

WRITING PAPERS

1. SELECT A TOPIC

- Your professor or TA may or may not give you a specific topic. In either case, it is up to you ultimately to decide what you are going to write about, so it ought to be something pertinent to the topic assigned, manageable in the length of paper expected and something in which you are interested. Avoid choosing a topic that is too broad as it will be difficult to do the topic justice in the paper. (It wouldn't be fair to write about the entire French Revolution in a two-page response paper.)
- **IMPORTANT:** You must first discern what type of paper your instructor wants. Usually he or she will make it clear: "Write a 10 to 15-page term paper" or "I need a 3-page response piece." However, you're at Johns Hopkins. It's vitally important to realize that the professors at this school want a thought-provoking and insightful paper, not a simple summary of the mechanisms of DNA replication, for example. Professors want to see you use your head, not just repeat facts from books.
- It is important that you attempt to present a topic, give the history and background, outline the issues or debates relating to it, and come up with your own conclusion. Granted, not all papers will require an in-depth analysis or thesis proposal, but it is important to show *insight* into the topic.
- Don't be afraid to consult with your professor or TA about your topic. He or she may be able to give you advice about the topic, narrow it further, direct you toward resources, or prevent you from delving into a irrelevant aspect of your paper. (It is a good idea to have a working outline for this meeting.)

2. TAKE NOTES AND RESEARCH

- Once you have selected and narrowed down your topic, begin to research it. That doesn't mean Google it a couple times, but rather go to the library, search the catalog, search the periodicals, search the databases and see what results you get. If you're not sure how to do a search, ask a reference librarian (it's their job to help you and they are good at it!)
- Keep your references as current as possible unless you are using historical, original sources.
- Now that you've gathered your sources, you must decide which ones will be helpful and which ones are unnecessary. Start your bibliography!
- From there, start taking notes of what you're reading. The most popular and beneficial way is to use notecards; title each card, note the source, write the idea or fact down, and **DO NOT** clutter the notecard!

3. ORGANIZE YOUR IDEAS

- As you took notes, you probably noticed some key areas in your topic, natural divisions or conflicts. Use these to start your outlining process. Your outline should, among other things, set forth your *purpose* and the direction your paper is taking.
- It is imperative that you have an organizational scheme to your writing; no professor wants to go on a safari through your thoughts about the topic, but would rather have you lead him or her on a systematic path from the introduction of your topic or thesis to the logical conclusion. No rabbit trails, please!
- Also, it is a good idea to follow an outline pattern. Some people choose to lay out their ideas in a chronological order, and some in a logical and methodical manner, leading to their own conclusions. Decide which is best for the topic you are handling.

4. WRITE YOUR FIRST DRAFTS

- Use the outline you wrote to write your paper.
- Be sure to document your sources either in footnotes, endnotes, or parenthetical references. (MLA and APA are the most popular.) For examples of the proper forms go to: http://www.ccc.commnet.edu/mla/practical_guide.shtml
- DO NOT PLAGIARIZE! If you're unsure of the proper citation method, ask!
- Also keep your audience in mind. Is your paper going to be read or critiqued by your classmates, your professor or a group of professionals? Tailor your writing to your audience.
- Follow a logical form for your writing: introduction, thesis statement or point of view, main points or arguments, contrary arguments if appropriate, analysis, conclusion (or some outline similar).
- Get yourself a style guide and follow the guidelines listed. A good one can be found at <http://nutsandbolts.washcoll.edu/nb-home.html>.

5. PROOFREAD

- Proofreading is the most important thing you can do to improve your paper. Read through and honestly critique your paper. Does your thought process flow? Do your arguments make sense? Could you better analyze the opposing view?
- Check for grammatical and spelling errors. Read your paper ALOUD SLOWLY. Then read your paper backwards. Don't trust Word's automatic check!

6. FINAL DRAFT

- Your final draft should reflect all the stylistic and substantive changes you've made throughout the writing process.
- Make sure you followed any specific formatting directions given by the professor.
- Give your paper a title. Make it interesting!
- Include a cover page with papers of significant length or just your name, the date, the class and/or professor's name at the top of the first page.
- Include your bibliography or works cited. Ensure that your references in the body of the paper are correct.
- HAND IT IN ON TIME!
- If submitting electronically: print a copy for your records. When emailing it to your instructor, ask him or her to email you confirming that he or she received it and opened it successfully.

SPECIAL TIPS

- Research Paper
 - If you are assigned a research paper, it's important to actually do some research! Usually the topic is some sort of question; make sure you answer it.
 - Once you have gathered the information and presented it, show some insight, look at the different views of the issue and take a side, and support your position.
- Technical Paper/Lab Report
 - Usually this type of paper requires a more formal style.
 - Consult with your TA or professor on how to write a lab report.
- Essay/Response/Opinion Paper
 - Essays usually require more of your own opinion as backed by research or materials learned in class.

PAPER WRITING RESOURCES AVAILABLE

- Johns Hopkins Writing Center is a valuable resource: http://www.jhu.edu/~english/writing_center/
- Helpful websites:
 - <http://nutsandbolts.washcoll.edu/nb-home.html>
 - <http://webster.commnet.edu/mla/index.shtml>
 - <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~writing/materials/student/toc.shtml>