Writing Research Essays: A Workshop Series: Step 2

Presented by The Writing Center at Trident Technical College

Step 2: Doing research and developing a strategy for writing your essay

Checklist for Step 2:

- ❑ Locate sources & complete bibliography/works cited page
- ❑ Read sources
- ❑ Reach some conclusions about the topic based on what you've read
- ❑ Make note of possible quotations and other supporting material
- ❑ Change your working thesis statement if necessary
- ❑ Create an outline for your research essay

Locate sources & complete bibliography/w.c. page

- At this point, you should have found most of the sources you'll be using as support for your essay.

- Be sure you've found the types of sources called for in the essay assignment.

- Ask librarians for help finding sources if you need help.

- Add all sources to your bibliography/works cited page.

Reaching conclusions/formulating ideas based on your research

- As you read your chosen sources, you should begin to reach some conclusions about your topic. These conclusions will form the basis of your essay.

- The more information you gather from sources, the more ideas you will have to help you focus and develop your essay.

- You may need to change your working thesis statement based on the information you gather from your research.

Gathering information from sources

- As you read, mark or make note of ideas or quotations you might be able to include in your essay as supporting information.

- If you are copying information from a source, it's important that you keep track of whether you are quoting the information directly or summarizing/paraphrasing the information.

- If you use information word-for-word from a source (quote) in your paper, you must include quotation marks around the quoted passage. Failure to mark direct quotations as direct quotations in your essay is a form of plagiarism, even if you cite the source.

- Develop a system to keep track of the information you gather from sources. You can use notecards, printing and highlighting/annotating sources, etc. The key is to have some kind of system that helps you keep accurate track of the information you gather from sources, so that you are able to use the information appropriately in your essay.

Using notecards to track source information

- You can use notecards to summarize, paraphrase, or quote information from sources. Always include a bibliographic citation on the card so you know which source the information came from.

- An advantage of using notecards or a similar system to gather information from sources is that notecards are easy to move around and organize when you are preparing an outline of your paper.

- On each notecard, you should include a bibliographic citation for the source and an indication of the type of info you've put on the card: quotation, paraphrase, or summary. You may also make a note to indicate where in your essay you intend to use the information.

- Placing the notecards in an order that follows your outline makes it easier for you to include the source information as you write the rough draft of your essay.

Create an outline for your essay

- Once you've read your chosen sources and developed some ideas about your topic, you can create an outline for your essay.

- Consider whether or not you need to change your working thesis statement, based on what you've discovered through your research.

- Put your working thesis statement at the top of the outline page. This thesis will help you stay focused on your overall main point as you develop the outline.

- Your outline can be very detailed or it can be brief. Use whatever format works best for you. Creating a more detailed outline will help you organize your ideas before you start writing a draft, and it will help keep you on track once you begin writing the draft.

Outline format

- The following slide shows you a sample format for an outline (slide 9).

- This outline format uses three major points to cover the topic. These major points should be touched on in the thesis statement.

- Your essay may have more than three major points. Don't limit yourself to only three major points if your essay needs more than that to adequately cover the topic. There is no "rule" that you can only have three major points, unless your instructor has specified this in the assignment.

- You can use a more detailed outline or a less detailed outline.

- The outline is intended to help you organize your ideas before you begin writing a draft of the essay. You should also use the outline to keep on track as you write the draft of your essay. Some writers work well with a very basic outline. Others need a more detailed outline to be sure they include all the info they intend to include in the essay.

Sample outline format

Thesis: Type your thesis at the top of the outline to help keep you focused as you write a rough draft of your essay

I.   **Introduction**: Introduce your reader to your topic, and provide a brief history or brief summary, depending on your subject, leading up to your thesis idea. Include your working thesis statement at the end of the intro.

II.   **First major point** (topic sentence). *(This should be your own words, not info from a source)*

    a.Major detail (supports the first major point) *(Again, in your own words)*

        i.Minor detail and explanation *(Your own words and information from sources)* ii.Minor

        detail and explanation

    b. Major detail (supports the first major point)

        Fill out the paragraph with minor details and explanation

    c. Major detail (supports the first major point)

        Fill out the paragraph with minor details and explanation

III.   **Second major point** (topic sentence)

    a. Minor detail and explanation

    b. Minor detail and explanation

IV**. Third major point** (topic sentence)

V. **Conclusion**: Your conclusion should wrap up the essay you've written. One format to use might be to reiterate your thesis idea, then touch on your major points, in backwards order from how you've addressed them in the paper, and at the end of the paragraph, broaden out to something that anyone can relate to.

Reminders and suggestions

- The outline is intended to help you organize your ideas <u>before you begin writing a</u> draft of the essay. You should also use the outline to <u>keep on track as you write</u> the draft of your essay.

- The thesis statement and topic sentences are organizational tools for writing. Creating a strong thesis statement and topic sentences for each of your major points as part of an outline will help you to organize and develop the ideas and supporting information you intend to include in your essay.

- **Doing the research and organizing your ideas may be the most time consuming part of putting together a research essay**. Give yourself adequate time to complete the research and organization before you start writing.