PAPER PLANNING GUIDE

Prewriting Steps

The four steps on this page should help you get started with your writing assignment. Please study the attached pages for further information on each step.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Situation:</strong> What type of writing situation do you find yourself in? What method of writing will work best for your assignment?</td>
<td><strong>Think of and jot down all the possible things you could write about for your topic.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Eliminate ideas that are not directly related to your topic. Focus on a small area of your subject that will allow you to say something meaningful.</strong></td>
<td><strong>In what order should ideas be arranged?</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. **Assess the Writing Situation:**
(Taken directly from Diana Hacker’s *A Writer’s Reference*, 5th ed.)

   Begin by taking a look at the writing situation in which you find yourself. The key elements of the writing situation include your subject, the sources of information available to you, your purpose, your audience, and constraints such as length, document design, review sessions, and deadlines.

   It is unlikely that you will make the final decisions about all of these matters until later in the writing process—after a first draft, for example. Nevertheless, you can save yourself time by thinking about as many of them as possible in advance.

**A Tip for ESL Students:**

What counts as good writing varies from culture to culture and even among groups within cultures. In some situations, you will need to become familiar with the writing styles—such as direct or indirect, personal or impersonal, plain or embellished—that are valued by the culture or discourse community for which you are writing.
Checklist for Assessing the Writing Situation:
(Taken from Diana Hacker’s *A Writer’s Reference, 5th ed.*)

Subject:
___ Has a subject (or range of possible subjects) been given to you, or are you free to choose your own?
___ Why is your subject worth writing about?
___ How broadly should you cover the subject? Do you need to narrow it to a more specific topic (because of length restrictions, for instance)?
___ How detailed should your coverage be?

Sources of Information:
___ Where will your information come from: Personal experience? Direct observation? Interviews? Questionnaires? Reading?
___ If your information comes from reading, what sort of documentation is required?

Purpose:
___ Why are you writing: To inform readers? To persuade them? To entertain them? To call them to action? Some combination of these reasons?

Audience:
___ Who are your readers? How well informed are they about your subject?
___ How interested and attentive are they likely to be? Will they resist any of your ideas?
___ What is your relationship to them: Employee to supervisor? Citizen to citizen? Expert to novice? Scholar to scholar? Peer to peer? Student to teacher?
___ How much time are they willing to spend reading?

Length and Document Design:
___ Do you have any length specifications? If not, what length seems appropriate, given your purpose and audience?
___ Must you use a particular design for your document? If so, do you have guidelines or examples that you can consult?

Reviewers and Deadlines:
___ Who will be reviewing your draft in progress: Your instructor? A writing center tutor? Your classmates? A friend? Someone in your family?
___ What are your deadlines? How much time will you need to allow for the various stages of writing, including typing and proofreading the final draft?
2. **Brainstorming**

You’ve thought about possible topics and have chosen one. Now **write down** all the ideas you might want to use for your topic. Just jot them down briefly: words or short phrases are best. Don’t try to put them in order. Just let the ideas flow. Be prolific; write down plenty of ideas without worrying about what you will ultimately use or discard. The longer the paper, the more you will write down for this step. This type of brainstorming is called **listing**. Other types of brainstorming include **clustering**, **asking relevant questions to generate ideas**, and **freewriting**.

The following is a **list** one writer jotted down about moving from Utah to California:

- my age when we moved
- father’s health
- selling his business
- decision—Colorado or California?
- Vacationed in Calif for 3 years in a row prior to decision
- Selling house parents had built
- Garage sale
- Only remember that house
- Feeling like a country bumpkin in California—clothing, speech
- Excellent school
- Bus trip with grandmother
- First visit to school—enrolling
- Grandmother sunburned on beach
- Her sickness resulting from sunburn
- My brother’s kindness
- Parents, baby brother arriving
- Grandparents and older brother sent on ahead
- I was sent to grandparents to start school on time
- Feeling as I drove out of town
- Break between childhood and future
- Crossing Malad River
- Childhood spent in same small town
- Climate differences
- Houses different
- Plants different
- Routine at grandmother’s house

The ideas appear here in the order in which they first occurred to the writer. Later this writer felt free to rearrange them, to cluster them under general categories, to delete some, and to add others. In other words, the writer treated his or her initial list as a source of ideas and a springboard to new ideas, not as a formal outline.
3. **Sorting and Focus**

After you have completed a list or other form of brainstorming, you must eliminate any unnecessary or unimportant information. That is, you must focus on a small enough area that will allow you to go in depth and say something meaningful about it. One way to sort information is by separating it into smaller related groups. In looking at the ideas and facts that you have decided to use, you will see that some belong together—group these. If something does not relate to any of your groups or does not seem to be a very valuable piece of information, discard it.

**Grouping:**

Childhood
Age
Length of time in Utah
Remember only one house
Parents had built house

Leaving town—physically
Leaving town—psychologically
Crossing the river
Being sent ahead by but with grandmother
Relatives preceding us

Climate differences
Houses different
Plants different
Daily routine different

Visiting school
Enrolling
Country bumpkin feeling
Excellent school
4. Outlining

Once you have finished grouping related ideas together, decide which are main ideas (more general) and which are supporting ideas (more specific). Decide how these ideas should be arranged—which should be first, second and last. Make an outline using main ideas supported by specific details. Be sure each section relates to your thesis. After these steps, you are ready to write the paper.

**Outlining:**

Thesis statement: The move from Utah to California was like crossing a threshold from childhood to adolescence.

I. Leaving town
   A. Physically—crossing the Malad River
   B. Psychologically
   C. Being sent ahead to grandparents

II. Looking back on childhood
   A. Length of time in Utah and age at time of move
   B. Remembering only one house that parents had built

III. Discovering differences in California
   A. Climate
   B. Houses
   C. Plants
   D. Daily routine

IV. Looking to the next part of my life
   A. Visiting an excellent school
   B. Enrolling
   C. Feeling like country bumpkin