

# Success Tip: Writing College Papers

## Part 1: Preparation

### **Talk with your professor**

Make sure you fully understand your assignment. If you're struggling with a topic or how to go about researching or organizing the paper, your professor can help and should be the first person you go to for answers. Bonus: Professors love to have students ask questions! Meeting with professors demonstrates that you care about your academics and are aware of assignments. Not only will you give a good impression, but you will also get valuable guidance for your paper!

### **Talk about your paper with someone else**

Grab a roommate, classmate, neighbor, or better yet, go to the [Writing Center](#) in Neville Hall and talk with a peer tutor to discuss your paper topic. You'll be surprised at how many ideas you will generate just by talking and listening to others. Your discussion will provide an opportunity for you to run through your ideas at least once and your partner can give some helpful feedback to embellish your paper. As a result, your ideas will be clearer and better developed once you finally sit down to write!

### **Research**

Avoid leaving the research to the last minute. When you are reading and trying to write your paper at the same time, your paper may turn out disorganized and choppy. Plus, you are not giving yourself the time to mull over the concepts before writing. This incubation time is important for thinking creatively about your topic. [Fogler Library](#) is a great resource to help you refine your topic and concepts.

**Fogler Library website:** [library.umaine.edu](http://library.umaine.edu)

Here, you can start a chat session with a librarian, access research guides by subject, and search collections, databases, and publications

**Citation Guides:** [libguides.library.umaine.edu/citation](http://libguides.library.umaine.edu/citation)

**List of Subject Specialists:** [library.umaine.edu/subject-specialists/](http://library.umaine.edu/subject-specialists/)

Students can contact Subject Specialists with questions via email or make an appointment to meet.

### **Outline**

You've probably heard about this countless times from high school teachers and your professors, but you know what? It is true! Whether you create an outline before you write or after the first draft, an outline can help you take a big step towards a more clearly organized and descriptive paper. Don't worry about creating a formal outline (unless that is part of your assignment); just jotting down some notes to keep you on track will do just fine and save time.

### **Know your assignment**

Before writing, be sure you have interpreted the assignment appropriately. After you have completed the first draft, check to see if you really have met all the requirements of the assignment and that you have addressed all questions appropriately.

### **Don't put it off**

This is pretty self-explanatory, but we all fall into this easy trap. The dangers of working under pressure and when tired may reflect poorly on your actual capabilities. So, put your best foot forward by starting early.

### **Give it a break**

Leave time before the due date (at least a day or two) to take a break from your paper so that you can review your work with a fresh perspective and can read all the words much more clearly. You may even spot holes in your paper where you could add more description or clarification. This is also a great time for peer reviewing, visiting the library, making use of the Writing Center, asking your professor questions about new problems, and just letting ideas brew a bit more.

## **Part 2: Formatting and Organizing a Paper**

### **Introduction**

Catch the reader's attention! Look at the first word, and make sure it's not "a" or "the" or "it" because you want to intrigue your reader as soon as possible by using exciting words and phrases. Using quotes to start off your paper is a good idea, too, but don't over use it. Use your creativity to "hook" your reader and "reel them in!" At the end of the paragraph, leave your reader with a clear understanding of where the paper is going.

### **Thesis**

This is the most important part of the introduction and is usually placed at the very end of the introductory paragraph, in a single sentence. It should be debatable or argumentative, and should be based on proof without being self-evident. Thus, the

thesis is your opinion based on facts that you've gathered and analyzed. Note: a clear, concise and creative thesis will immeasurably strengthen your argumentative paper.

## **Body**

Here's where you "prove" your thesis. Make sure you have ample support for all your arguments. One helpful writing model explains that each paragraph should be a mini-essay beginning with a topic sentence or two, with a body explaining or providing proof of your ideas, followed by a final statement to bring your point to a close. Each paragraph should relate back to your thesis directly and further your argument while at the same time relating to the previous and preceding paragraphs in logical order. This task may seem a bit complicated, but you can make it easier by creating an outline of your draft to double-check that your ideas flow logically, from one to the other.

## **Transitions**

Along with the thesis and organization, transitions are highly important for weaving your paper together. Transitions have key words such as: *however*, *in addition to*, *also*, or can come in the form of briefly restating what you've said in the sentence or paragraph before. Repeating key words and using a theme through your paper will help unify your ideas so that you may lead your reader smoothly from one idea to the next.

## **Conclusion**

This should draw all your ideas together into one big picture, possibly furthering your thesis statement to prove why your ideas are so important, or speculating on future implications. You can develop the conclusion with a few examples from the "body" paragraph where you proved your point, but did not summarize. At the end of this paragraph, the reader should feel done with the paper and perhaps be impressed by your last statement. Your first sentence of the paper should catch the reader's attention; the last should leave the reader with something to think about and with the feeling that the reading has been worthwhile.

**Writing Center:** 402 Neville Hall, 207.581.3828 <https://umaine.edu/wcenter/>