



# **Transfer Students: A Guide to Writing Research Papers**

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At the start

# **ORGANIZE YOUR REFERENCES**

# Ways to organize

- Author last name
- Order found
- Topic
  - Which subtopic does this reference support
- Level of support
  - How well does this reference help me argue my main point

The only way to effectively organize your references is to read them! Make notations in the margins; use highlighters, sticky notes, or flags; and most of all, actively assess how the reference fits into your paper.

Before writing

**ORGANIZE YOUR THOUGHTS**

# Spend time to save time

- Organize to understand the assignment
- Organize to establish goals and plan a schedule
- Organize source materials as you read them and think about how they can be incorporated into your paper

# Thesis statement

- A sentence that clearly explains the main point of the paper and the ideas that support that assertion
- Goal-oriented:
  - Main point
    - Supporting idea 1
    - Supporting idea 2
    - Supporting idea 3
- Good thesis statements tell readers exactly what papers are about
- Often found at the end of the introduction to the general topic

# Prewriting

- Purpose is to allow you to clarify your ideas and establish focus before starting to write the actual paper
- Focus on identifying main themes and supports
- Types of prewriting activities
  - Freewriting produces cohesive and coherent writing
  - Outlining is a more formal technique that produces concise and coherent writing

# Freewriting

- Goal is to write about a topic without self-censoring in order to discover material related to the topics
- Best way to find thesis and main arguments
- Offers you a chance to practice writing your paper without the pressure of getting it right
- Ideally is at least a few pages in length – this allows you to really delve into the topic

# The value of multiple drafts

- Try starting your paper with the last paragraph of a rough draft
- Scrap the rest of it and begin at the end, making it the introductory paragraph of your next draft
- Believe it or not, this method often works
- Writing a rough draft often clears your head of rubbish, so that by the time your last paragraph rolls out, you're writing and thinking more clearly
- To put it another way, rough writing is often a way of giving yourself permission to say what you mean
- A last paragraph summons up will and energy, allowing your thoughts to crystallize, your ideas to grow suddenly decisive

# Types of outlining

- Outlining requires the writer to:
  - Examine source documents for common themes
  - Develop the scope and structure of the article
  - Establish a point of view and writing strategy
- Begin generally, as topic headings, before becoming more specific in terms of what each section covers
- Informal outlines are a type of freewriting intended only for the writer to use
- Formal outlines logically number, in parallel fashion, the topics to be covered and can be used to seek feedback from others or to more rigidly develop the paper's structure

# Outlining

- Can help overcome the writer's block that comes from trying to create whole sentences and ideas
- Always include the thesis statement at the top
  - Thesis statement establishes the goal of the paper
  - Restricts and unifies the ideas of the paper
- Main supports of the thesis statement are arranged as major headings
  - Supporting points of the main supports are arranged as secondary headings
  - Avoid including too much detail

# Example of formal outline

Title

Thesis statement

1. First main support
  - A. Supporting fact of the first main support
    1. Identify the source of this fact (reference)
  - B. Another supporting fact of the main support
    1. Identify the source of this fact (reference)
2. Second main support
  - A. Supporting fact of the second main support
    1. Identify the source of this fact (reference)

# Sample outline

- Theory is nice, but how does this work for real?

To write well

**STRUCTURE YOUR PAPER**

# Conciseness

- Conciseness helps both the writer and reader follow the flow and purpose of the paper
- Concise papers use the same terminology throughout (don't go crazy with the thesaurus) and maintain a logical format
- Present the supporting ideas of each topic in a parallel manner

# Concise writing

“Vigorous writing is concise. A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts. This requires not that the writer make all sentences short, or avoid all detail and treat subjects only in outline, but that every word tell.”

From Strunk and White *The Elements of Style*

# Cohesiveness

- Cohesion comes from clear connections linking one sentence to the next
- Consider a three-sentence paragraph in which the topic sentence comes first
  - Sentence 1 (topic sentence) introduces the main concept, which will be enhanced in each succeeding sentence
  - Sentence 2 augments the initial concept and then introduces something new
  - Sentence 3 does the same thing, linking back and then going one step farther
- Smooth the flow by using transitions between sentences

# Coherence

- Coherence is the sense that all sentences in a given paragraph contribute to a unified whole
- A logical order of development (chronological, general to specific, specific to general)
- Unity reinforced by repetition of key words and ideas

# Consistency

- Formatting is uniform
  - Titles and subtitles
  - Paragraph indentations
  - Margins and spacing
- References are cited using the same reference style throughout
- References on the Works Cited page follow the same format
- Consistency allows for the content of a document to take center stage, rather than the mix – or creative use – of fonts, references styles, and spacing
- Good academic writing involves checking for consistency *before* assignments are turned in

# Value of good paragraphing

- Good paragraphs: the building blocks of any well-written document
- Primary concerns:
  - Good organization
  - Appropriate topic sentences
  - Cohesion and coherence
  - Effective transitions

# Effective paragraph organization

- Why are you writing?
- Who is your audience?
- What is the logical sequence for your ideas?

Fundamentally, every document consists of a series of linked paragraphs. Effective paragraphs make for an effective document.

# Topic sentences

- The single, main idea of the paragraph
- Leads naturally to sentences that develop the main idea
- Often appears early in the paragraph, but may be at the end of the paragraph or even embedded in it (but be careful)

# Something to think about ...

Panda: large black-and-white bear-like mammal, native to China. Eats, shoots, and leaves.

**Don't forget to use proper grammar and punctuation!**



Ways to

# **APPROACH ESSAY EXAMS**

# In-class exams

- Short answer
  - The goal is to provide major facts
  - Little elaboration is necessary
  - Think of them as long-hand multiple choice questions, without the choice

# In-class exams (cont)

- Essays
  - The goal is to provide major and minor facts
  - Elaboration and explanation is required
  - Take a few minutes to jot a quick outline and thesis
  - Stay focused by monitoring your time and never getting so wrapped up in details that you are unable to finish
  - Make sure you have
    - Introduction (1 sentence introducing topic, 1 sentence thesis)
    - Supporting paragraphs (at least 1 for each point in the thesis)
    - Conclusion (1 sentence pulling all the topics together and 1 sentence to provide the context necessary to understand why your essay topic/argument is important)

# Take-home exams

- Take-home exams should be treated very much like regular papers
- Let the length guideline tell you how much detail is expected
- Ask for a page length guideline if one is not provided
- Goal is to provide major facts, supporting details, and provide context for understanding
- Elaboration and explanation are required: more than for an in-class essay exam, but most often less than for a term paper
- Use a few outside sources to support your statements: textbooks, articles, other research references
- If you use references, don't forget to create a Works Cited page or your exam will be considered incomplete

# Contact us

- Hours of Operation
  - Monday through Thursday, 10am to 8pm  
(closed 10am to 11am on Wednesdays for chapel)
  - Friday, 10am to 4pm
- Appointments
  - Online: <http://callutheran-writing-center.genbook.com>
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  - Walk-in: Darling Collaboration Suite, Pearson Library
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  - [www.callutheran.edu/writing\\_center](http://www.callutheran.edu/writing_center)



# Resources

- Duke University Writing Studio, Resources
  - <http://uwp.duke.edu/wstudio/index.php>
- Amherst College, Online Resources for Writers
  - <https://www.amherst.edu/academiclife/support/writingcenter/resourcesforwriters>
- Purdue University, The OWL at Purdue Online Writing Lab
  - <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>
- Strunk W. Jr., & White E. B. (2000). *The elements of style*, 4th edition. New York: Longman.