

# Timing It Right!

## *When should I begin putting together a plan?*

The earlier you begin planning, the better. It is usually a mistake to do all of your research and note-taking before beginning to draw up an outline. Of course, you will have to do some reading and weighing of evidence before you start to plan. But as a potential argument begins to take shape in your mind, you may start to formalize your thoughts in the form of a tentative plan. You will be much more efficient in your reading and your research if you have some idea of where your argument is headed. You can then search for evidence for the points in your tentative plan while you are reading and researching. As you gather evidence, those points that still lack evidence should guide you in your research. Remember, though, that your plan may need to be modified as you critically evaluate your evidence.

## *How much of my time should I put into planning?*

It is self-evident that a well-planned paper is going to be better organized than a paper that was not planned out. Thinking carefully about how you are going to argue your paper and preparing an outline can only add to the quality of your final product. Nevertheless, some people find it more helpful than others to plan. Those who are good at coming up with ideas but find writing difficult often benefit from planning. By contrast, those who have trouble generating ideas but find writing easy may benefit from starting to write early. Putting pen to paper (or typing away at the keyboard) may be just what is needed to get the ideas to flow.

You have to find out for yourself what works best for you, though it is fair to say that at least some planning is always a good idea. Think about whether your current practices are serving you well. You know you're planning too little if the first draft of your essays is always a disorganized mess, and you have to spend a disproportionate amount of time creating reverse outlines and cutting and pasting material. You know you're planning too much if you always find yourself writing your paper a day before it's due after spending weeks doing research and devising elaborate plans.

Be aware of the implications of planning too little or too much.

**Planning** provides the following **advantages**:

- helps you to produce a **logical** and **orderly** argument that your readers can follow
- helps you to produce an **economical** paper by allowing you to spot repetition
- helps you to produce a **thorough** paper by making it easier for you to notice whether you have left anything out
- makes drafting the paper easier by allowing you to concentrate on writing issues such as grammar, word choice, and clarity

**Overplanning** poses the following **risks**:

- doesn't leave you enough time to write and revise
- leads you to produce papers that try to cover too much ground at the expense of analytic depth
- can result in a writing style that lacks spontaneity and ease
- does not provide enough opportunity to discover new ideas in the process of writing