

## How to Write a University-Level Paper

(Whether essay, expository, research, argumentative – most of these steps and techniques apply)

### I. Planning Your Paper

This may be *the most important* step in the writing process and one that most students neglect. The result is a poorly written paper. You must not only plan your paper, but do so systematically.

- A. Know the **purpose** and **audience** of your paper
  - 1. For example, in this class, the **purpose** of the SECRETs is synthesis, explanation, critical analysis, reflection, expansion, and theorizing. These are elements of the “**expository**” and “**argumentative**” paper.
  - 2. In this class, the **audience** is primarily a university professor with a Ph.D., and secondarily, other students at your same level.
- B. Choose a **subject** and **limit** (narrow) it.
  - 1. When an instructor provides you with a subject, such as a SECRET question, you still need to identify it clearly *for yourself* and limit the topic. This is particularly true because the instructor will often provide very broad, general topics.

Let’s use as an **example** the general topic of the **Industrial Revolution and effect on community**. In the SECRET you are asked to provide some specifics, such as whether, how, and why the Industrial Revolution affected community and what you consider to be the single most significant effect of the Industrial Revolution on community. Although it may appear that the instructor has narrowed this topic for you considerably, you still have much to do.

- 2. With your general subject as the Industrial Revolution’s effects on community, you now need to begin narrowing the topic. One way to do this is through a technique called “**prewriting**.” Do not confuse this with writing a first draft. Think of this more as brainstorming on paper. Many writers find it useful to carry out this step with pen (or pencil) and paper, as opposed to using a computer and word processor. It is easier to move ideas around, draw arrows, box or circle words and thoughts, etc. Some writers still use note cards and write individual ideas on the cards and then arrange the cards around on a large, flat surface as they continue to brainstorm. Here are some prewriting techniques:
  - a. jot down ideas and opinions you already have on the topic
  - b. make a list of ideas related to the topic that come to mind; do not attempt to organize them at this point
  - c. ask who, what, where, when, how, and why
  - d. check the lecture guide, notes & textbook for key points and ideas
  - e. explore online resources (but be careful here not to get sidetracked)
  - f. if more fully formed ideas and sentences come to mind, write them down (free-style writing) – but only as part of the prewriting process
  - g. cluster ideas if you are visually oriented

3. Now begin to arrange your ideas into a general pattern:
  - a. identify main ideas
  - b. match main ideas with facts, details, examples, definitions, explanations
  - c. discard ideas that are redundant or unrelated, no matter how fond you might be of them.
  
4. This is an example of some of what you might have ended up with:

### *Industrial Revolution*

*when (1600s-1800s; focus on 1800s)*

*where (England, Europe, America)*

*how/why (enclosure movement, agricultural revolution, textile revolution, transportation rev., communications rev.)*

*Community: effects of Ind. Rev. on (first define)*

*define "community" (see Phillips p. 118-9, refer to Tönnies, etc.)*

*group sharing physical space*

*trait/characteristic*

*identity and culture = cohesion*

*definition of "sense of community" = sense of belonging (Phillips, p. 120)*

*Tönnies & Gemeinschaft (see Phillips, p. 124)*

*Put into intro?*

*Maybe 1<sup>st</sup> part of body....*

### *Effects of Ind. Rev. on Community*

*role of changes in ag. production (less farming work)*

*changes in transportation technologies (→: sep of work and home; migration; faster pace of life)*

*changes in manufacturing technologies:  
assembly line  
more division of labor*

*decline of cottage industry*

*more alienated working life*

*exploitation in factories (growth of unions?)*

*depersonalization of production: people buying assembly-line goods instead of from friend down the street*

*Thesis statement?*

## II. Planning the Outline

Now that you have gone from the general to the more specific and your brain (and paper) is full of ideas, it's time to start focusing. You will need to create an outline, but before that you should plan the outline. Here is a "planning form" you can use:

**Intro/attention getter:** Your first sentence should grab the reader's attention and make him or her want to read on.

My grandfather made pockets. In Italy, the Biancos had for generations been the proud owners of fruit orchards, producing fruit of such quality that they were renowned throughout the valley. What happened? How did we go from being orchardists, providing from the land, for an entire community and known to people in villages all around us - to working in an American suit-making factory, specializing in one single item: the pocket, as anonymous to its wearer as the paper on which I write. Who cares where it came from or who produced it?

### **Transitional statement:**

What "happened" was the Industrial Revolution, beginning in Europe as early as 1650 and peaking at the end of the 1800s.

**Thesis statement:** A thesis is your main point, your main argument, what it is you plan to show or "prove" to the reader. Having a thesis is what takes your university writing beyond the primary level. It is also the key feature of what distinguishes an argumentative essay from an expository essay. Even if you do not have a point to argue or to prove, you should have a focus or a point of your essay. In this example, the thesis is "argumentative," in that it attempts to argue a point and to convince the reader of a certain position.

The Industrial Revolution, with its advances in methods of factory production and in changes in transportation and communications technologies, changed not only the nature of work, but where people lived, how they traveled, how they interacted, and, ultimately, how they experienced community. This paper maintains that the Industrial Revolution, while ushering in profound societal and economic change, also contributed to the decline of traditional community.

**Plan of paper:** Tell exactly what you will do in the paper, in the order in which you will do it.

This paper will first define "community" and then briefly describe those developments that occurred during the Industrial Revolution that had the most significant effect on changing how people experienced community. This paper will attempt to show that, despite bringing economic advances, the Industrial Revolution's ultimate impact on how people experienced *traditional* community was negative. It will conclude by raising questions about the implications of the "technological revolution" on community today.

**Operationalization of terms:** This is the "definition" of terms as you will be using them in the paper. In the examples here, you've already operationalized "Industrial Revolution." As the introductory material above indicates, you will be operationalizing "community." Your "prewriting" has led you to include definitions from Phillips and from Tönnies. In this case, you may choose to make the operationalization of community your first topic or point.

**Transition:** It is important to transition from one part of the paper to the next. Once you have finished the Introduction, you can begin the body by separating it with a subtitle or starting the first sentence in such a way that it ties right back to the last sentence of the introduction.

**First main topic or point:** Definition of community, using references from Phillips and Tönnies's *Gemeinschaft-Gesellschaft* continuum. Emphasize elements constituting "traditional community," because these are what change in the industrialized society.

**Second main topic or point:** Overview of key developments in Industrial Revolution that changed economy from agricultural based to factory production: farming technology, mechanization of factory production, changes in transportation technologies. Also should mention larger climate: social and economic changes (growing population, migration, etc.).

**Third main topic or point:** Bring together ideas about separation of home and work, faster pace of life, "alienated" factory work, exploitation of working masses (incl. child labor), depersonalization of products, increased consumerism, decrease of cottage industry, etc., to show how these contributed to a decline in traditional community.

**Conclusion:** Summarize what you've said so far to show how it makes your point (substantiates your thesis) that the Industrial Revolution led to the decline of traditional community, thus bringing your paper full circle. Raise questions, perhaps for further research, and leave your reader feeling somehow affected, changed, touched by your work (the "elegant exit"). For instance, add thoughts about how the current technological revolution is changing community. Suggest a question that leaves open the possibility that while one type of community is destroyed, other types emerge.

This paper has shown that although the Industrial Revolution enhanced people's mobility and increased economic production and population, new methods of production ultimately contributed to a decline in traditional *Gemeinschaft*-like community (Tönnies 1887). The separation of work and home further exacerbated divisions within the community. Have we lost community altogether? Is postindustrial society in even more danger of losing a sense of community, as the technological revolution allows people to go about their daily lives with virtually no face-to-face interaction with other human beings? Future research will be able to assess the impacts of such changes, but for now, there are signs that some semblance of community remains.

My grandfather's great-grandson may not be an orchardist, but he can communicate online with people all over the world about the latest developments in Lego robotics, and he still plays with neighborhood kids on a nearby soccer field. And I, his mother, am (for better or worse) a member of the "soccer mom community." So, no, community has not been lost, but, as I click on "attach" to send this paper over a digital network to readers I may never meet, I can conclude that the experience of community has - at the very least - changed.

### III. Making the Outline

After "Planning the Outline," you may feel disinclined to make an actual outline. If you are a very good writer, you could perhaps skip that step. However, for most students, proceeding to the actual outline level is very useful. Not only will it help you organized your thoughts, but it will keep you on task.

By now, as you can see from what has been written so far, there is not that much to add to make the actual outline. This is what the final outline might look like:

- I. Introduction
  - A. Intro statement and attention grabber
  - B. Thesis statement
  - C. Plan of paper
- II. Body
  - A. Definition of community
    - 1. Phillips's definitions
    - 2. Tönnies's continuum
    - 3. Elements of "traditional" community
      - a. kinship
      - b. barter economy
      - c. walking city: everyone in close proximity
      - d. homogeneous population
      - e. religion and spirituality
      - f. strict sanctions
  - B. Industrial Revolution: Key Developments
    - 1. Changes in farming conditions and technologies
    - 2. Mechanization of factory production
    - 3. Population growth → increased supply of labor (and demand)
    - 4. Changes in transportation technologies
      - a. increased migration
      - b. ability to work relatively far from home
  - C. Decline of Community
    - 1. decrease of cottage industry
    - 2. separation of work and home
    - 3. faster pace of life
    - 4. factory work alienating and depersonalized
    - 5. increased consumerism
    - 6. exploitation of wage labor, incl. women and children (refer to Riis)
    - 7. examples of new way of life that shows how community had changed
      - a. family members don't live close to one another
      - b. economy based on wages and money
      - c. city pattern becoming more spread out, yet crowded and dense in center
      - d. less emphasis on religion and spirituality; more on rationality and money
- III. Conclusion
  - A. Substantiate thesis
  - B. Elegant Exit
- IV. Reference List

#### IV. Writing and Revising Your First Draft

When writing the first draft, stay close to your outline. After you have finished, begin reading and revising, paying special attention to the Writing Checklist as well as to these considerations:

- ✓ Is every idea in the thesis stated clearly and given appropriate consideration?
- ✓ Does the introduction lay out the plan or structure of the paper?
- ✓ Does the paper follow the plan as indicated in the introduction?
- ✓ Have you operationalized all terms as necessary?
- ✓ Do you have transitional sentences between paragraphs?
- ✓ Have you eliminated redundancy, wordiness, and weak verbs, nouns, and modifiers or replaced them with precise, exact terms?
- ✓ Have you replaced colloquial terms and phrases with precise wording?
- ✓ Are you using correct prepositions with idioms (e.g., compare *with* – not compare *to*)
- ✓ Have you checked for homonym errors, apostrophe problems, overuse of commas, sentence fragments, comma splices, and fused (run-on) sentences (see Writing Checklist)?
- ✓ Have you read your paper out loud (waiting a while after printing) to make sure you haven't omitted words or left off an "s" or an "ed" ending or typed "to" for "the" and other very common mistakes that a spell or grammar checker will not find?

Here is an example of a typical student introductory paragraph that is replete with redundant, wordy, weak verbiage, further disrupted with colloquialisms and grammar errors (see if you can find them all!):

In this day and age, its usually the case that government officials express huge concern about things in the public interest. For example, good public health. This is an extremely important factor that is essential. It is one of the most important things facing officials today. Health factors have more or less always been a concern to public officials, but they have changed over time. Things change over time, this may seem obvious. It is to me. The reason why I think public health as a topic of concern to public officials is important, as a national policy issue; is because it is something that has always been important, and has not been effected over time, regardless of how insane and selfish leaders seem to be to the very people who elected them. In my opinion, this is something that needs to change. For one thing, there are more people then ever living in extremely crowded conditions that are just horrible. Which causes disease to spread extremely easy. This has been going on for about one hundred years! So this is why I think this is important.

Here is that same paragraph, rewritten:

One issue facing policy-makers and elected officials today is public health. Although public health has not always been a priority to decision-makers, it has become increasingly so over the past century, as population numbers and densities increase, facilitating the spread of infectious disease.

Expect to rewrite your paper at least once. Be sure to proofread it again, because every revision may potentially bring in new typographical errors. In the best-case scenario, proofread three times. Be sure to follow all guidelines and suggestions at <http://www.marthabianco.com/Courses/Cities/checklist.htm>.