Effective Writing Strategies

2. Choose a Topic
- Start thinking of a topic as soon as the paper is assigned
- Discuss your ideas with your professor, TA, peers
- Do light research: use the library, academic databases, Internet
- Once you have chosen a topic, stick to it!

1. Brainstorm
Choose one or several of the following ways to brainstorm ideas for your paper.
1. Identify strengths and weaknesses in the literature, use two columns to organize
2. Ask yourself questions about the topic, and then answer them
3. Mind mapping
   - On a blank piece of paper or using an online mind-mapping tool, create a web of ideas
4. Record ideas
   - Instead of writing down your ideas, say them out loud and record them
5. Talk your ideas out with a friend
6. Free-writing
   - Choose topic that you will write about
   - Set a time limit for writing (start with 2-5 minutes)
   - During this time, write whatever pops into your head
   - Can write in point form, single words, on lines of a paper or all over the paper
   - At the end of the time limit, look over what you have written

3. Outline
*Use bullet points and short sentences
a) Intro: Begin very generally and end with your thesis statement
b) Body
   - Jot down the main ideas of each section of the paper
   - Jot down 3 supporting statements for each main idea
   - Play with the order of your main ideas, see which order flows best
c) Conclusion
   - Begin by repeating the thesis statement and end more generally
4. Feedback
- Get feedback on essay ideas from peers, professors, TAs
- Take a walk and think about your outline/sleep on it before starting to write

5. Rough Draft
*Does not need to be perfect!

a) Introduction
- Should grab the reader’s attention, set up the issue, lead into your thesis statement

b) Body
- Each paragraph should focus on a single idea that supports your thesis
- Begin paragraphs with topic sentences
- Support assertions with evidence
- Present ideas in the clearest, most sensible way you can
- Speak to your reader as if he were sitting in front of you

c) Conclusion
- Make a quick wrap-up sentence
- End on a memorable thought, a quotation, an interesting twist of logic, or a call to action
- Make sure the conclusion summarizes the main points discussed in the paper

6. Edit
- Polish language: correct grammar, make sentences flow, incorporate rhythm, adjust formality
- Proofread until it reads just how you want it to sound
- Read it out loud so that you can hear how it sounds
- Swap your paper with a peer so that you can both benefit from peer-review
- Have someone who is not familiar with the subject read the paper to ensure that the topic is understandable and clearly presented

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