

Have you got several assignments and midterms around the corner, with a term paper as the icing on a very stressful cake? Here's how to write a paper as efficiently as possible.

But first, let's answer why professors ask you to write papers and how they differ from the ones you wrote in high school. In high school, your papers likely just reported the ideas of others using a few sources, mostly from Google & Wikipedia. In university you are expected to ask more meaningful questions and to evaluate a topic from a variety of perspectives. Your task is to come up with your own thoughts and opinions and to join the scholarly conversation about a topic.

So let's talk about, Writing Process:

Getting an early start on your paper is essential. The research and writing process for your paper are different and equally important. Leaving the paper 24 to 48 hours before the due date doesn't give you the capacity to devote the necessary amount of time to each process.

Another key starting point is often with your professor. Each discipline has their own writing style and in order to do well, it's important to follow those guidelines.

Before you begin writing a paper, you'll need a general idea about what you want to write about. You must first read about the topic in order to listen in on conversations already happening. Ask yourself:

- what are the main issues and perspectives?
- who are the main people talking and writing about them?

Remember, your paper is you joining a scholarly conversation. You're not expected to discover a discipline changing revelation, but your perspective is unique and the best papers are one's that look at new perspectives and ideas within the context of the class. Here are some good questions to ponder:

- What are your opinions on the main arguments?
- What are the motivations behind your reasons and arguments?
- What would someone who disagrees with you think?

Even if you haven't done formal research in the past, don't worry. Subject librarians and library resources are great tools that will help you get started.

There's a tendency for students to rely heavily on their sources in a paper instead of letting their arguments and ideas shine. When you draft your paper, don't rely on your sources to make up the body of your work, and remember your sources aren't your argument, they help you build one. When evaluating sources, highlight, markup and organize quotes and create short summaries of another author's words that you might want to use in the paper. Start by building your arguments, make sure your thinking is logical and easy to follow. State one point

at a time and elaborate on what you mean through the use of examples and analogies but be concise.

When thinking about your thesis, make sure it's a specific and debatable statement. For example, "education is important for economic growth" is a broad statement and not debatable because only very few people would disagree. Instead be more specific with your thesis statement, for example, "at least 25% of the federal budget should be spent on improving education". The latter is debatable and can be developed throughout the paper in a number of ways.

It is important to note that this will be a working thesis that can be continuously revised as you write your paper. If your ideas and arguments change down the line, your thesis can change with them too.

Another way to develop a strong thesis, according to Purdue University, is to think about the question that guided your research and its answer. Then, switch those around to make a sentence. For example, a question is "what could improve education?" The answer is "if at least 25% of the federal budget is spent on education". This makes the sentence, "at least 25% of the federal budget should be spent on improving education". Base your ideas on evidence and treat them as hypotheses to be tested rather than obvious truths.

Now let's dive into the process of actually writing the paper. Step 1, Plan:

To get a better grasp on the direction of your paper, it's best to build a tentative outline. According to Purdue University, to create an outline, make sure you clearly understand the purpose of your paper and the audience you are writing for. Then, you can proceed to:

1. Brainstorm a list of ideas that you want to include in your paper
2. Group these related ideas together. For example, in a paper about the causes of world war one, you can group your ideas into political, social and economic causes.
3. It's also very useful to arrange your ideas in subsection, in some order. For example, a chronological order or from abstract ideas to more concrete ones.

Any kind of outline you make, even just jotting down main ideas, will be beneficial.

Step 2, Draft:

Using the outline you've created, you can begin to write the first draft of your paper. Start at the point that makes the most sense to you. In fact, it is usually easiest to save the introduction and conclusion for last. These parts of the paper are usually the shortest. Their purpose is to give the paper a contextual basis which is difficult to accomplish until you've written the paper.

The body of the paper is where you develop your argument. It should have citations from scholarly literature or academic journals. These citations should

add to your argument, not be your argument. It is important that you add commentary, using your own original ideas. Think about including how or where the knowledge was gained, how and why it's significant. When forming your argument, it is important to not be one-sided. What's missing from the literature? Are the sources you cited representative of a commonly held belief? Or are they new and somewhat controversial? Make sure you consider other possible outcomes and conclusions on your topic or it will look like you have only researched sources that back up your argument. You don't have to refute counter arguments but they should be addressed. Ignoring them weakens your paper, giving the impression that you're a lazy thinker.

Now we can tackle the introduction and conclusion. An introduction is a great place to provide some context for your paper, such as the time period your research is based on or how your topic is significant to your study. Be careful not to provide too little or too much context. Your thesis statement must be in your introduction.

Generally speaking, a conclusion is used to summarize arguments in your paper and suggest where there's room for further research. Rather than restating the intro, you can discuss some further implications of the research or your argument.

### Step 3, Revise:

Revision is an important step in the writing process. This is different from editing and proofreading which should be left for the end of the process. According to the University of Toronto, you should go beyond the surface, focusing on:

1. Whether you have fulfilled the intention of the assignment. Look at the instruction sheet and think about whether you've performed the kind of thinking it asked for. Pay attention to keywords like, analyse, argue, compare and so on. Have you used concepts and methods of reasoning discussed in the course? Have you given adequate researched examples for your argument or interpretation?
2. Then look at the overall organization. Print and revise your paper by asking yourself questions like "does my introduction make clear where the rest of the paper is headed? Do my arguments follow a logical structure and is there anything missing? Have I drawn connections between sections, making sure topic sentences link back to the backed-up arguments?"
3. Now you can edit for stylistic purposes. A useful tip is to read text aloud to look for repetition and drawn out sentences.

### Step 4, Proofread and Finalize:

Now that you have completed your revision, you are ready to proofread. Look out for errors in grammar, syntax, and punctuation. Printing out a copy of your draft and proofreading the old-fashioned way makes this process a lot easier. Avoid using automatic spelling and grammar checkers as nothing can substitute your own judgement. Also, make sure the appearance of your paper,

for example, cover page, page numbering and double spacing, meets your instructor's specification. Writing a paper can be a daunting task, but by breaking down the process and tackling each step with an appropriate amount of time you'll be able to handle any writing assignment that comes your way.

Want to be a better student? Explore the [learningcommons.ubc.ca](http://learningcommons.ubc.ca) website or visit the Centre for Writing and Scholarly Communication on the 3rd floor of the Irving K. Barber Learning Centre.