

Content Prewriting

Although getting started on a paper may seem intimidating, following a few basic steps can help to make the process both effective and less overwhelming.

STEP 1: HOW DO I GET STARTED?

DEFINE THE PURPOSE

The purpose of your paper will determine how you write it. Ask yourself, “What is the assignment?” and “What is the purpose of my paper?” A paper can serve any number of purposes. For example, your purpose could be

- ◀ to analyze
- ◀ to define
- ◀ to discuss or examine
- ◀ to evaluate
- ◀ to interpret
- ◀ to persuade
- ◀ to report
- ◀ to self-express
- ◀ to summarize

IDENTIFY THE AUDIENCE

It is important to identify your audience, since the same paper will be written very differently for different audiences. Ask yourself,

- ◀ **Who will read my paper?** (A paper would be written very differently for a teacher than it would be for a classmate or a business. Also consider your potential audience—not just the person who will read it to give you a grade.)
- ◀ **What does my audience already know?** (What information will I not need to explain?)
- ◀ **What does my audience not already know?** (Do I need to provide background information, define technical terms, or give a context for my topic?)
- ◀ **What topics, details, or approaches will interest my audience?**
- ◀ **What level of language should I use?** (Does it need to be formal or informal? Should I use simple or complex words and sentences?)

DETERMINE THE TONE

Your tone is your overall attitude toward the topic and reader. It includes the general atmosphere that your paper creates. To decide what tone to use, consider the following points:

- ◀ Papers can vary dramatically in tone: humorous, indignant, sympathetic, indifferent, etc.
- ◀ For most college papers, you should use a knowledgeable, somewhat serious tone.
- ◀ Your paper should be academic and professional, but never stuffy or artificially serious.
- ◀ Look at the tone of other writing in your field to help determine what tone to use.

STEP 2: WHAT WILL I WRITE ABOUT?

READ THE ASSIGNMENT CAREFULLY

Refer to the assignment from your instructor to determine appropriate topics. If you still have questions, professors are usually happy to discuss ideas with you.

ASK BASIC QUESTIONS

Explore the basic questions of your topic: *Who? What? When? Where? How? Why?*

TRY FREEWRITING

Write down a specific subject or topic on your paper. Then begin writing every word or phrase that comes to mind. Work quickly, and don't stop writing until your ideas run out.

Content Prewriting

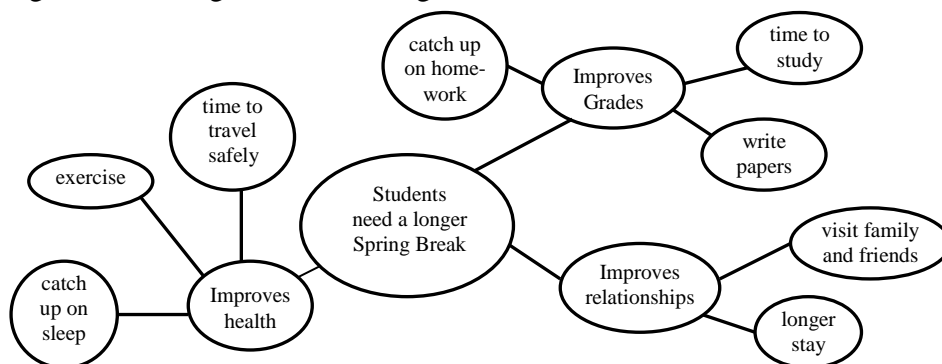
STEP 3: HOW DO I ORGANIZE MY PAPER?

NARROW YOUR TOPIC

Your topic should be specific, but not too narrow. Make sure you will be able to discuss the topic thoroughly in the length of your paper. If you find that your topic is too broad, consider focusing on a specific aspect of the topic.

CREATE A CLUSTER DIAGRAM

Group your thoughts into categories according to their similarities:



FORMULATE YOUR THESIS

The thesis statement sets forth your main point, limits your topic, indicates your paper's organization, and is typically found at the end of your introduction.

DEVELOP AN OUTLINE

Outlines help you organize all the information you have gathered. For a formal outline, use Roman numerals, letters, and numbers to organize your ideas.

Title: The Importance of a Longer Spring Break
Thesis Statement: A longer spring break improves health, grades, and relationships.
I. A longer spring break improves health
A. Catch up on sleep
1. Naps
2. Sleep in
3. Rest periods
B. Exercise
1. Outdoor activities
2. Community activities
3. Time at the gym
II. A longer spring break improves grades
A. Catch up on homework
1. Read
2. Study
3. Get ahead
B. Write papers
1. Research
2. Outline
3. Rough drafts
III. A longer spring break improves relationships
A. Visit family
1. Time to travel home safely
2. Stay for longer visits
3. Time to see more family
B. Visit friends
1. Go on an outing together
2. Get together for lunch
3. Have sleepovers

YOU ARE NOW READY TO WRITE YOUR FIRST DRAFT!