

Utah State University Writing Center's

TIPS FOR STRONG WRITING

NARROW AND SPECIFY THE TOPIC.

One of the most effective ways to increase the quality, content, and/or length of a paper is to narrow and specify its focus. A narrow essay focus leads to more meaningful examples, connections, and main ideas.

EXAMPLE: *Notice how much easier it is to brainstorm ideas for the specific topic.

Original: The importance of reading to kids

***Revised:** The importance of reading aloud to children with dyslexia

INCLUDE A THESIS STATEMENT.

A thesis statement is typically one sentence at the end of an essay's first paragraph that details what the paper will argue or explain. Remember that specificity and clarity are essential!

TIPS:

- Thesis statements often require you to combine multiple ideas into one cohesive thought. Try using a subordinating conjunction to clarify the relationship between ideas! (e.g., although, because, even though, since)
- Avoid vague descriptors like "interesting," "exciting," "unusual," "good," and "bad."
- Avoid broad and abstract words like "mankind," "society," and "culture."

EXAMPLES:

Original: There are advantages and disadvantages to using statistical data.

Revision 1: Careful manipulation of data allows researchers to use statistics to support any claim they desire.

Revision 2: In order to ensure accurate reporting, journalists must understand the significance of the statistics they report.

Revision 3: Because advertisers consciously and unconsciously manipulate data, young consumers need to learn how to evaluate statistical claims.

(Examples adapted from University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign's "Writing Tips Workshop": cws.illinois.edu/workshop/writers/tips/thesis)

BREAK IT DOWN.

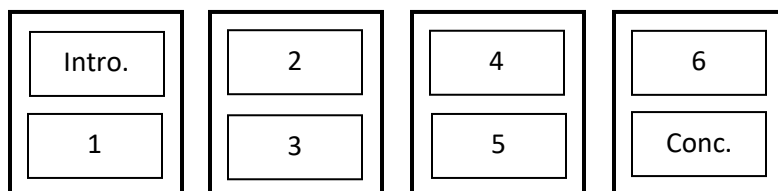
The length of the paper can help approximate how many main ideas should be included.

1 paragraph = 1 main idea

1 page = 2 paragraphs

An introduction and conclusion make up the first and last paragraphs.

Total main ideas needed for a paper = 2 x (# of pages needed – 1).



For example, a 4-page paper needs an introduction, conclusion, and ~6 main ideas/paragraphs.

$2 \times (4 - 1) = 6$ main ideas

START WITH THE SIMPLE.

Typically, it is best to explain simple information before advancing to more complex information. This flow creates a natural, logical progression between ideas.

TIPS:

- Explain critical background information and key terms before showing how that information impacts the essay's topic.
- Identify simpler connections and ideas before expanding.
- This progression works well for both paragraphs and long papers.

ANCHOR MAIN IDEAS WITH TOPIC STATEMENTS.

Each paragraph should develop **just one main idea!** Put the main idea in the first sentence of the paragraph. (Think of this sentence as the paragraph's thesis statement.)

TIPS:

- Avoid starting a new paragraph with a quote.
- Try to connect the paragraph's main idea to the paper's thesis.

EXAMPLES:

Original: The author talks about her extensive experience in the food industry.

Revised: The author establishes her credibility by attacking her critic's inexperience in the food industry.

Original: Another study shows the importance of understanding PTSD.

Revised: Understanding the symptoms of PTSD can dispel common misconceptions about war veterans.

AIM FOR CLARITY AND CONCISION.

The purpose of writing is to communicate ideas. Write for clarity, not verbosity. The best writers can distill complicated ideas into concise, comprehensible, and engaging writing. When it comes to writing, more is not always better!

Avoid: wordiness, verbosity, "fluffy writing," and ambiguity

Strive for: concision, simplicity, and brevity

REVISE.

Revision can happen at any stage in the writing process! Schedule time for revising your writing.

TIPS:

- Take time to revise the thesis, organization, arguments, research, and main ideas before tackling grammar. Big revisions could require you to delete or revise entire paragraphs. Wait for the final grammar polish until you are happy with the content and organization.
- Explain your thesis and main ideas to a friend. The more you verbalize your ideas, the easier it is to write them.
- Read the paper aloud! Brains are programmed to skim information. Reading aloud forces you to slow down.
- Read "backwards." Read the last sentence of the paper out loud first. Then the read the second-to-last sentence, etc.

Have questions? Schedule an appointment with a writing tutor today!

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