

WHERE TO START A PAPER

Record your answers to these questions below. When you're done, use this as a checklist for drafting your paper.

- What question(s) must I answer in order to fulfill the assignment?
- What "code words" does my assignment contain? (Code words could be abstract terms such as "concepts of freedom" and "system of belief" or they could be terms that demand a certain task of you, such as "analyze," "compare," "explore reasons for," etc.)
- Which areas of my readings or sources are still unclear to me? How necessary are they for writing a first draft?
- Who is the audience for this paper? (Don't always assume you're writing for your professor; s/he may want you to write for people unfamiliar with the topic. If you're in doubt, ask your professor).
- What are the most important things that my audience needs to know?
- What are a few main points that I want to convey in this paper?
- Are any of these points contradictory or overly vague? (For example, if you wrote "I want to show how factories in Japan and America are both similar and different," your goals are probably too broad; "Macbeth was both good and evil" could be easily read as a contradictory statement.)
- Can I refine any of these goals? (For instance, for the second example above, you might decide to focus on how Macbeth was a good man who fell because of his lust for power).
- Can I support my main ideas? Are they unsupported speculations and opinions? Depending on the type of paper, opinions might be acceptable. Generally, professors look for support from readings and other academic sources--when in doubt, ask.