

Reviewing Ideas for Your Paper

Take a few minutes to look over everything you have gathered to help you write this paper: the articles you've read, the notes you've taken on the readings, the notes you've taken in class, your outline, your thesis statement, and topic sentences.

Then, decide which supporting point to work on first. It can be the first point in your outline or a later one; you can write your paper in any order and arrange the sections into your final order later. Think about the most important things you want to say about this point. It is important to include at least one piece of documented evidence in each paragraph of your finished paper, so jot down some notes to remind yourself what evidence you will use in this section.

As you write, consider several different ways to develop your ideas and make sense of them for your reader. For instance, you can provide examples, definitions, explanations, reasons, summaries, comparisons and contrasts of ideas, or alternative perspectives.

When you feel comfortable with your planning, move ahead to your next step: the writing itself.

Writing a First Draft

Writing a first draft may be the most difficult stage of writing because you must begin with an empty page. However, keep in mind that, although your page is blank, your mind is full of ideas about this paper because you have been working on it and thinking about it for a while.

Writing your ideas down is almost certain to be messy. Most of us cannot write a perfect first draft with everything clearly explained the first time. Moreover, you may be surprised at the new things you learn about your topic just from setting the words down on the page. This may lead you to make changes in your plan for the paper as you write. For example, you may decide to rearrange the order of supporting points, to leave gaps where your ideas are not yet clear, or to make other revisions. All of these changes are a normal part of the writing process.

No One “Best” Way

There is no one “best” way to write a draft. You can faithfully follow the outline you have made or start in the middle and go back to the beginning later. You may decide to write the easiest parts first to encourage yourself or write the hardest part first to get it over with. You may write one long paragraph for each supporting point. Later, for your second draft, you can divide that paragraph into shorter ones and write a topic sentence for each.

You may use a computer or write by hand. You can write it all in one sitting or write a few sentences at a time, and then get up and wander around. Write everything that comes to mind; you can always cross it out later. If you can't think of what to say in one section, leave space and go back to it later.

The point is to keep at it until you complete your first draft. Then, you have something to work with and never have to return to an empty page.