

Planning Ahead

Directions: Review these key terms related to planning a research paper.

A **topic** is a specific area for intense investigation that emerges from research, i.e., the United States' role in World War I; the impact of personal computers on society; the future of high-definition television; the first international space station.

The **purpose** is what you want to accomplish in the research paper: to persuade the reader that all major dams should be removed from rivers in order to save them; to show that women are still forced into accepting lower-paying jobs; to make the case that awarding college scholarships based on race or ethnic background is unfair.

The **thesis** is your own likely position in the controversy that most interests you, i.e., "The V-chip in new televisions violates free speech"; "The city of New York should be the fifty-first state"; or "Teachers' unions are trying to stop charter schools." (Notice the similarity between the purpose and the thesis. The thesis usually expresses the purpose.)

The **organizational plan** is how you are going to structure your research paper:

- An analysis will lead to an examination of cause and effect, how and why: "How circuses gave way to national theme parks and why that's good."
- A comparison will find similarities and differences: "Palestinians and Native Americans: two minorities pushed off their land for the same reasons."
- An evaluation will apply your judgment to the results of your analysis: "To what extent should schools carry advertising for private businesses? It's time to let free enterprise in the classroom."

Example 1

General topic: Prisons

Specific topic: Optimal prison conditions for rehabilitation

Purpose: To show that prisons are most effective when they are neither too harsh nor too lenient in policies with and treatment of inmates

Tentative thesis: Prisons that strike a fair balance of firmness and flexibility are most successful in rehabilitating convicted criminals.

Tentative

organizational plan: 1. Harsh prisons—conditions and results
2. Lenient facilities—conditions and results
3. Model prisons—conditions and results

Example 2

General topic: Alcoholism
Specific topic: U.S. teenage alcoholism
Purpose: To identify causes and effects of contemporary teenage alcoholism and to consider solutions
Tentative thesis: U.S. teenage alcoholism, a complex and deadly problem, requires creative, long-term solutions.

Tentative organizational plan:

1. Evidence of problem
2. Causes of alcohol abuse and addiction among youth
3. Effects: psychological, physical, social
4. Solutions: programs, legal approaches, education

Example 3

General topic: Walt Disney
Specific topic: Disney's animated characters as values-transmitters
Purpose: To show how Disney's animated characters convey both social and personal values
Tentative thesis: Walt Disney's animated characters provide more than entertainment; they introduce children to significant social and personal values.

Tentative organizational plan:

1. Disney's array of animated characters
2. Self-image values
3. Friendship values
4. Good vs. evil values
5. Values regarding the individual and the group