# Preparing to Write: Organizing Your Information

Beginning the writing process can be very difficult because it is hard to know what information to include, and how to arrange it to tell your story. As a writer you will be acting as both a "scholar" and a "chef" to complete your project. Wearing your scholar hat will help you to decide what the most important information is to include. As a chef you must prepare your project in a way that works well for your particular topic. Below are some tips for how to navigate the writing process.
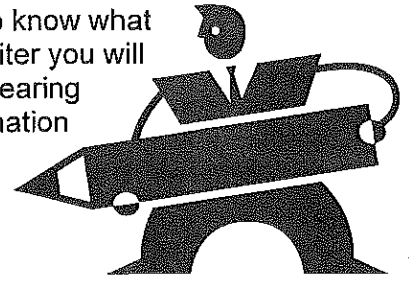
Top Tips on Writing for All Categories:

- **Break it down.** Instead of trying to write everything in one night, create an outline or guide that lets you write in smaller pieces. Using this as a guide for your project will also help viewers and judges more easily understand your project. Also, If you have divided the writing responsibilities up, make sure your writing style is cohesive in the end.
- **Use your thesis to guide you.** Everything included in your project should lead back to supporting your thesis. This should also help you divide information into smaller, more manageable pieces.
- **Seek advice.** Remember you want your project to be easily understood by anyone, so if your friends have that "huh?" look on their face, you may want to consider revising your work.
- **Keep it short and to the point.** Make sure you do the work for the viewer; no one goes to a museum to read a book. Before writing it is important to analyze your information so you know what to argue.
- **Once is not enough.** It is crucial to have at least one re-write of your information. Writing is a process, and the first draft will likely be inadequate for most projects.
- **Use an active voice.** Things rarely just "happen" in history, someone or something is usually propelling it. Instead of saying "the Berlin Wall *came* down in 1989," try, "the Berlin Wall was *taken* down in 1989."
- **Viewers can't read your mind.** You have been working on this topic for months, for some of the viewers and judges this may be the first time they encounter it. Don't assume they know anything about what you are presenting.
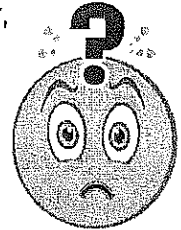
Strategies for the Writing Process

- **Start by identifying the most important quotes, excerpts, images, etc.** Write these on notecards that you can arrange on a table.
- **Write it out on paper first.** Writing key points on notecards and then moving them around into different configurations can help you segment your work. This can also be a good way to save drafts you may want to come back to later, rather than having just erased them on the computer.
- **The best place to start is to start.** Don't let your time go to waste because you are afraid of "getting something wrong" or not writing it perfectly the first time. Once you write something on paper it is much easier for others to advise you and help you work on your writing.

Organizing Your Information: Papers

Papers are the traditional way of organizing and presenting information. The best way to start your paper is to create an outline. It may be useful for you to physically write out your thoughts first, placing key events, points, and evidence on notecards and arranging them on a flat surface. This may give you a better idea about how exactly you would like to organize your paper.
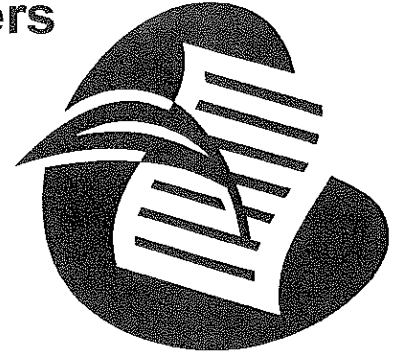
Basic Outline:

Introduction

- Use this section to *briefly* introduce your topic. Give the reader enough information to orient them about when and where your topic is happening. Don't spend a great deal of time explaining everything (that is what the rest of your paper is for).
- Your thesis should be included in this first paragraph as well. It should help to outline the rest of your argument for the reader.

Body Paragraphs

- Each of these paragraphs should make a point that *ties back to your thesis*.
- *Tell a story* with your writing. You want the information to be segmented and arranged in a way that flows from one point to the next.
- You may want to consider tools like *subtitles* to orient the reader and make it easier to fill in your information as you write.

Conclusion

The conclusion of an effective paper *restates* (in a slightly different way than the thesis) your argument and *summarizes* your evidence. Every sentence in this paragraph needs to be powerful and use an active voice. This is your final impression- so make it a good one!

Other notes to consider when writing:
- **Physically arrange your work on a flat surface.** This often lets you see "the whole picture" which normally can't fit on a computer screen.
- **Don't throw anything away!** You may want to discard a lot of your work as you go because it doesn't seem useful to you. However, often people who read early drafts of your work may make suggestions to include a part you tossed away. Don't create more work by throwing parts away prematurely.
- **Pay close attention to grammar, writing style, and citation.** Avoid redundant sentence structures (starting sentences the same way) and use a thesaurus to spice up your writing!