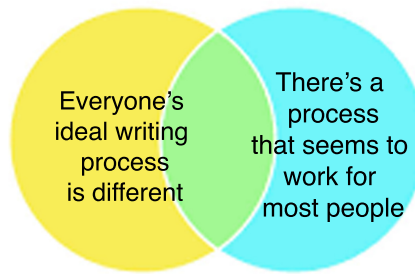


How to Write an Academic Paper



While there are a lot of different ways to write an academic paper, this is the process that, in my experience, has worked for the largest number of students.

Step 1

Explore your topic. Read at least three articles on your chosen subject matter and write down the most interesting quotes from those articles. Write back to those quotes, picking them apart and asking as many questions about them as possible. Brainstorm answers to the questions, some of which will likely generate new questions. Brainstorm answers to *those* questions.

Step 2

Now look at everything you've written in response to the quotes. What connections can you make between your thoughts? Can you identify any recurrent themes? Are there any places where you appear to be contradicting yourself? If you are contradicting yourself, what's causing the disconnection? Ask more questions and brainstorm answers to those questions. "Rinse and repeat" (i.e. do all this over again) until you're ready to write either a thesis or a research question that necessitates further reading. (See the handout on how to write a research question.)

Step 3

If you have a thesis at this point, work backwards to develop a research question. This will help you define your paper's focus. If you have a research question but no thesis, choose further reading material that will help you answer that question. When you've sketched out your answer to the research question, that answer is your thesis.

Step 4

Reread your sources and collect quotes that answer your research question. Separate this material into categories and write a topic sentence for each category. Eventually, each of these topic sentences will introduce a paragraph.

Step 5:

Mold your work into a basic paper format. Revise at least twice before submitting a final draft.