

Organizing ideas—OUTLINING

The difference between a well organized paper and a holy mess generally lies in the outline.

An outline does NOT have to be sophisticated; it only needs to show levels of ideas and the order in which you will write about them.

BEFORE writing:

1. List all the points you want to make.
2. Group them according to relationships.
3. Decide which ideas are major and minor / main topics and subtopics.
4. Decide the order in which you want to cover the topics.
5. Indicate logical connections/transitions between them.

DURING writing: outline what you have written so far when you are stuck, or to make sure you are staying on topic.

Writing your first DRAFT—some helpful and unorthodox tips

Don't begin at the beginning: start with the section/point that seems easiest to you, work to the end, then write your intro.

Write quickly. Get your ideas down as quickly as possible, without worrying too much about grammar, perfect word choice, spelling, etc.

Write strongly. Capture your initial passion and excitement about the ideas, or else you'll lose them. You can tone down your writing later.

Save all drafts and notes. Save both hard and electronic copies, betting on the worst (it happens). Save multiple versions of your drafts, as you may decide to revisit ideas you've already deleted.

When you take breaks—finish a section or try to exhaust your current thoughts; if not, make notes about what you want to say next.

Write where you are free from distractions. You'll get more done in two intense hours of work than in six hours of interruptions by friends, phone, TV, email, etc. Don't waste your time.

Set deadlines, plan breaks, break up your work hours. Setting aside a whole day to write a paper usually results in getting little done—the idea of spending an entire day writing a paper is just too awful. Plan shorter

work periods with rewards at the ends of them. (Start early.)

When all else fails, take a shower—or do whatever makes your brain juices flow. Run. Sing. Sniff a rotten apple.