original draft
  - Do the ideas move together? Do your topic sentences match your thesis? How is your conclusion?

Polished draft with references

- Mechanical issues: spelling, grammar, comma splices, formatting
- Citation count: both in-text and reference page
- Format the reference page and in-text citations correctly

At least 24 hours break

- Do not touch your paper
- Do not look at your paper
- Do not think about your paper

Final review

- Print off your paper. Read over it twice with a pen in hand.
- On the first read-through, briefly do a follow-up check on the basic content: your argument, your thesis, and the topic sentences.
  - Does everything make sense? Does your introduction fully explain your paper? Are you happy with your conclusion?
- As you go through the content, mark any mechanical issues that are also wrong
- Briefly review your works cited page. Do you have all of your references? Are they formatted correctly?
- Check your header, your page numbers, your margins, your title and the overall format of your reference page according to the style you should be using (MLA, APA, Chicago, etc.). Mark any issues.
- Now, go into your computer and make every correction (at once) that you noted on your paper.
- Read through your paper ONE FINAL TIME to make sure that your corrections were made accurately
- Is it good? Print off two copies, staple them separately, and put them in your folder.
- You’re finished. Don’t look at the content again.