

7 Steps to stronger writing

In order to be a strong writer your ideas must move from one idea to the next in an understandable and logical sequence. By applying some of the following techniques, you can achieve a logical sequence, better flow, and stronger emphasis, which in turn will give you a stronger paper.

STEP ONE: The outline

Outlining is not as hard as you might think and it helps with the sequencing of your paper. It is taking your paper one step at a time.

The basic outline looks like this: The example is canoe camping.

1. The basics of canoe camping
 - a. Gear needed
 - i. Tents
 - ii. boats
 - b. Attitude
 - i. Happy campers
 - c. Safety
 - i. Training
2. The best places to go
 - a. The Wilderness canoe area
 - b. Bog river flow
 - c. Camp ground
3. The skills needed
 - a. How to paddle
 - i. J-stroke vs dragging
 - b. Fire regulations
 - c. Campsite cleanliness
4. What to do if it rains
 - a. Staying dry
 - b. Drying sleeping bags

The final step is to then add your introduction and your conclusion and write, revise and re-write.

STEP TWO: Cut and paste

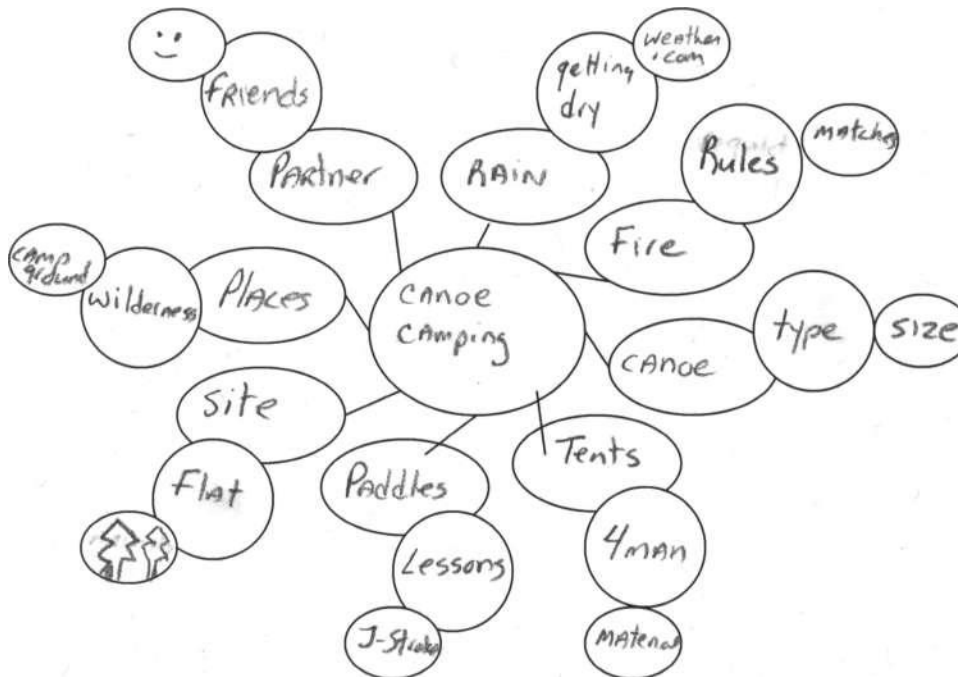
Cut and paste works very well when you have a paper already written, but for some reason it is not coming together logically.

You simply cut the paper, with real scissors, and re-arrange them until you find a new way to fit them back together. You can also cut and paste in on the computer, but using scissors is fun! Be sure to save a copy first!

Try grouping ideas in different orders; see which grouping best supports the main topic and which ones are better as smaller topics. Play until you have found a stronger paper and then ask yourself: what is missing? Re-write and revise the paper.

STEP THREE: Make a mind map

One more way to help get organized is to mind map your ideas. It's fun and easy: Place your topic in the center circle and then think of ideas that relate and place them in the next layer out. From that second circle place another related idea and so forth. You can use pictures or drawings, symbols or numbers if they will help you develop and organize the idea. Example:



A mind map sets up a logical train of thought just by moving from the middle circle to the outer circles.

STEP FOUR: Look for emphasis

Another strong way to organize your paper is to look for the proper emphasis. Does your main topic receive more written time than your sub-topics? If not then you need to consider revising your work. Do you go off on an interesting tangent that does not really support your thesis? Then you need to consider revising. Take the time to develop all the important ideas to their fullest then spend a bit less time on the subtopics.

Try highlighting all your main topic supports...there should be more to support your main ideas than interesting side bars. If using the example above of canoe camping:

paddle designs might be interesting to mention, but it probably does not need to be a big section of the paper.

STEP FIVE: Look for redundancy

A way for a paper to feel unorganized is to repeat the same idea over and over. You say it one way and then you say the same idea in another way. Strive to state your ideas clearly the first time. Proofread and check for repeating ideas. Can you take one out? Can you explain a repeated idea so that brings clarity to the paper? Develop an ear for redundancies so you keep the readers attention.

A good way to look for redundancy is to highlight one idea in one color, if there is too much of the same color you might have some redundancy to clean up. Ask which ideas can come out and which can be re-worded. Reading your paper out loud will help train your ear to hear redundancies...it might feel silly, but it works!

STEP SIX: Sequencing

There are several ways to improve your paper's organization through sequencing. You can sequence with: time, relevance to topic, numbers, oldest to youngest, or youngest to oldest. The easiest way to sequence your paper is to use emphasis or time.

Emphasis: What is the most important point, what is the next most important point and continue to ask this until all the points are in place.

Time: Start from oldest to the newest, or the reverse. If you follow a time sequence your paper will automatically have sequence. Also, if you follow the order of how the events happened you will have a cohesive sequence.

Think about the sequence of events, it is an easy way to achieve a good organized paper.

STEP SEVEN: Details and Descriptions

One last way to strengthen your papers is to develop the details and descriptions and build small pictures for the reader. You can do this by adding active verbs, adverbs and adjectives, and senses or emotions.

Active verbs: If you have several "to be" verbs (is, are, was, were) all in a row trying something more active: Rather than saying: "He is walking," say, "He *walks*."

Adverbs and adjectives: Begin to build a picture: "He *slowly* walks in *tiny* steps."

Senses or emotions: Feelings build a stronger pictures: "He slowly walks in tiny steps as his *blue* eyes *squint* to block out the *burning* flood lights."

Even if you are writing a research paper you can add details and descriptions to help strengthens the writing. "The flakey bark gradually sheds as the blight sickens the trees." Details and description keeps the reader interested, and it makes it more fun to write!

Try using all of the above to help strengthen your paper. You will find that some come easier and naturally, while others might take a bit more effort. Writing is a process and each part of the process you improve, you strengthen your papers!

Practice:

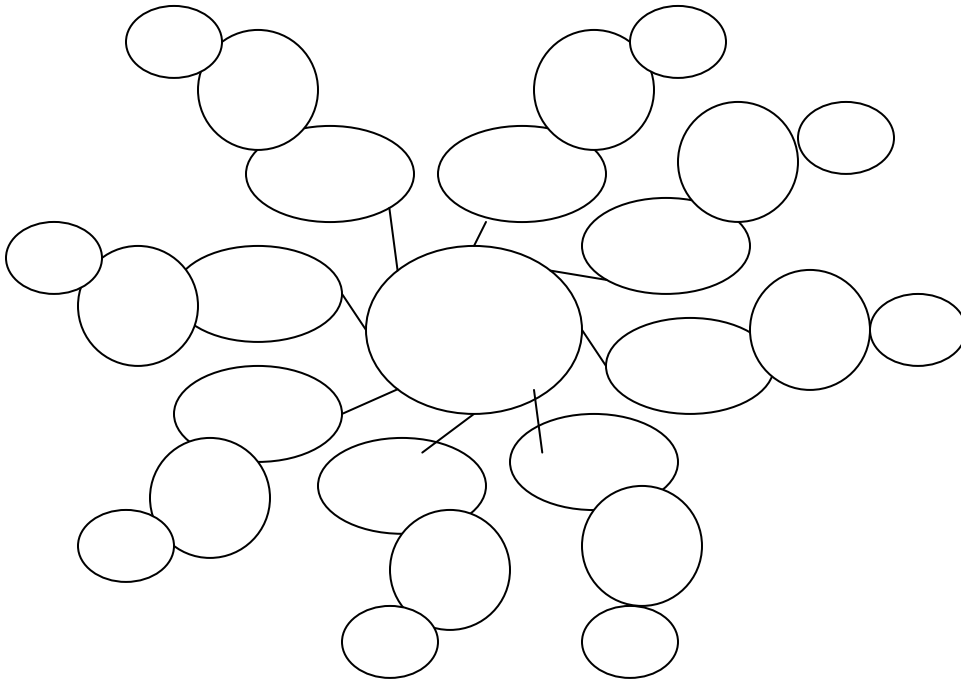
Try to outline the topic: turning a campus green

- 1 Main topic _____
 - a. support _____
- 2 Sub topic _____
 - a. support _____
 - b. support _____
- 3 Sub topic _____
 - a. Support _____
 - i. support _____
 - ii. support _____
- 4 Sub topic _____

Introduction:

Conclusion:

Now try to make a mind map of the same topic:



What would you emphasize in this paper? _____

How would you sequence it? _____

What details and descriptions can you add? _____

On your next essay take the time to try all seven ways to help organize and strengthen your paper, you will be happy with the results.