

HELP! I Have to Write a Paper!
Strategies for Thesis Development and Editing

Writing a paper is a scary prospect, especially when you have only 2 or 3 pages in which to make your case. This quick guide should help you succeed in writing papers, not just for this class, but for any other paper you write.

STEP ONE: GATHER EVIDENCE

Whether you are writing a primary-source based research paper or a two-page response to literature, you must gather evidence. That means finding primary and secondary sources or gathering *relevant evidence* from the particular reading. Once you have gathered your evidence, the task of piecing it together in a coherent narrative should be much simpler.

STEP TWO: THINK ABOUT YOUR PAPER AND ANCHOR YOUR BOAT...

More than anything, this section is about brainstorming. What did the question ask? What are the requirements of the paper? If you do not fulfill all requirements, you cannot get an A, so make sure that you sketch out your major points. You should also use this time to **plan out your paper**. **The best advice remains to write an outline**. But even if you don't create a traditional outline, you should have a framework. When you anchor a boat, you prevent it from meandering around the water. When you anchor your ideas (with a thesis, topic sentences, etc.), you keep them on course and very focused.

STEP THREE: WRITE YOUR PAPER

When you write your paper, you must make sure that your paragraphs relate back to your thesis statement. Make sure each paragraph has a **topic sentence** that will guide the ideas for the paragraph. Make sure the evidence used supports your claims. Do not simply "plop" evidence into your paper without explaining it. **ASK THE "SO WHAT?" QUESTION!** Whenever you make a claim or use a piece of evidence, ask "so what?" immediately following its use. If the answer to that question is not there, then your claim / evidence lacks proper's substantiation.

EXAMPLE:

According to Dr. Sayegh, "getting your facts straight is important."

SO WHAT?

This is an important statement because it means that we must choose relevant evidence and apply it to our explanations. The use of relevant evidence makes us better at argumentation and ultimately makes us better critical thinkers.

See the difference?

STEP FOUR: EDIT, EDIT, EDIT

No paper is complete after the first draft. Indeed, I would like to encourage you to make your first draft a handwritten draft. The process of writing facilitates thinking, and I personally enjoy the physical process of handwriting early drafts of my work. At the very least, you should print out a draft and work on the printed draft as you edit. This helps you two ways: first, it enables you to think about the paper away from the computer, and second, it gives you a printout just in case your computer dies. **You should NEVER submit a first draft of a paper.**

STEP FIVE: MAKING IT LOOK GOOD

Make sure the paper conforms to the guidelines stated in the assignment (this is usually consistent across disciplines: one-inch margins, twelve-point font, double spaced, paginated, etc.). A title on the top or a title page if necessary.

CONGRATULATIONS! You are now ready to submit your paper!