

HOW TO OUTLINE A PAPER

Generally speaking, your paper will answer three questions:

- *What?*
- *So what?*
- *Now what?*

WHAT? What are you writing about?

- 1. INTRODUCTION:** Let your reader know where you are going with this paper.
 - a. Background or context to help your reader understand your topic
 - b. Something interesting, to get the reader's interest (avoid dictionary definitions, clichés, and sweeping generalizations)
 - c. Your paper's main, overall idea
 - i. For argument or persuasive papers, this should be a **thesis**. A thesis is an *argument or claim*.
 - ii. A statement of fact such as "Drunk driving is harmful" is not a thesis.
 - iii. An announcement about what will be in your paper such as "This paper will discuss X" is not a thesis.
 - d. Your main idea **MUST** be in your introduction.

SO WHAT? What about it? Why is it important enough to write about?

- 2. BODY PARAGRAPHS:** As many as you need to adequately address all your points
 - a. The paragraph's ONE idea or topic—**only one idea/topic per paragraph**
 - i. Each paragraph's main idea should be clearly expressed in a topic sentence.
 - ii. Everything in the paragraph should relate to the topic sentence.
 - b. Support for the one idea or topic
 - i. Support can be quotations or paraphrases (for research or persuasive essays).
 - Be sure to include discussion/analysis of each.
 - ii. Support can also be illustrations or examples (for personal essays).

NOW WHAT? What are the implications of this discussion? What does it all mean?

- 3. CONCLUSION:** Step back and take a look at the bigger picture.
 - a. Be careful not to repeat or summarize what you have already written.
 - b. Instead, answer the "now what?" question.
 - i. What does it all mean?
 - ii. What are the implications of what you have discussed?
 - iii. How does everything in your paper relate to your thesis or main idea?
 - Don't repeat your thesis. Circle back to it using different words.
 - b. Tie up any loose ends.
 - c. Help your reader see how everything you have discussed fits together.
 - d. End strong, with something interesting and memorable. Last impressions last!