



Planning Longer Papers

When planning longer papers, it can be helpful to break them into smaller parts and then set a date for yourself by which you plan to accomplish each goal. This chart can help you to plan out the steps of your writing project!

Date	Goal	Notes/Follow-up
	Choose a research topic.	
	Meet with a research librarian. Identify the most significant/influential sources about your topic, important databases, etc.	
	Start background/contextual research. Find, skim, or read 5-10 sources that provide background information about your topic. Consider not only reference materials, but introductions to collections of essays, book reviews published in journals, and "state of the field" essays.	
	Determine a research question. What are some unanswered questions, unconsidered ideas, or problems with other peoples' arguments about your topic? <i>Is your question audience-aware?</i> <i>Is it ambitious?</i> <i>Is it arguable?</i> <i>Is it answerable?</i> <i>Is it appropriate in scope?</i>	
	Draft your thesis/hypothesis. Double-check: <i>Is your thesis/hypothesis specific, appropriate, debatable, and significant?</i>	
	Having trouble drafting a thesis? Come by the DEWC! We can help!	
	Meet with your professor during office hours. Along with other questions, you might ask: <i>Does thesis sound appropriate for a paper of this scope?</i> <i>Are there any foundational background sources they'd recommend?</i> <i>Are there any similar arguments/articles you can look at as models for organization?</i> <i>Are there any "methods" texts – theoretical backgrounds that can help frame your thesis?</i> (This probably goes without saying, but be sure to take lots of notes during this meeting!)	
	Start your 2nd round of research. Here's a chance to look up the sources recommended by your professor and begin addressing the questions she or he may have posed about your research.	

Write the 2nd draft of your thesis or hypothesis.

What has changed? How have your thesis or hypothesis shifted as you research and write?

Write the 1st draft of your outline.

Start easy. Break your thesis into its most basic parts.

What will you need to prove to get your reader to agree to your thesis?

(This outline will be full of holes. That's okay.)

Start a "significance" file.

Now is the time to begin thinking about the question "so what?"

Starting a "significance" file (on your computer or on paper) will allow you to keep track of how other scholars on your topic frame their work as important, and to jot down ideas about the significance of your own research as they occur to you.

Start your 3rd round of research.

Now that you have a rough draft of your outline, you can begin to fill in the blanks.

Write a 2nd draft of your outline.

This draft should be basically complete (there may be a few holes), although the organization may need work.

Visit your professor again.

Bring your outline. You might include the following among your questions:

Do you notice any significant gaps in my research or logic?

Is there a common counterargument that I may be overlooking?

Do I make a compelling case for the significance of this research?

Do you have any suggestions for organization?

Start your 4th round of research.

Use your conversation with your professor to do research that fills in the gaps, include common counterarguments, or establish the significance of your research.

Write a 3rd draft of your outline.

This time focus not only on content but also on organization. Remember that it's much easier to rearrange ideas at this stage, so try out a few possibilities.

You might also begin thinking about transitions at this point.

Want to chat about organizing your ideas?

Drop by the DEWC for a consultation on your outline!

Write the 1st draft of your paper.

Make sure you have the right coffee, snacks, and music.

Don't judge yourself—just write it down. You have plenty of time to revise later.

Use your outline as a guide, but allow your argument to flow in some interesting ways; you can always adjust it later. The most important thing is to get your ideas on to paper.

CONGRATULATIONS!

You finished a draft! Take a break, get a treat, put up your feet.

WELL DONE!

Get feedback on your 1st draft.

Revising can be so satisfying; now you get the chance to polish up those rough spots in your paper. Check with your professor to see what you're missing or what you need to focus on in the next round of research and writing.

Start your 5th round of research.

Every time you talk to your professor, it can't hurt to dig a little more to fill in the gaps you identify together. The nice thing is, at this stage, your research is specific and focused: just one book, one article, a main idea or two.

Write the 2nd draft.

Don't forget to bring it by the DEWC!

Revise your 2nd draft.

The end is in sight! Keep going!

Visit your professor to talk through any sticking points.

What issues are you concerned about? What arguments are outside the scope of your paper? What are you afraid you're missing?

Start your 6th round of research.

Last time! You can do it! You just need a tiny detail here and there!

Write final draft.

Coffee, candles, upbeat music, whatever it takes—get your final draft done!!! Don't write your final draft right before your paper is due. Give yourself an earlier deadline so you have some breathing room.

Take 24 hours (or more) to step back.

Remember when you had a life?
Go do that.

Proofread/edit final draft.

Read it out loud to catch odd-sounding sentences, double check for punctuation and editing errors, for proper citations, formatting, etc. Look at transitions and verb usage; catch any repeated lines or weird fragments.

Come to the DEWC and read it out loud! We'd love to celebrate with you and do some last minute polishing on your writing!

TURN IT IN!!!

You are currently the winner of all things. Take a nap and then meet your friends for a well-deserved celebration of your hard work. You did it! WELL DONE!
