

Organizing and Outlining

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Introduction

- How do you organize your research notes?
- Organize as early as you can.
 - Prepare a preliminary sketch or outline from your research question.
 - Key your notes to your outline.
 - Keep your outline current as you do research.

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Organizing and Outlining

- Organizational strategies differ.
- Try sketching your topic.
 - Start with blank sheet of paper.
 - Write your thesis statement somewhere.
 - Draw lines from it to the main points.
 - Cluster observations and evidence around the main points.
 - Draw lines, arrows, circles; use color.
 - See the relationships among your ideas.

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Organizing and Outlining

- Develop a topic outline.
- Good to start with, but it won't help you move toward writing.
- Move from topic outline to point outline.
- See Booth, Colomb, Williams 152-153.

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Organizing and Outlining

- Topic outline for a discussion of election.
 - I. Words used to describe election
 - II. Scope and purpose of election
 - III. Central biblical passages on election
 - IV. Theological issues
 - V. Summary and conclusions

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Organizing and Outlining

- Point outline for a discussion of election.
 - I. The main Greek word used for election is *eklegomai*, to choose out for oneself.
 - A. This can be used in an ordinary or a religious sense.
 - B. Sometimes people choose things or actions.
 - C. Sometimes God chooses human beings.
 - D. God chooses individuals or groups of people.
 - E. Related words include *proorizo* (foreordain) and *proginosko* (foreknow).
 - II. God chooses people to special tasks or to salvation.
 - A. Election to salvation is primarily corporate.
 - B. Election of individuals is primarily to a task.
 - C. Election is intended to benefit the non-elect.

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Organizing with Note Cards

- Use a card file.
- Sort all the cards into piles according to headings and sub-headings.
- Read the cards in sequence to check your organization.
- Re-sort the cards or refine the outline if necessary.
- This approach might help visual or kinesthetic learners.

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Organizing by Computer

- Try note organization software (Nota Bene).
- Key your notes to your outline as you go.
 - Insert keywords tied to the outline.
 - Find notes using “find” or “search” function.
- Put your notes into one file for each chapter.
- Back up your notes frequently!
- Have backups in more than one place.

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Organizing Paper Notes

- Minimize paper shuffling.
- Badke: register method (an index for notes)
- Collect your notes in a binder.
 - Take notes on all sources consecutively.
 - Number each page consecutively.
 - Include any photocopies and number them.
- On your bibliography, indicate the page numbers for the notes from that source.

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Organizing Paper Notes

- Develop symbols for each outline level.
 - Use outline symbols or special symbols.
 - Keep your system flexible.
- Index your notes to your outline.
 - Index in both directions.
 - Write page numbers in your outline.
 - Write outline symbols in your notes.
 - Try to process your notes once.

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Organizing Paper Notes

- If some of your notes don't fit...
 - Discard the information if it isn't important.
 - Refine your outline if it is.
- You should now be able to find the notes you need when you write.
- You should also be able to assess how well your research will enable you to answer your research question.

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Organizing Paper Notes

- If you can, index as you take notes.
 - Saves you time later.
 - But it's more likely to change as you research.
 - Key notes to the main sections of your outline.
- Go over your indexed outline to see if your research is well balanced.
 - Do you have enough evidence for each point?
 - Are the different parts weighted appropriately?

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Organizational Strategies

- Purpose of your organization = persuade your reader to accept your conclusions.
 - Develop an organization to accomplish this.
 - Outline reflects the strategies you've chosen.

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Organizational Strategies

- General organizational strategies
 - Introductory, general, or foundational first.
 - Define important terms early.
 - Objectivity before analysis (Badke).
 - Analysis before evaluation.
 - Information before call to action.

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Organizational Strategies

- Methods of organization
 - Historical subject: chronological (either narrative with analysis or analysis with narrative).
 - Description: spatial/geographical.
 - Cause-to-effect
 - Theory-to-practice
 - Comparison: longitudinal or cross-sectional.
 - Climactic order (save the best for last!)

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When to Start Writing

- Write throughout the process.
- When you have a sense of your audience.
- When you know what character to present.
- When you have a well defined question.
- When you have a tentative thesis statement.
- When you have a sense of the sequence of the parts.
- But be willing to develop new ideas!

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When to Start Writing

- Advice on the writing process:
 - “Respect the complexity of the task”! (Booth)
 - Be ready to discard.
 - Draft as quickly as you can.
 - Leave time for substantive revisions.
 - Get reactions from experts and non-experts.
 - Keep writing. Watch deadlines!
 - Stay in touch with your thesis advisor.
 - Check out the seminary’s writing page.

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