

Sample Timeline for Writing a Paper

As you glance over your syllabus, you notice there are a few papers assigned throughout the semester. It's been a while since you last wrote a paper, and this seems a bit different than what you're used to. Actually, this is a little overwhelming. What should you write about? Where should you even *start*?

If this sounds familiar, this is the tip sheet for you! There's no one way to write a paper, but these general guidelines will help keep you on track.

4+ Weeks Before the Paper is Due:

- Start early! Most people do their best work with some lead time to think and plan. This is especially true when there are several assignments due and you need to make time for all of them.
- If you have any questions about the assignment, ask your professor for the answers *before* you start working on it.
- Make an appointment to meet with the research librarian. She can help you brainstorm your topic and narrow it down to fit the assignment.

3+ Weeks Before the Paper is Due:

- Meet with the research librarian and develop a research strategy for your topic. Figure out what search terms you should use, what kind of sources you want, and where you should start looking. She can also help you learn to use citation management software like Zotero.
- Make a list of sources and start figuring out which ones are the most valuable for your paper. If possible, organize them in a citation manager so they are ready when you start writing.
- If there are sources you want to get via Interlibrary Loan/We Deliver, submit your request now so that it will arrive in time!
- Read your sources and work up an outline of your paper. You can use a rough mental outline, a detailed written outline, or anything in between. The important thing is to have an idea of what you want to say. If you have trouble, the Writing Center can help!

2+ Weeks Before the Paper is Due:

- Write a first draft of your paper based on your outline. Don't worry about perfection—your main goal is to get your ideas written down and clarify your main thoughts.
- Bring your draft to the Writing Center! You can get feedback on everything from a rough outline to a near-final product. Running your work by a second set of eyes, especially a writing tutor, will give you a broader perspective on what you've written. Feedback on the clarity of your focus and the organization of your ideas will be particularly helpful at this stage.

1+ Weeks Before the Paper is Due:

- Revise your draft based on the feedback you got the previous week. Double-check that this draft meets the requirements of the assignment.
- Consider bringing your new draft back to the Writing Center for additional feedback. This is the time to make sure your main points are clear, your paragraphs are well-organized, and there are no pesky sentences with awkward syntax or double-meanings.

0+ Weeks Before the Paper is Due:

- Read through your paper one last time to fix any typos or mistakes.
- Turn in your paper and relax, confident in the knowledge that you have done a good job!