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Planning & Organizing Ideas

Academic writing requires that you present your topic to the reader in a straightforward and logical manner with sufficient supporting evidence and a clear structure.

Planning and organizing your ideas is the first step toward this goal.
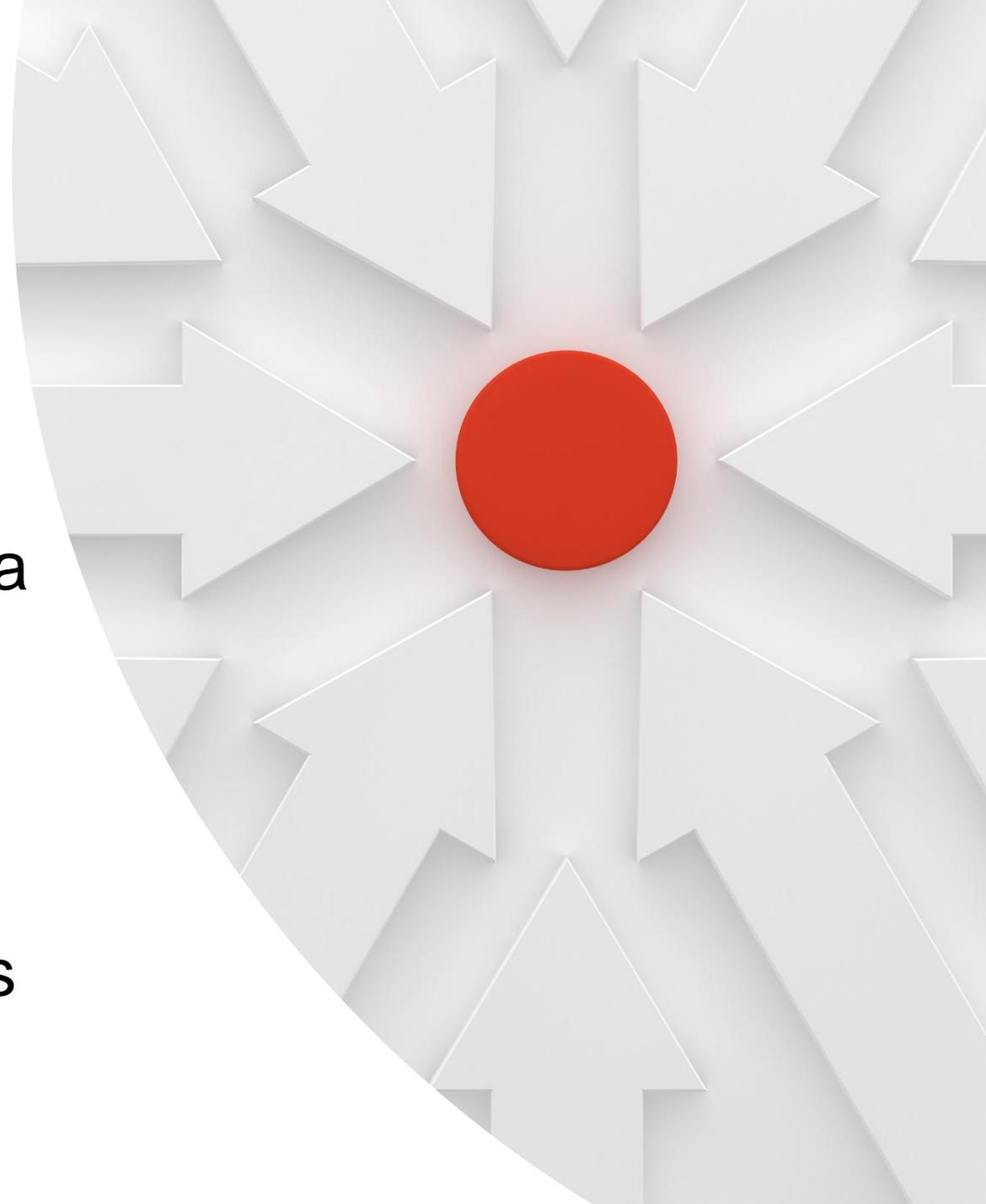
This presentation covers:

1. choosing a narrow topic

2. organizing ideas

3. outlining

4. creating well-synthesized paragraphs from an outline

Choosing a Narrow Topic

You must narrow your topic enough to have a clear understanding of the issue, be able to organize clearly what you want to present, and effectively and interestingly communicate it in your paper.

Why a Narrow Topic?

You only have so much time and space to convey your point in an assignment.

- If your topic is too broad, you cannot effectively cover the information necessary to explain it clearly or in-depth enough to make your point.

- Narrowing your topic makes it manageable for you and understandable for the reader.

- It is the writer's responsibility to relate all important information to the reader.

How Do You Narrow a Topic?

You may be given a topic or have the chance to pick your own. Before beginning your actual paper, you can take steps to make sure it is narrow enough.

• Brainstorm everything you already know about the topic

• Ask yourself Wh- questions

• Do some basic background research

• Take a stance

• Identify a question and application for your topic

Brainstorming

- Write down your main topic/idea.

- Make a list of everything you can think of about your topic. No need to put it in order. Just do some *free association*.

- After you jot down your ideas, go back and look at what you've written. Circle the parts that interest you.

- Do more brainstorming about the circled areas.

Ask Yourself Wh- Questions

Wh- questions can help you break your topic into smaller categories and identify specifics.

- Who? (school-aged children)

- What? (speech impairments)

- Where? (United States)

- When? (current trends)

- Why? (identify the most effective speech therapy methods)

- How? (therapy methods)

Do Some Basic Background Research

Basic research can help you see broad trends and get a feel for your topic.

- Search Google News or Google Scholar

- Use the databases provided by the school:
  http://library.madonna.edu/research/research-survival-guide

- Start collecting keywords and search terms for further research and answers to your Wh- questions.

- Get a broad idea of what is being said about your topic.

Take a Stance

If your assignment requires you to write a paper from a certain perspective, you will need to form an opinion based on your current knowledge or your basic background research.

- As you do further research, your stance may change.

- Remember to research all sides of an issue. This will help you strengthen your argument or change your opinion.

Identify a Question and Application for your Topic

Think about your topic in relation to a specific question/issue and a particular application.

I want to research _____ (topic)

in order to know _____ (issue/question)

for the purpose of _____ (application).

The application can be project-driven (assignment, service-learning, etc.), audience-driven (persuasion, information), or purpose-driven (career-related, contributing to the body of research).

Identify a Question and Application for your Topic

I want to research trends in behavioral therapy for adolescents

in order to know the best type of therapy for children

for the purpose of preparing me to be a better therapist.

(purpose-driven)

Identify a Question and Application for your Topic

I want to research management styles

in order to know which styles are most and least effective in the workplace

for the purpose of persuading my readers that one style is the best.

(audience-driven)

Identify a Question and Application for your Topic

I want to research the effects of eating organic foods

in order to determine if organic foods are better than non-organic foods

for the purpose of producing a brochure summarizing the issues for my composition class.

(project-driven)

Organizing Ideas

As you brainstorm your topic or start doing some initial research, you will want to start loosely organizing the information you come across. You can then evolve that into a clearly organized structure from which to create your paper.

Why Do You Need to Organize Ideas?

Using organizational techniques can help you:

- remember and sort details

- keep multiple ideas in mind

- analyze parts of an idea

- see connections

- create a structure that you can turn into a paper

Strategies for Organizing Ideas

Organizing both your ideas and the information you find from sources can be done in many ways. Here are just a few. Choose the strategy that is most effective for you.

- idea mapping

- using index cards

- categorizing ideas by theme

Idea Mapping

Idea mapping is the practice of using diagrams to jot down ideas in a non-linear fashion.

Idea mapping is also called

- clustering
- bubble diagramming
- webbing
- cognitive mapping
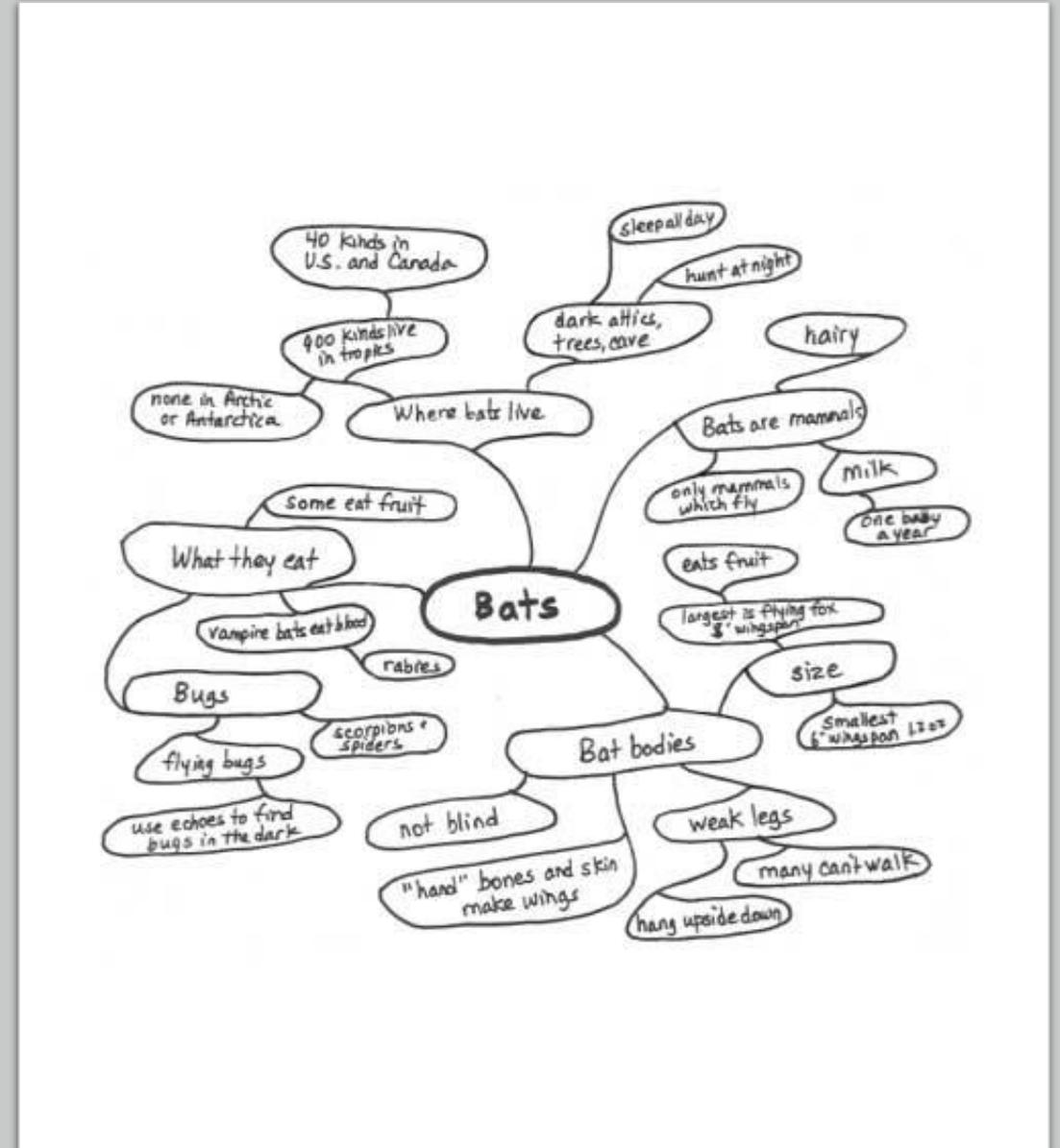
Index Cards

Using colorful index cards allows you to physically separate ideas or sources by color.

For example, if you are sorting ideas for the benefits of eating organic foods, it might look like this:

pesticides
- mostly absent in organic foods
- pesticide safety tested in animals – not humans
- negative effects to young brains

Feldschur, K. (2017). Health benefits of organic food, farming outlined in new report. Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health.

pesticides
- lower pesticide residue
- difference in health outcomes unclear

Mayo Clinic. (2020, April). Organic foods: Are they safer? More nutritious? Mayo Clinic.

antibiotics
- antibiotic resistance in animals -> humans
- organic farms, restricted antibiotic use, natural conditions, lower infections, improved animal health, lower risk to humas

Feldschur, K. (2017). Health benefits of organic food, farming outlined in new report. Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health.

bacteria/antibiotics
- possible higher levels of antibiotic resistant bacteria
- same risk of bacterial contamination as in non-organic foods

Mayo Clinic. (2020, April). Organic foods: Are they safer? More nutritious? Mayo Clinic.

nutrients
- higher contents of some nutrients (not of sufficient importance)

Feldschur, K. (2017). Health benefits of organic food, farming outlined in new report. Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health.

nutrients
- Some studies: moderate increase in nutrients

Mayo Clinic. (2020, April). Organic foods: Are they safer? More nutritious? Mayo Clinic.

Categorizing by Theme

As you research, you may start to notice similar themes appearing repeatedly from different sources.

Sources can be listed by theme with a short description or quote.

culture, conflict & cognition

Park, S. H., & Ungson, G. R. 1997. The effect of national culture... motiva... Manag...

Des...
adip...
et d...

Doney...
Unders...
develo...
23(3):...

Des...
adip...
et d...

economics & political economy

Hoskisson, R. E., Eden, L., Lau, C. M., & Wright, M. 2000. Strategy in emerging economies. Academy of Management Journa...

Des...
adip...
labo...

Peng,...
planne...
organi...
Manag...

Des...
adip...
labo...

business dynamics and strategy

Christensen, C. M., & Bower, J. L. 1996. Customer power, strategic investment, and the failure of leading firms. Strategic Management Journal, 17(3): 197–218

Description: Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed do eiusmod tempor incididunt ut labore et dolore magna. Ut enim ad minim veniam.

Inkpen, A. C., & Beamish, P. W. 1997. Knowledge, bargaining power, and the instability of international joint ventures.
Academy of Management Review, 22(1): 177–202.

Description: Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed do eiusmod tempor incididunt ut labore et dolore magna. Ut enim ad minim veniam.

Outlining

Outlines are a general description that give the most essential features but not all the details. They are much more linear than idea maps.

Why is Outlining Beneficial?

As ideas start to formulate, you will want to sort and organize them so that you have a clear picture of your content.

Outlines help by:

• Giving you the bones of your paper

• Offering a sense of hierarchy

• Keeping you on track

• Providing a visual reminder

How Do You Outline?

- Decide what ideas best answer your research question and that you want to focus on

- List your thesis statement at the beginning

- List the major points that you have identified in an order that will build toward your conclusion

- List supporting points under each larger category

Examples of Outlines

I.   Introduction
- A.   Background
- B.   Thesis Statement

II.   First Main Idea
- A.   Supporting Content
  1.   Examples, reasons
     - a.   Specific details: facts, statistics, quotes
- B.   Supporting Content

III.   Second Main Idea
- A.   Supporting Content
- B.   Supporting Content

IV.   Third Main Idea
- A.   Supporting Content
- B.   Supporting Content

V.   Conclusion
- A.   Restatement of Thesis
- B.   Concluding Strategy

Academic Writing and the ESL Learner

I.   Introduction
- A.   Background
- B.   Thesis Statement

II.   Recognizing the existence of a problem
- A.   Lack of preparation
- B.   Experience of frustration and alienation

III.   Identifying the main reasons for the problem
- A.   The gap between rules and application
- B.   Cultural and linguistic differences

IV.   Building a new learning environment
- A.   Different pedagogical strategies
- B.   Process vs. Product

V.   Conclusion
- A.   Restatement of Thesis
- B   Concluding Strategy

Creating Well-Synthesized Paragraphs from an Outline

You can now use your outline as a guide to construct an entire essay containing paragraphs that merge your ideas and understanding of the topic with information from sources.

From Outline to Paragraph

Your outline is your blueprint for your essay. Use it to help you write.

- Main topics (I, II, III) → topic sentences
- Subtopics (1, 2, 3) → supporting points in each paragraph
- Subpoints (A, B, C) → primary examples and reasons
- Specific details (a, b, c) → secondary examples, facts, statistics, quotations, etc.

Paragraph Synthesis

What is the meaning of synthesis?
- combination of parts to form a whole
- combination of ideas to form a theory

Why do we need paragraph synthesis?
- paragraphs ≠ individual sentences strung together
- paragraphs = carefully and thoughtfully combined sentences

Paragraph Synthesis

Do not:
- Overuse quotations
- Underuse your own understanding and analysis

Do:
- Use quotations as support
- Have a deep understanding of the topic and showcase your analysis of the issues

Comparing Paragraphs

Medical treatments have clear costs for individual patients, including unpleasant side effects, little information about long-term use, and uncertainty that they will yield significant weight loss. The financial burden is heavy as well; the drugs cost more than $3 a day on average (Duenwald, 2004). In each of the clinical trials, use of medication was accompanied by expensive behavioral therapies, including counseling, nutrition education, fitness advising, and monitoring. As Critser (2003) noted in his book *Fat Land*, use of weight-loss drugs is unlikely to have an effect without the proper "support system" – one that includes doctors, facilities, time, and money (p. 3). For many families, this level of care is prohibitively expensive.

Comparing Paragraphs

Let's compare two paragraphs.

- The 1st is not well-synthesized

- The 2nd is well-synthesized

Can you see why?

Parents are always trying to find ways to encourage healthy eating in their children. Elena Pearl Ben-Joseph, a doctor and writer for *KidsHealth*, encourages parents to be role models for their children by not dieting or vocalizing concerns about their body image. The first popular diet began in 1863. William Banting named it the "Banting" diet after himself, and it consisted of eating fruits, vegetables, meat, and dry wine. Despite the fact that dieting has been around for over a hundred and fifty years, parents should not diet because it hinders children's understanding of healthy eating.

Parents are always trying to find ways to encourage healthy eating in their children. Different scientists and educators have different strategies for promoting a well-rounded diet while still encouraging body positivity in children. David R. Just and Joseph Price suggest in their article "Using Incentives to Encourage Healthy Eating in Children" that children are more likely to eat fruits and vegetables if they are given a reward (855-856). Similarly, Elena Pearl Ben-Joseph, a doctor and writer for *KidsHealth*, encourages parents to be role models for their children. She states that "parents who are always dieting or complaining about their bodies may foster these same negative feelings in their kids. Try to keep a positive approach about food" (Ben-Joseph). Martha J. Nepper and Weiwen Chai support Ben-Joseph's suggestions in their article "Parents' Barriers and Strategies to Promote Healthy Eating among School-age Children." Nepper and Chai note, "Parents felt that patience, consistency, educating themselves on proper nutrition, and having more healthy foods available in the home were important strategies when developing healthy eating habits for their children." By following some of these ideas, parents can help their children develop healthy eating habits while still maintaining body positivity.

Getting help with academic writing:

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writingcenter@madonna.edu

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