

Writing Advice
LART602
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As you work your way into research projects, please consider the following advice.

Work from a plan (“outline”).

- You need some overall structure to your efforts, if there is to be some overall structure to the results (which, of course, there must be). So:
- Keep your topic (or issue) firmly in front of you, along with your thesis (as available), as you work. One way to do this is to list topic and thesis each time you sit down to work.
- As you accrue materials, plot their presence in your overall plan. This is a relatively simple matter of adding to what, in effect, is the outline of your essay. Be sure to indicate – in complete sentences – how each additional component is related to your overall issue and thesis.
- Your plan can, of course, evolve. If you make changes to your issue or thesis, go back and make changes to everything else to reflect those changes. Do this right away, so that you don’t wind up with orphaned materials or an inconsistent set of research objects.
- It is particularly important that you get a clear idea of what you are working with as you begin your project. Too little clarity at the outset can lead to significant problems later on. So:
- Take such notes or draft such text as will (a) summarize the content of a given resource and (b) indicate its role in your overall project.
- Keep things simple. It is tempting to list half a dozen or more distinct ideas in support of your thesis. But be realistic about your research burden, and keep the overall line of your essay as simple as possible. The simplest of essays will be more than adequately challenging.

Work on one or two things at a time.

- It is difficult to manage more than one or two complex sets of ideas at once.
- You already have one set, which is your overall thesis and issue. As soon as you start thinking about some specific portion of your project (e.g., a particular reading or author), you have added a second set.
- A best practice, then, is to work with only one reading or author at a time, as you develop your research. Any given material may ask for or require pursuit of further material.
- Depending on how many distinct readings or authors you plan on using, you will have to make decisions about how long to spend with one before moving on to another.

Begin to write.

- You can begin drafting text as soon as you have a firm idea of what you want to say – for any given portion of the essay.
- Generally speaking, you will draft the essay in stages or sections. The sections of the essay are defined by the overall plan.
- Some portions can and should be drafted earlier than others. In particular, you should early on draft an account of your issue, particularly where this may itself be a complex task. Re-read this portion frequently and adjust it or the plan as needed.