

Super Organization and Super Specifics

Super Organization

If you follow these steps, you will have a beautifully organized paper, guaranteed.

1. Print out your draft. Highlight your **THESIS STATEMENT**. Ask yourself if it meets all the criteria of a good thesis statement (see Parts of a Great Paper/Thesis handouts). If not, revise it.
2. Highlight the **TOPIC SENTENCE** for each paragraph. If there isn't one, supply one. Note that some paragraphs--for instance, paragraphs of description or example--may lack topic sentences. In this case, write that paragraph's topic in the margin, "tsunami description" or "illegal wiretap example," and then highlight it.
3. Now check to make sure that each highlighted **TOPIC SENTENCE** supports your paper's highlighted **THESIS STATEMENT**. If one does not, cross out that paragraph. No matter how interesting it is, it doesn't belong. Save it for another paper! (Or, if it's the part of your paper that excites you the most, revise your thesis statement and your paper plan to accommodate it.) Then check to make sure you don't have two paragraphs on the same topic. This happens surprisingly often. If you do, simply combine those two paragraphs into one.
4. By looking at your highlighted **TOPIC SENTENCES**, decide whether your paragraphs are in the most logical, most effective order. If not, move your paragraphs around until they are. The easiest way is to print out your paper and cut it up into paragraphs. You can then shuffle the paragraphs around on your table like puzzle pieces until you find the best order. Then tape them together. Now adjust your computer document to match.
5. Look carefully at each **PARAGRAPH**. Does every sentence in that paragraph support that paragraph's **TOPIC SENTENCE**? If not, cross out those stray sentences or move them to paragraphs where they belong.
6. Now you can congratulate yourself on having a beautifully organized paper!

Super Specifics

If you follow these steps, you will have a vivid and interesting paper, guaranteed.

1. Print out your paper. Read it all the way through, marking stars* over anything you could "illuminate" with specifics. What are specifics? "**Examples, numbers, proper nouns, five senses, quotations, action scenes.**" Memorize that jingle and you'll always know what to add to make your writing more specific.
2. Put a star over every **GENERAL STATEMENT** to remind you to follow it up with examples. You could follow the general statement "Single parents attending college face many challenges*" with an example of one of these challenges: "With young children and sometimes elderly parents to care for, **finding study time** can be difficult for single parents." A vivid action scene will make your example come even more alive. Here's an action scene depicting **finding study time**: "After picking up his two children from daycare, Mark drives thirty minutes to the ranch to check on his elderly father. Then it's back to the apartment to make dinner for the kids, play with them, and put them to bed. By ten, Mark is finally free to begin his schoolwork."
3. Put stars over **VAGUE GENERIC WORDS** to remind you to replace them with specifics. You could revise the vague sentence "When my friends* and I were little*, we played* outside* all the time*" to this: "When my cousins Tina and Jeff and I were in fourth grade, we spent every Saturday afternoon building forts out of old packing crates in the shadowy cottonwood arroyo behind the Safeway."
4. Put stars wherever you can create specific **SENSE IMAGES**, that is, wherever you can make your readers experience exactly how something looked, sounded, smelled, felt, or tasted. "The homeless children slept in a cardboard refrigerator box* under the overpass* could be revised to "The homeless children slept in a mildewed refrigerator box, breathing diesel fumes and shaken by the semis passing overhead."
5. Put stars wherever you could quote somebody's words or add dialogue. Quotation marks make writing come alive!
6. Now that you've committed yourself with all those little stars, go back and turn your draft into a vivid masterpiece.