

# The Benefits of Developing a Working Outline<sup>1</sup>

## Midwestern Writer's Studio Handout

Developing a working outline takes some time and effort. (For more detail on the process involved, see the Writer's Studio handout "Organizing Your Paper.") Is it worth it?

Absolutely. Here are just some of the benefits:

- ✓ You have a clear plan for your paper. Sitting down to write the paper itself will be much easier and much less daunting than starting from scratch, because you know what you're going to say and how you are going to present your ideas.
- ✓ If you tend to ramble or go off on rabbit trails when you write, a working outline is a great way to stay focused and on topic. This is especially key when the purpose of the paper is to present and defend a thesis statement.
- ✓ Developing a working outline can reveal gaps in your research or places where you need more supporting evidence. Going through the outline process at least a week before your paper is due will ensure that you have time to fix the problem before it's time to start writing.
- ✓ Stuck on one particular argument or section of your paper? Set it aside and jump ahead to a different argument or section. Use the working outline to keep track of which sections you've completed and which remain to be written.
- ✓ Use the working outline to "budget" pages for your paper. In other words, before you start drafting, take a few minutes to figure out how long each section of the paper should be – and note it on your outline. Let's say, for example, that you are writing a 10-page paper, and you think that your introduction and conclusion will take up about a page, total. That leaves you with nine pages. If you have three supporting arguments, you should plan to write about three pages per argument. Thinking this through ahead of time helps with pacing as you draft.

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<sup>1</sup> Author: Jennifer Hearson. Adapted from English Composition II notes and "Organizing Your Paper" Workshop, 10/23/19.