

# TIPS FOR WRITING ESSAYS

1. **Start early.**
2. **Analyze the wording of the assignment;** make a list of the various points you are asked to cover. Assess the **purpose** behind the project and the **audience** you will need to address.
3. Use a variety of **strategies for getting ideas** before sitting down to draft your essay: non-stop writing; question-asking (who, what, when, where, why, how); listing ideas and clustering them into categories (such as pros and cons, similarities and differences); creating a map of the connections between your points; talking with a friend, classmate, or writing center tutor about your points and your plan for developing them.
4. Write out a **working thesis statement (main idea) or a question** you plan to answer. You can refine it later. A thesis statement should not be just a statement of fact but a statement saying something about that fact.
5. **Make a scratch outline** of the points you want to use to develop your main idea; ask yourself how each point connects to the thesis and experiment with different possible sequences to find the one that promises to be most effective. Writing well means knowing you have choices.
6. **Write a draft straight through, without stopping to fine tune such things as wording and punctuation.** Don't get hung up on writing the perfect introduction. You may indeed need to pause as you write to rethink some aspect of the essay or to reword a key point. But wait to proofread and refine your wording and punctuation until you've gotten all your ideas down.
7. When you've completed a draft (or if you run into trouble while writing it), write the **main idea or ideas for each paragraph in the margin.** If there is more than one main idea per paragraph, ask yourself about the relationship between the ideas. Do they belong in the same paragraph or does each of them need a separate paragraph? Do any of the ideas no longer fit with your focus as you have developed it?
8. Check to see that the **main point of each paragraph connects clearly to the main point** of the essay as a whole and to the paragraphs on either side.
9. **Imagine questions that an intelligent reader who knows less about your subject than you do might ask about specific points in your essay.** Are there words that this reader needs to have defined or points that need more support (reasons, evidence, examples) before the reader will understand or be ready to listen to what you have to say?
10. **Read your essay out loud.** Listen for sentences that are difficult to read; difficulty with reading usually signals that a sentence needs revision.