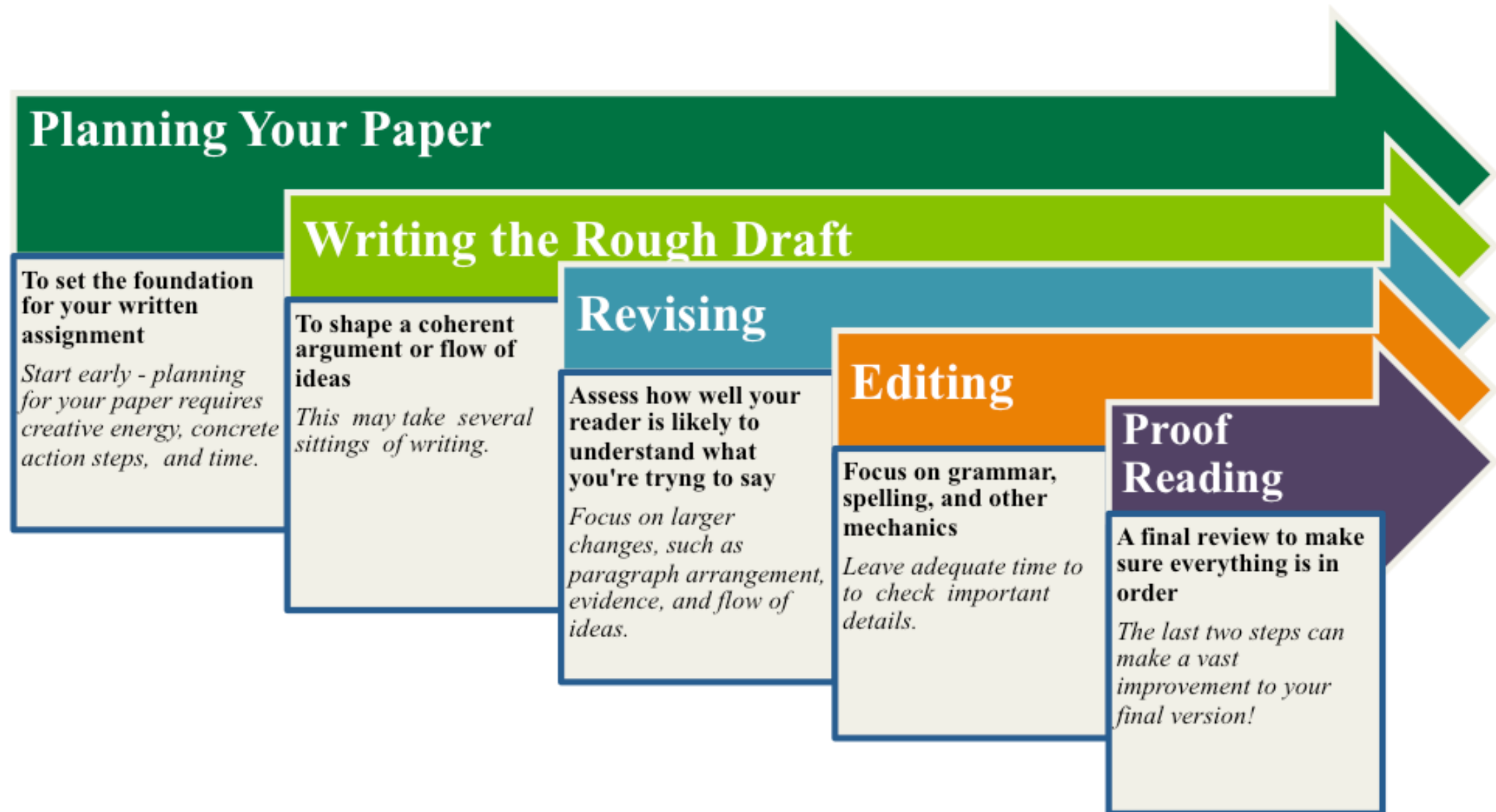


School of Criminology and Criminal Justice Academic Writing

Writing to university standards is both challenging and rewarding. Writing assignments offer you the opportunity to engage in a deep learning activity and become more actively involved in your educational process. Writing usually entails careful planning, searching for accurate information, reading, note-taking, reflecting, explaining, and analyzing concepts and ideas that result in a coherent final product. It takes more time than you may think to produce a well-constructed paper. From planning to proofreading, there are five important steps that you should utilize to complete written assignments, such as research papers.



Step 1 - Planning Your Paper

Putting in adequate time to plan your paper is important for the outcome of your written assignment. Beginning early enough gives you the needed time to think, research, and write. Here are some specific ways you can begin:

- Carefully review the assignment guidelines and assessment criteria. Ask your instructor questions if you need clarification.
- Plan to complete your paper several weeks early to give yourself enough time to make final revisions.
- Choose a topic from the course outline or one approved by your instructor.
- Develop research questions related to your topic to guide the specific focus for your paper.
- Consider the quality and sources of information gathered for your topic.
- When choosing books, consult the Table of Contents and Indexes to see what the authors have to say on the topic you have chosen. Start by reading the abstract, introduction, and conclusion to a chapter or article because these parts usually highlight the author's main ideas and arguments.

- Make judgments as to whether you want to read further and whether to include their research, comments, or observations in your paper.
- Make notes and record your sources of information, such as the main ideas, outstanding examples, and important conclusions. Any information you collect should relate directly to your topic or research questions. If an author in a textbook mentions a particularly relevant journal article that you cannot find in the library, obtain it through Inter-Library Loans (allow for up to two weeks for delivery). Ask for help from a UFV Librarian if needed.
- Be able to identify your sources accurately. Write the page number if you plan to use direct quotes. Include, in note form, your own reaction to what the authors have said. Re-read your notes for omissions.
- Always ask yourself at each stage of the research process, "What does this article, book, or the notes have to do with my main argument or description of my topic?"
- From your research, begin to develop a central question or idea (the thesis) as the guiding direction for your paper.
- Create an outline that flows from your central idea and the main issues you intend to address. Under each main idea, briefly organize your supporting points. Your instructor may be willing to review your outline.

Step 2 - Writing the Rough Draft

Drafting is about shaping a coherent argument or flow of ideas. The first draft should have a clearly defined order - either chronological or based on the logical flow of ideas. Here is a general framework for your paper:

Introduction

Many students find that the introduction is best written at the end of the writing process. Use the Introduction to highlight what you are going to do in the main body of your paper. Capture your reader's interest by demonstrating why your topic is timely, important, insightful, or unique.

Body

You may wish to begin your first draft by writing your paper in sections. Remember that you do not need to write your paper from beginning to end. Writing the body of your paper in sections or paragraphs can be accomplished by shaping the main ideas identified in your outline. To allow the reader to follow your thinking, introduce main ideas in relation to your thesis statement. Depending on the length of your paper, it may also be helpful to use headings as a “map” for the reader to follow your thinking. Another way to help the reader is to create transitional sentences that move your reader from one section to another. Essentially, the body of your paper needs to deliver on the ideas or statements presented in the introduction. In many cases, it is

desirable to integrate course concepts into your paper topic. This demonstrates that you can apply the knowledge learned in class. Finally, make sure to document where your ideas came from to avoid plagiarizing or submitting falsely or inaccurately cited work.

Conclusion

Like the introduction, it is often more effective to write the conclusion last. Not only should you avoid simply repeating the introduction, but avoid inserting new ideas in your conclusion. The conclusion summarizes key points and serves to remind the reader about the purpose of the paper. It could also answer the ‘so what’ question about your topic.

References

References refer to a listing of all authors and sources used in your paper. This listing forms the last section of your paper. All sources cited in your reference list should appear in your paper and only those references cited in your paper should be included in your reference list. In other words, if you have cited and referenced your paper correctly, the in-text citations and your references list should match exactly.

Step 3 - Revising

The purpose of revising your paper is to assess how well your reader is likely to understand what you are saying. Avoid getting too caught up in spelling, grammar, and other mechanical aspects of your paper in this phase of your writing. Rather, focus on making larger changes, such as paragraph arrangement, adding in new evidence, re-writing your introduction, or checking for the flow of ideas.

Some other questions you can ask yourself:

- Is this paper interesting, relevant, and unique?
- Am I clear about the central idea?
- Are my main ideas well supported with accurate and relevant evidence? Avoid unsupported claims or generalizations. Information from your courses is not common knowledge and must be properly referenced and indicate where you obtained the information, whether from the course text, lectures, seminars, guest speakers, or additional secondary re- search.
- Have I been respectful and objective to varying positions?
- Have I defined and directly applied key concepts from the course?
- Are my paragraphs' topic sentences clear?

- Have I been careful not to overuse direct quotes?
- How is my own voice portrayed? If you find your inner voice sounding unclear or stumbling over sentences, chances are your reader will too. Pay attention to how you “speak” to the reader.

This may also be a good time to seek the advice of the Academic Success Centre if you are not a strong writer.

Step 4 - Editing

Slowly read through your paper for details. Preferably, do this by reading your paper out loud, slowly, and from a double-spaced print copy of your draft.

This allows you to correct errors. Check for spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Ask yourself the following type of questions:

- Have I used simple, formal language?
- Have I used clear sentences? Does each sentence make sense? Is each sentence grammatically correct?

- Have I avoided errors, such as using:
 - semi-colons (;) to join two or more sentences together?
 - abbreviations (e.g., etc.)?
 - contractions (can't, won't, don't)?
 - clichés (such as “it could be worse”) and overly used common phrases (such as hopefully, in hopes of)?
 - colloquialisms (overuse of “like,” “basic,” “basically,” “really”)?
 - ambiguous phrases (such as “research shows”)?
 - profanity and slang (“cons,” “cops,” “B&E’s,” “dope”)?
- Have I used the American Psychological Association (APA) writing style convention correctly?
- Have I correctly indicated when I am using others’ ideas?
- Have I minimized my use of quotations and explained quotes because they are not always self-explanatory?
- Is every word spelled correctly? Have I used words appropriately?

Make sure you do not rely on computerized spelling and grammar packages since they cannot be relied on to identify all mistakes!

Some Additional Tips:

- Sound authoritative without being condescending. Be interesting and varied, active rather than passive, specific rather than vague.
- Write for a general academic audience that is uninformed about your topic.
- Avoid sensationalism. You are writing an academic research paper that is informed by science. While you may write passionately, appeal to your reader’s sense of reason, rather than romanticizing or exaggerating an issue.

Step 5 - Proofread Your Final Copy

Almost done! Read out loud as you go through your paper one final time. Ensure that your paper *sounds* right. If it does not sound right, it will not *read* right. Make all necessary corrections to your final draft. You may wish to use the following final checklist for your paper before you hand it in.

1. Submit your paper in Word or PDF (check with your instructor about their required format). Double space the text and leave one-inch (2.54 cm) margins around the page. Do not leave large sections of blank white space as filler to meet page requirements.
2. While there are many interesting and creative fonts, use 12-point Times New Roman font. Word processors can let you know how many words are in your paper.
3. Number pages consecutively. In APA style, page 1 begins on the title page.
4. Add a simple cover page that includes the title of your paper, your name, your student number, the instructor's name, the submission date, and the course name (e.g., Criminology 100).
5. Include a reference page as the last page of your paper. As mentioned earlier, your reference page should only include materials you have specifically summarized, paraphrased, or quoted in the paper, rather than background reading which may have occurred.

For additional writing support, UFV's Academic Success Centre offers one-on-one feedback on the writing you are doing for your UFV courses. To access their services or to read useful handouts that can assist you with various types of writing assignments, from article reviews, literature reviews, case analysis, and research papers, make an appointment or visit them online at www.ufv.ca/asc.

Each instructor will have their own distinct grading rubric for evaluating your paper. In other words, each instructor may have their own weighting system for how much of your paper's final grade will be based on context, style, composition, and degree of critical thought. In all cases, you should refer to your course outline and all instructions provided by your instructor to ensure that you understand all requirements for your paper and the way in which your paper will be evaluated.

UFV's Libraries

Your course papers are going to require that you use UFV's libraries. There are many opportunities to receive a general orientation to the library and the library staff are always available to assist you with questions. There are several key resources for students of Criminology and Criminal Justice. While these are not the only resources that students can assess, these are some of the more useful.