

Planning and Getting Started with Your Writing Project

Name of Your Project: _____
Course/Instructor: _____
Final Deadline: _____
Date(s) to Schedule Writing Center Consultations: _____

Thinking about the Purpose / Goal of Your Writing Project

Review the assignment guidelines. What **verbs** stand out? Persuade? Analyze? Explain? Summarize? List the verbs that seem important:

Explain in your own words what you believe to be the primary **purpose** of this writing project. What should you accomplish with the project?

Thinking about the Audience of Your Project

Review the assignment guidelines again. What language from the assignment guidelines directs you to write for a specific audience? If there's nothing included in your writing assignment guidelines, what has your instructor shared with you about the audience for your project? Summarize what your *instructor* has shared about the project's audience here:

If your instructor provided little or no guidance about your audience, identify below who you believe your audience for this project should be. *NOTE: Avoid thinking of a "general reader." There's no such thing because all readers are specific. Also, for most college writing projects, your writing will benefit if you avoid thinking of your instructor as your audience. Instead, think of the audience as college faculty, researchers, and other well-educated readers who have some expertise in your subject. Sometimes your instructor will not have expertise in your subject!*

Think through the following characteristics about your targeted audience. Here you're making broad assumptions, but try not to think of this process as stereotyping. Instead, this is where you consider your readers' unique identities, their values, the arguments they hold, their background, their life experience. Be sure to avoid all-inclusive descriptions, like "My readers are all ages, from all educational levels, who live anywhere in the world . . ." Would that mean you're writing for an audience that includes 1-year old children who live in mainland China as well as particle physicists working at the Large Hadron Collider in Switzerland? Be realistic about your targeted audience.

What is the age range and educational level of your readers?

Where do your readers live?

What is the political affiliation of your readers?

What is the religious affiliation of your readers?

What is the race/ethnicity of your readers?

What is the gender identity of your readers?

What are the hobbies, interests, and occupations of your readers?

What is the general position your readers have about this topic? What do your readers believe?

What values do your readers hold that are relevant to your topic?

What do your readers already know about your topic, and where might they object to your position?

Planning a Timeline for Your Project

Review the assignment guidelines and identify the requirements you'll need to meet for this project. Also include any additional steps you would like to complete, even if they're not required.

- ___ Complete a series of brainstorming and invention activities by
- ___ Submit a proposal by
- ___ Submit an outline by
- ___ Spend time locating research/sources around _____ and/or schedule a consultation with a Writing Center research consultant around _____
- ___ Submit first draft to my instructor by _____
- ___ Complete a peer review session on _____
- ___ Complete a Writing Center consultation around _____ & _____
- ___ Submit a second draft to my instructor by _____
- ___ Read more research around _____
- ___ Do a final revision by _____
- ___ Complete editing and proofreading by _____

Getting Started on Your Project: Identifying Your Topic/Question

First, review the assignment guidelines. Does everything make sense to you, or do you need to clarify anything about the writing assignment? What requirements are unclear to you, and when can you visit with your instructor during office hours to ask about these requirements?

Second, consider your topic. Has your instructor *assigned* you a topic? Are you being asked to respond to a specific question? If so, what's your *assigned topic*?

If you will be choosing your own topic, consider how to *narrow your topic*. Begin with a broad topic, like "U.S. politics in the 21st century." Then focus that topic: "mud-slinging and other ad hominem attacks in t.v. advertising during the 2016 presidential election," for example. What's your *broad topic*?

What's your *focused topic*?

Finally, consider writing a *research question* or an *essay question* that you can answer over the course of your project: "How did mud-slinging and ad hominem attacks affect undecided voters' voting choices in the 2016 presidential election?" for example. What's your question?

Getting Started on Your Project: Brainstorming and Invention

Before you even start writing, consider completing at least THREE distinct *invention* activities about your topic. *Invention*, from classical rhetoric, includes brainstorming ideas, considering effective arguments, getting to know your audience, understanding counterarguments, and forming new insights into your topic.

This handout does not provide lengthy direction on invention, but the [Writer's Handbook at the University of Wisconsin Madison](#) has a wonderful series of invention activities that all writers can practice. Here's an example from that handbook. This invention activity is called "clustering" or "mindmapping":

