



Learning Styles and the Writing Process

Gathering Information

Visual Learners

Look at Model Papers

Both student writing and professional papers will give you useful ideas about structure and organization.

List Important Terms

Gather words and phrases important to your topic. Keep terms and definitions visible as you organize and draft.

Start with Visual Info

You might want to find pictures, video or other visual information to help you "see" your subject clearly and identify sub-topics.
Note: The Internet works well here.

Color-Code Information

As you identify categories of information, use colored pens, highlighters etc. to mark those categories. Be consistent and carry your system over to the organization stage.

Form a "Mental Picture"

What is in the background? In the foreground? What is the focal point? What kinds of details are necessary? Which details detract from the central focus?

Auditory Learners

Read the Assignment Aloud

Be sure you know what to gather before you get started. Listen for both the overall idea of the assignment and parts of the assignment.

Talk About the Assignment

Talk with instructors, teaching assistants, other students, tutors, anyone who will listen. This will help you identify areas of interest and sources of information, and will also help you begin to formulate language you can use in your paper. Take notes or use a tape recorder.

Summarize Key Concepts as You Gather Information

Reduce concepts, theories, positions in a debate and different points of view to a few words; write these summaries down, but also say them out loud. This will help you remember and distinguish key portions of your topic.

Use Audio Information, When Possible

If audio tapes, narrated films, lecturers or computer sources that include sound are available, use them.

Read Aloud

It might not be practical to read everything out loud, but do read key passages aloud, especially passages you could quote.

Kinesthetic Learners

Collect Information in a Form You Can Manipulate

Note cards, individual sheets of paper, post-it notes etc. can all be moved around as you organize your thoughts. Small ideas and pieces of information can be arranged in "idea trees" on a table or wall.

Write Down Ideas and Information

The physical act of writing aids memory and facilitates organization for kinesthetic learners. Typing is probably better than handwriting.

Involve Your Body in the Thought Process

If you need to move, move. Take a walk as you think about your paper. Write down your ideas. Organize your physical activities around your project. For example, generate ideas about one side of a debate as you walk away from home, then move to the other side of the debate when you turn around. Make breaks for physical activity part of each stage in the process. Give yourself time to break up your work.

Organizing Information

Visual Learners

Organize Information Visually

Break your paper into parts that you can separate visually. Use note cards, separate sheets of paper, large paper with plenty of white space, maps, colors, highlighters etc. to make visual distinctions.

Keep Lists; Keep Them Visible

Keep lists of key words and concepts, and keep those lists where you can see them. Use tape or tacks, for example, to post lists and outlines on your wall.

Use Patterns, Colors and White Space Strategically

Plan your visual organization strategies. For example, leave yourself enough room to see your work clearly, and write down a key that shows how you use colors.

Use a Computer

Most newer word processing programs have outlining and listing features - use them to create visually clear plans for your paper. Use fonts or colors, if available, to make distinctions.

Auditory Learners

Have Organized Discussions

As you begin to determine what will be the parts of your paper, discuss those parts with someone. This will help you articulate those parts clearly and will also help you see which parts might need to be sub-divided, further developed or eliminated.

Outline; Read Your Outline Aloud

Reading your outline aloud, or having someone else read it to you, will help you determine if you have placed concepts in the most effective order, and will also help you identify gaps in your paper.

Ask Yourself Questions

Ask questions like, "What is my main point?" or "What is the connection between the second section and the third section?" Record or write down your answers. The best writers constantly ask themselves questions, and as an auditory learner, you might want to ask those questions out loud.

Write Down a Thesis Statement and Topic Sentences for Each Paragraph

This will help you determine "how your paper sounds" before you even write it.

Kinesthetic Learners

Organize Information in Piles or Columns

If you have gathered information in a form that you can manipulate, such as note cards or post-it notes, you can organize that information on a table in piles or columns, and you can move the individual parts around to try out different organizational structures.

Make Something

Some people like to make something three dimensional to organize a paper. For example, you might use string to make a hanging mobile, or use blocks to make a kind of model. For some people, making something is more effective than simply outlining.

Use Body Position to Reinforce Organization

This might seem a little strange, but try changing the position of your body as you move from one section of your writing project to another. For example, in a "pro-con" paper sit facing one way as you organize the "pro" position, and sit facing another way as you organize the "con" position. You might also work in different parts of a room for each section of your paper. For some people, this makes the sections of the paper seem clearer.

Drafting

Visual Learners

Use a Computer

Using a computer will help you keep your draft visually organized and neat. You may want to print several different versions of your paper so that you can see how your paper would look several different ways. Use the "save as" feature to create several different versions of your paper. You may also spot problems more easily on paper than on a computer screen, so don't hesitate to print (and don't forget to recycle).

Keep an Example of the Required Method of Citation Handy

Find out whether you are required to use APA, MLA or some other form of citation, and then keep an example handy; It'll save you headaches later.

Highlight the Topic Sentence of Each Paragraph

Use **bold type** or *italics* for the topic sentence of each paragraph. This will help you focus clearly on the topic sentence, and will also help you rearrange your paper later.

Focus on One Section or Paragraph at a Time as You Draft

Remember that it is easy to move sections of a paper around, so focus your attention on one section at a time. It is often a good idea to work out of order.

Auditory Learners

When in Doubt, Talk it Out

If you have difficulty writing a particular part, just "say what you mean" out loud. Usually, you will "say it" more clearly and simply than you "write it." Use your tape recorder to help you remember what you say, if that helps. This is also a good technique for revision.

Read Quotes in a "Different Voice"

Remember that a quote uses someone else's voice, so read them in another voice to be sure that they have been introduced properly. If you shift into another voice that has not been introduced, it will sound awkward.

Make Your Paper "Sound Clear" First; Make it "Sound Academic" Later

Be sure your sentences make sense. If you feel that you want to make your sentence structure more complicated or that you want to beef up the vocabulary, you can do that later as a part of revision. Clarity is the first job of a good essay.

Read Your Topic Sentences Aloud

If you read your topic sentences one after the other, you should wind up with a kind of summary of your essay. If the topic sentences don't seem to fit together, you may need to reorganize, add something, or modify your transitions.

Kinesthetic Learners

Use a Computer

Computer keyboards are wonderful for kinesthetic learners. Typing will help reinforce your ideas, so that you more fully understand your own points. Further, your fingers can often learn skills, such as spelling, better than your eyes. Typing on a computer, as always, will also make revision easier.

Take Frequent Breaks; Plan Some Physical Activity

You should probably take a break in which you participate in some physical activity between major sections of your paper. You can squeeze a rubber ball, go on a short walk, dance, play a little basketball, whatever you want. Don't interrupt the drafting process for too long, but give yourself a break between sections.

Again, Use Body Positions

Using the same body positions you used for collecting and organizing your main ideas may also help you write about those ideas.

Revising

Visual Learners

Re-Read Your Assignment

If you have been given guidelines for your paper, re-read them after you complete a draft.

Change the Way Your Paper Looks

Suggestions: (1) Change the lighting, (2) Change the font on your computer, (3) Use a computer or photocopier to change the size of the print, (4) If possible, use a color printer or try printing your paper on colored paper

Give Your Eyes a Break Between Drafting and Revision

Twenty-four hours or more would be ideal, but even a few minutes can help.

Outline Your Completed Draft

This will help give you the "big picture" of your paper.

Look for Long Paragraphs or Short Paragraphs

Very short paragraphs may be underdeveloped. Very long paragraphs may contain more than one idea and may need to be revised as two independent paragraphs.

Print a Draft Without Paragraph Breaks

Try printing a draft of your paper as one long paragraph and then read through your paper and make a mark (use a colored pen) every time your paper seems to shift focus. Then compare your marks with your original paragraph breaks.

Auditory Learners

Have Someone Read Your Paper Out Loud

Have someone read your paper out loud while you follow along on another copy. Read sections of the paper to yourself to revise paragraphs or sentences. You may also consider using a computer read-back program to read your paper.

Ask Yourself, "How Would I Say This?"

Say what you mean as simply as you can. You may want to use a tutor or a tape recorder to help you remember what you say. Remember to be clear first.

Listen for Transitions

Usually, the beginning of a paragraph should connect that paragraph to the one that comes before it. If your paragraphs sound unconnected, you need to write stronger transitions.

Outline Your Draft; Read Your Outline Aloud

Reading an outline of a completed draft aloud should help you spot gaps in logic and flaws in organization. Reading an outline is also a good way to think about transitions, since it is easier to see the progression of ideas in an outline than in a full draft.

Kinesthetic Learners

Change the Way Your Body Feels to Change the Way You See a Paper

Sleep is a good way to get a new perspective, but there are other options as well. Exercise, eating, changing clothes, and changing temperature are all ways to change your perspective.

Outline a Completed Draft

Even if you don't look at your outline again, making an outline will give you a better feel for the organization of your paper.

Take Breaks

Again, take breaks after revising major sections. Try to only take breaks during a logical break in the revision process.

Look at Different Versions of Your Paper Side-By-Side

If you are having trouble deciding how to organize your paper, or you can't decide which version of a particular paragraph to use, print both versions and look at them side by side. Moving the different versions around as you compare them might help you make those decisions.

Editing

Visual Learners

Let a Computer Help You

Use spell checkers to help you catch errors. You can also highlight sections that you want to look at closely.

Focus on One Sentence at a Time When Editing

When you draft, you focus on one section at a time. When you revise, you want to get a sense of the whole paper. However, when you edit, focus on individual sentences. Try reading your paper one sentence at a time from back to front. This will keep you from missing mistakes by getting caught up in the flow of your argument. Try printing a draft with several spaces of white space between each sentence.

Mark Editing Changes Clearly

Be sure that you can identify the changes you need to make. You may want to make editing marks in a colored pen or draw attention to your editing marks with a highlighter.

Auditory Learner

Read Aloud

Just as with revision, reading aloud is the best way for an auditory learner to edit. Focus on one sentence at a time (you may want to read one sentence at a time, beginning with the last sentence of the paper and working backwards).

Read Whole Sentences Before You Make Changes

If you try to place commas etc. as you go, you will probably put in more than you need. Therefore, look at whole sentences, whenever possible, as complete units.

Spell Problem Words Aloud

Sometimes, you may find that even though you have spelled a word correctly in one place, you may misspell it in other places. Therefore, double check the spelling, then spell the word out loud each time you find it in your paper.

Read Punctuation Marks Aloud

This may seem odd, but as you edit, read the punctuation marks aloud as if they were words. This may help you catch errors, and in the long term, will help you get a feeling for punctuation.

Kinesthetic Learners

Use a Computer

If you have written your draft on a computer, editing will be much easier. Your body will remember what you wrote earlier, and the computer makes it easy to try new options.

Keep a Checklist

Keep a checklist of important things to remember. For example, you may want to check each quote to be sure that you have cited it correctly, and check off each one as you go. You can even create a checklist of editing activities, such as spell checking, consulting with a tutor, oral reading, double checking quotes and citations etc. A checklist will keep you from forgetting important jobs, and will help keep you on task.

Look at One Section or Sentence at a Time

You might want to print each paragraph on a separate sheet of paper, or use a ruler or a card to isolate individual sentences. Use physical space to make the parts of your paper easier to examine as parts.