

Planning Your Paper

Sometimes the most difficult aspect of writing a paper is scheduling your time. This handout is for those of us who struggle with time management. In general, 50% of the time available for writing a paper should be dedicated to prewriting. Then, the other 50% should be dedicated to drafting, revising, editing, and proofreading. You can use the following checklist to help schedule your writing process.

Prewrite (50% of your time)

Planned start date: _____

This is the date your professor assigns your assignment or the date you plan to start.

Prompt: Spend some time reading the assignment and thinking about what you would like to write about. Which topics deserve further exploration?

- Develop a **research question** to guide your research without favoring a particular thesis.
- Find and read **potential sources**. Keep a running **references list**.
- Narrow your topic** after going through research.
- Develop a **preliminary thesis**.
- Brainstorm** your paper. Check out our handout on brainstorming techniques!
- Assess your **audience**. Who are you writing for?
- Assess your **purpose**. Which **verbs** are used in the prompt? Examples include:

analyze	compare	list
summarize	contrast	identify
explain	argue	discuss
evaluate	apply	critique
classify	review	illustrate

Outlining: When you're ready to organize your thoughts, consider outlining your paper in a way that follows the assignment instructions and aids the flow of your argument. An outline can be five lines or fifty, so do what best serves your purposes!

Draft (20% of your time)

Draft due date: _____

(This date should be halfway between your start date and your final due date.)

- Write **quickly**; save revisions for later.
- Feel free to **leave blank spaces** and come back to them later.
- Make sure your **tone** is appropriate for your audience.
- When you're finished, consider a **reverse outline** to check the structure of your paper.

Take a break: Take some time after your first draft to clear your head and prepare for revision.

Revise, Edit, & Proofread (30% of your time)

Revise:

Final due date: _____

- Do I have enough support or evidence?
- Is there an introduction, body, and conclusion?
- Are paragraphs cohesive and ordered logically?
- Do I have transitional statements and topic sentences?
- Do I repeat myself? How is my style?

Edit:

- Do I vary my sentence structure?
- Is my word choice appropriate to my audience?
- Does my paper use the correct format/documentation?
- Have I read my paper aloud to listen for wording issues?

Proofread:

- Do I have correct grammar, spelling, and usage?
- Do I meet the required formatting/layout standards?