

Pre-Writing Game Plan

1. Pick a subject: Sometimes this is already done for you by your instructor; sometimes you must do this yourself. If you are allowed to choose your own topic, make sure it is something you are interested in as you will be spending much time on it.
2. Narrow the subject down: Think about it—you can't write if you can't think. How long is your paper going to be? How broad a subject can you discuss in this space?
3. Form a tentative thesis: What do you want to say about your topic? This idea should change and become more refined with each subsequent draft. However, even a preliminary thesis should be clear, focused, and arguable.

Test your thesis:

Is it focused? It must say one specific thing, make one specific point.
How many pages will it take to prove your thesis: one, five, ten, twenty?

Is it clear? Your thesis must be a statement—avoid questions. The best rule is to use a declarative sentence. Do different parts of your thesis appear to contradict each other? Also, do you say what you mean to say? Are your words clear as your thoughts?

Is it arguable? A statement of fact does not make a good thesis. Say something important about an issue that has more than one point of view. The following is an example of a good arguable thesis: "Though television shows often glamorize women, television commercials typically present them as housewives in distress so they can be rescued by the sponsor's product."

4. Determine your line of defense: Plan how you will support your thesis. You probably do not need a formal outline unless your instructor requires one, but you do need a sense of direction. Arrange your supporting points in some kind of tentative order.
5. Begin writing: With your thesis at the top of page one, write several paragraphs in defense of the thesis, keeping in mind the order you chose in Step 4. Rearrange, refine, and improve your defense where it is weak. Resist the temptation to write either an introduction or a conclusion at this time.

NOTHING IS SACRED YET! DO NOT LET YOUR TENTATIVE THESIS INHIBIT YOUR IDEAS! LET YOUR IDEAS FORM YOUR THESIS.