

WHY NOT JUST START WRITING THE PAPER? Learn before you write

Stage 2: The outline as an "extra-rough" draft

In class: general response; source review and reflection; paraphrasing; thesis statement and outline.

First, reflect on your initial, stage-one data to develop a general response to your research question that you feel capable of supporting.

Second, commence with a deeper review of your sources, a review consisting of data collection and reflection. Take thorough notes on your review. These notes are the pool of data and reflections you will draw from in developing your outline, which consists of the expected form and structure of your final draft. (See syllabus on length of final draft.)

Third, begin outlining. The outline's headings present assertions, which will be supported and discussed in the paper. Single-word headings such as "Introduction," "Body," "Pros," "Cons," "Background" deceive you into thinking you have a structure of the final product. So, AVOID single-word headings. Lower levels of the outline should contain some *substantial detail* related to the assertions in the headings. The substance, not whether you use bullets or numerals for your outline levels, is what matters most to me. Substantial details are drawn from the "pool of data and reflections" described above.

Fourth, at some point, during the first three steps, a *possible thesis statement* should emerge. Write it down when it does emerge (and re-write it if it changes for you). A thesis statement is a one-to-three sentence (approximately) preview of the argument to be made, expressing the main ideas and identifying the purpose of the paper. That statement is your general response to your research question. It will be fully explained, supported, and fleshed out in detail in the body of the paper.

The outline is the first stage of writing the paper and, in that sense, I refer to it as an "extra-rough" draft of the paper. It gives you the basis for drafting the introduction in your rough draft (stage 3). To me, the toughest part of a research paper, word for word, is writing a proper introduction. This is when an outline is of crucial assistance. A proper introduction immediately informs the reader of the author's thesis statement and steps taken to support it. The outline fleshes out the steps of the paper and, therefore, becomes the basis for your introduction.

Stage two is your opportunity to become learned enough to write on your topic. A successful outline reflects deeper thought, richer learning, and, in general, substantial research on the topic. I ask myself when reviewing it: Did the author really conduct research? Can the author rely on this to write a rough draft? Can the author use this to draft a proper introduction? Was this rushed simply to get it done? The more specific you are in your strategy for writing the paper, the better the feedback (and, yes, grade) I can give you.

Format of assignment: Your name; possible thesis statement; then the rest of your outline. Upload to designated link in CampusWeb. Due date is stated there and in the course calendar. MS Word!