

# Paper Writing Timeline

Use this helpful guide to help you determine how to best allot your time when writing a course paper!

## **IMMEDIATELY AFTER YOU'RE ASSIGNED A COURSE PAPER:**

- Close read all assigned texts. Skim through class notes if applicable.
- Brainstorm, identify, and develop potential paper thesis/claims on your own
- Meet with an OWRC tutor as soon as possible to:
  - Further brainstorm, identify and develop potentials thesis/claims for your paper with a trained writing consultant.
  - Determine what kind of additional info, if any, you need.
  - Find sources if applicable.
  - Create a strong thesis/claim + complete outline for your paper.
- Make a second appointment with an OWRC tutor as soon as possible to guarantee you'll be seen by the date/time you need.

## **AFTER YOU WRITE YOUR 1<sup>st</sup> ROUGH DRAFT (IDEALLY 5-14 DAYS BEFORE YOUR PAPER IS DUE)**

- Use the claim/thesis + outline you created with an OWRC tutor to complete a rough draft version of your paper.
- Meet with an OWRC tutor for the second time. Bring a double-spaced copy of your rough draft in hardcopy format. During this session you and your tutor will pay attention to HIGHER ORDER CONCERNS such as:
  - ✓ **Main Claim/Argument:** Do you know exactly what your main claim is for the whole paper? Is it worthwhile, compelling, juicy, arguable (not reporting, opinion, or narrative) and appropriately complex? *Does it meet the requirements of the assignment?* Does every section of ideas reflect advanced knowledge of the thesis (instead of the thesis only coming out later in the body)? Is your *exigence* clear?
  - ✓ **Critical thinking and Analysis:** Are the ideas you use to develop the thesis perceptive and valid? Are the main points of the body the strongest ones you *could use* to prove the thesis? In the end, have you proven your thesis to a skeptical audience? Does the writing pass the "So What?" test?
  - ✓ **Development of Content:**
    - **Elaboration**—Are there enough topics in the whole paper to fully develop your analysis? Are there enough sentences in each paragraph to fully develop that topic so that the idea is explored in depth?
    - **Organization/Chain of Reasoning (coherent flow of strong ideas)**—Are the paragraphs in the essay arranged in the most sensible order? Are the sentences in the paragraphs arranged in the most sensible order? Does the path of your reasoning (the paragraphs that follow each other) make logical sense? Do the paragraphs build on each other and move the essay forward rather than repeat the same

ideas over? (Rehashing the same material is often a sign that the writer is trying to understand her or his own meaning.) Do you state how the paragraph topics connect to the thesis? This is a crucial use of a warrant.

- ✓ **Evidence:** Do you use valid academic evidence (authority of researched texts, spelled-out warrants, logical explanations, examples, facts, personal stories only as pertinent examples, qualified claims rather than absolutes)? Have you avoided wild claims/unsupported generalizations? Does the evidence conform to the rules of logic (one way to check is “STAR—sufficient, typical, accurate, relevant.”)? Do you complicate the subject, acknowledge ambiguities, and make concessions when necessary? Do you make wise choices about what researched material to include (the authority of text from experts in their fields is probably the highest kind of academic evidence), and do you use it effectively, knowing when to quote and when to paraphrase?
- ✓ **Audience Awareness and Disciplinarity:** Have you adjusted your paper to fit the discipline specific needs of your audience? For the humanities, this means: not address readers as if they already agree with me or know the context for the assignment; not assume your experience is common to all by making comments like “We all have a religious upbringing,” but show understanding of the diversity of other perspectives; make direct claims and exact assertions rather than beat around the bush with phrases like “The movie is about what society fears.”; state your ideas clearly in your own words using concrete, specific, explicit statements and not ask the reader to “read in-between the lines”; keep your tone scholarly and not “preachy.” Imagine your audience as your professor, diverse students, and all the faculty at the college.
- ✓ **Exigence and Voice:** Have you made this topic your own or is it a repetition of class discussion? Is your own originality reflected in the paper? Is this you talking (maybe with your newly educated voice)? Did you get engaged with your subject and assert something you personally care about? (Writing without voice sounds empty and mechanical. The biggest difference between an A and a B is often found here, in the creativity and risk-taking of a well-supported original argument.)

## **AFTER YOU WRITE YOUR 2<sup>nd</sup> ROUGH DRAFT (IDEALLY 1-4 DAYS BEFORE YOUR PAPER IS DUE**

- Revise your 1<sup>st</sup> draft based on comments from the OWRC tutor you met with, your peers, and/or your professor.
- If there is time, make a third (and final!) appointment with an OWRC tutor to address LOWER ORDER CONCERNS such as:
  - ✓ **Clarity:** Is your wording spelled out and not implied? Is your wording specific and precise, not vague and inexact? Does the wording sound smooth and not overblown or jumbled? Have you avoided wordiness, or unproductive repetition? Every sentence must speak for itself, must not perplex the reader with garbled wording and need other sentences to make it understandable.

- ✓ **Transitions:** Are there clear transitions, or “bridges,” from one paragraph to the next? Are there signposts within the text to help guide the reader through your train of thought? (e.g. “Although teasing is affectionate when used by your immediate family, the same teasing is not affectionate but disrespectful when used by your cousin.” The repeated words guide the reader.)
- ✓ **Articulation:** Have you checked for common writing errors?
- ✓ **Title:** Does your title capture the essence of your big point? Is the title creative and compelling? Have you typed it correctly? (not underlined, not in quotes, not in a different font; capitalize all main words)
- ✓ **Introduction:** Is the first sentence (or group of sentences) an attention grabbing “hook”? Do you give necessary background the readers need to know? Is the background related to your claim? Do you avoid a writer-based background that repeats the steps you went through before you nailed down your claim? Do you clearly assert your claim in a statement that directly claims your central point? Do you avoid a commonplace “announcement,” such as “I will now discuss ads”? First impressions are powerful—make the introduction capture your readers.
- ✓ **Conclusion:** Does your essay have a satisfying finish? Does it tell a “so what” about your topic? Does it avoid empty repetition, getting “preachy” or “drippy,” using clichés, or saying “In conclusion”? (Warning: if your conclusion is merely a point-by-point summary of the main points, it is probably “just plain redundant and boring”.) The last word leaves a permanent effect: make yours be the finale that seals your presentation.
- ✓ **Spell check:** Have you put the final copy through spell check? Have you looked for spelling errors yourself?
- ✓ **Proofreading:** Have you read the final, printed copy (not the screen)?
- ✓ **MLA/APA/Chicago Style/CBE format:** Have you checked for correct rules of the citation and documentation style guide your professor asked you to adhere to?
- ✓ **Correctness:** Have you checked for grammar rules?
- ✓ **Design form:** Have you checked margins, spacing, title form, abbreviations, and other rules of layout form?

### **1-3 HOURS BEFORE YOUR PAPER IS DUE**

- Print out a copy of your paper. Read your finished paper out loud, slowly, deliberately, in full voice at least once. Jot down any last-minute changes you need to make on the hardcopy you printed out.
- Make any last-minute changes you need to make to your paper. Print out a final copy. Submit it to your professor. You’re done!

### **ONCE YOU GET YOUR GRADED PAPER BACK**

- Send the OWRC an e-mail at [owrc@u.washington.edu](mailto:owrc@u.washington.edu). We’d love to hear how you did!
- If your teacher provided commentary on your paper, feel free to bring it in! Together, we can help you decipher your professor’s comments and help you address any issues your professor would like you to work on!