Now that you've got a topic, a thesis, chunks that support your thesis, and a page budget, it’s time to write.

Just as with the planning of an academic paper, there are two main questions in mind during the writing process:

**WHAT AM I TRYING TO COMMUNICATE?**

**AM I COMMUNICATING MY IDEAS IN A WAY THAT MAKES SENSE TO SOMEONE BESIDES ME?**

I’m going to fill you in on a secret about academic writing: there is no one “correct” writing process. Some people start with the part they know the least about (these sections likely will require more time for research). Others prefer starting with what they know best (these sections will go quickly and give the writer a sense of accomplishment). Some people feel most comfortable when they write their conclusion first. I’m not going to tell you where to start, but I will tell you this: just start writing.

I've presented the parts of a paper below in the order in which they appear in a paper (introduction, chunks, and conclusion), but use them in whatever order makes the most sense to you.

**WHERE DO I START?**

The first step is to open a fresh Word document and copy and paste your page budget into it.

**INTRODUCTION WITH THESIS:** 1 page

**CHUNK #1:** 2 pages

**CHUNK #2:** 2 pages

**CHUNK #3:** 2 pages

**CONCLUSION:** 1 page

**TOTAL:** 8 pages + References

Then fill in your thesis and your main idea for each chunk. I’ve always found that putting this text into a new document helps to relieve any stress that I have about getting the paper started.

**WHAT AM I WRITING IN MY INTRODUCTION?**

At its most basic, an introduction tells your readers about the topic of your paper, your thesis, and the chunks of information that support your thesis. You also need to present the chunks in the order that they will appear in your paper.
Your introduction is an agreement between you and your reader: “If you stick with me and read my whole paper, this is what I’m going to deliver to you . . .”

If your introduction is missing any of this information or if your introduction does not provide an accurate overview of your work, you risk making your readers crabby. Readers like knowing where a writer is going to take them and if you confuse them, you lose them.

When you write the draft of your introduction, you might start with the old standby line: “In this paper, I will . . .” That’s fine—don’t worry just yet about making your introduction sound smooth. You can edit your writing later.

WHAT EXTRA INFORMATION DO MY READERS NEED TO KNOW SO THAT THEY UNDERSTAND MY PAPER?

When you’re writing an academic paper, your obvious audience is your professor, who is an expert in the field of education. However, your secondary audience is your peers—fellow students of education who are also learning about the issues that are shaping schooling today.

As part of your introduction section, it’s wise to write a short context section that

- shows your professor that you’ve done your research and know what you’re talking about
- gives your peer readers background information, so that they can understand your topic and thesis

BACKGROUND INFORMATION VS. SUPPORTING DETAIL

Sometimes, it’s crystal clear what information needs to go in the background information section of your introduction. At other times, it can be difficult to figure out if information is background information, or if information should be positioned with one of your chunks as a supporting detail.

A trick that always helps me is to check that the information only relates to the topic of the paper—this context section should not discuss anything to do with the chunks of your paper.

In the background information section of the “Prts of the American education system are clearly racist” paper, you might want to briefly answer these questions:

- Who controls the American education system?
- What are the main “parts” of the American education system?
- How are the main parts accountable to those who control the system?
- Is there a history of racism in the American education system?

Notice that you’re not getting into the details of how a curriculum is written or how standardized tests are created. You’re simply giving background information about your topic.

Here’s another suggestion: just write. When you’re editing your paper, you can move sentences from this background information section of your introduction to your chunks as necessary.
WHAT AM I WRITING IN EACH CHUNK?

As you write a chunk, you should ensure that you do the following:

**INTRODUCE:** Write a short introduction to this part of your paper so that your reader knows what to expect and has some context for this chunk. Some of your writing in the background information section could be moved here. (This can be one to five sentences long.)

**STATE:** State the main point of this chunk in your own words and link it back to your thesis. (This can be anywhere from one sentence to its own mini paragraph.)

**SUPPORT:** Use others' work to support your point. (This should be the longest part of your chunk—you need to show that you've found several scholars who have researched this issue and that their findings support what you're saying.)

**DISCUSS:** Write about the impacts of the main point of this chunk. Whenever possible, use a combination of statistics and statements made by experts or by people who have had relevant experiences.

As you write each chunk, you may feel that this introduce-state-support-discuss structure feels stiff and boring. You can polish your work later—just be sure that you write content that introduces, states, supports, and discusses and that you keep your page budget in mind.

WHAT AM I WRITING IN MY CONCLUSION?

Your conclusion should include a very brief summary of what you've covered in your paper. In your conclusion, you can get away with a more general summary than in your introduction.

Summary of your content in your introduction: I will briefly describe who holds decision-making power in the American education system. I will then show that these government bodies have allowed curricula, textbooks, and standardized tests that are used throughout the United States to be infused with racist content, which is having a variety of effects among (students, teachers, parents?).

Summary of your content in your conclusion: By examining particular parts of the American education system, I have shown that racism is rampant within the system and is having catastrophic effects throughout American society.

BUT THERE’S SO MUCH MORE TO SAY . . .

Your conclusion should also provide an indication that the topic doesn’t end with what is covered in your paper. This is a convention in academic papers and you should absolutely follow it.

There are many different ways that you can do this:

**DISCUSS A PROMISING SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM YOU'VE ADDRESSED.**
This requires more research, but it's nice to leave your readers with something to be hopeful about.
DISCUSS WHAT NEW CHALLENGES ARE MAKING THE SITUATION EVEN WORSE (OR WILL MAKE THE SITUATION WORSE IN THE NEAR FUTURE).
This requires more research, but it’s another way to demonstrate that you know your topic well.

DISCUSS WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN IF NOTHING IS DONE TO FIX THE PROBLEM.
This does not require much extra research, but it can lend a lot of weight and “drama” to your work.

DISCUSS WHAT THE EXISTENCE OF THIS PROBLEM SAYS ABOUT OUR SOCIETY (WHAT OUR PRIORITIES ARE, WHO AND WHAT WE VALUE, ETC.)
This does not require much extra research, but it can also lend weight to your work.

DOES WHAT I’M WRITING MAKE SENSE TO SOMEONE BESIDES ME?

When you’re writing, you’re making your thoughts visible by presenting a series of ideas and facts. As you write your paper, you wrestle with your ideas and try to find research that supports what you’re saying. This makes it all too easy to lose track of the “big picture” of your paper. While your paper might make perfect sense to you (because you’ve been working on it so closely), it might be confusing to someone else.

Fortunately, there are several steps you can take during your writing process to ensure that your reader will be able to understand your logic (you can also use the editing process to refine your work once everything is written).

HEADINGS

One way to show the reader the logic of your paper is to include APA-style headings.

APA dictates exactly how your headings should appear:

Levels 1 and 2 headings appear on their own line, separated from the paragraph that they introduce.

LEVEL 1: Centered, Boldface, Uppercase and Lowercase
LEVEL 2: Left-aligned, Boldface, Uppercase and Lowercase

Levels 3, 4, and 5 headings are indented and attached to the paragraph that they introduce.

LEVEL 3: Indented, boldface, lowercase heading with a period.
LEVEL 4: Indented, boldface, italicized, lowercase heading with a period.
LEVEL 5: Indented, italicized, lowercase heading with a period.

TRANSITION WORDS AND SENTENCES

When you start or end a chunk of information, use transition words and sentences so that your reader can tell that you’re shifting in to or out of an idea. To find out more about transition words, check out www.sass.uottawa.ca/writing/kit/grammar-transitional.pdf (note that this is a .pdf file that will automatically download to your computer).

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IN-TEXT CITATIONS AND REFERENCE LIST

You need to use in-text citations to show the reader where you have used others' ideas. You also need to provide a list of all of the sources of those ideas at the end of your paper under the heading “References.” To find out more about this, check out “Using APA Style in an Academic Paper.”

Now you're ready to start editing.