

RESEARCH PAPER CLASS WORKSHOP

Activity 1: Headlines

Reduce your thesis statement to 6 words for a “news headline”. What is the main takeaway of your paper? Remember, this should be positional not factual. For example, rather than “PTSD affects ten percent of adults” your headline should be something like “We need more awareness around PTSD.” Or rather than “Arachnophobia is a hereditary condition,” try something like “Arachnophobia: it’s not what you think.” Look back at the motivating moves worksheet if you’re not sure what your “position” is.

Activity 2: Reverse Outlining

You might start your paper with a detailed plan, but it’s rare that your ideas don’t change a bit during the drafting process. That’s why it’s important to go back after you have a draft and map out what you’ve actually written rather than what you intended to write. Use the worksheet to write a reverse outline of your current draft. Be honest about whether any ideas have snuck into your paragraphs that aren’t strictly relevant to what you thought the paragraphs would be about. Then decide if they need to be cut or if they are trying to guide you towards a new thesis or paragraph topic.

Activity 3: Cutting Wordiness

Take 10% of the words out of your introduction. (Count the number of words in your introduction and divide it by 10, then remove that number of words.) Do this by simplifying your sentence structure and cutting “filler” phrases and words. Eg: “due to the fact that” becomes “because.” If any words or phrases are there to make your writing sound more academic, they are probably making your writing wordy.

Activity 4: Goal Setting

Start by free-writing for five minutes about where you’re at with your paper, any anxieties that you have about it: ideas that you are having trouble explaining or things you want to change in your plan. Then break down a list of tasks that you need to do to finish the paper. Instead of “write paragraph 2,” and “write paragraph 3,” try to break down your tasks into more detail. This can help prevent writers’ block. These tasks might be things like “find quotes from X source” or “come up with a new topic sentence for paragraph 2.” Then give yourself deadlines for each task, working towards having the paper finished by the due date.