

The Importance of Planning

Writing is like a journey; it can help to plan your route (including the key points and their order) before going on your trip. Planning can help overcome issues such as being repetitive, illogical or trying to cover too many points.

Types of Planner

Everyone approaches planning and writing differently. Which approach from Crème and Lea's (1997, pp. 79-83) four types best describes you?



Diver: Plunges straight in. Needs to do initial writing to understand thoughts.



Grand Planner: Spends time reading and note-taking to develop a clear idea. Afterwards, writing comes out nearly complete.



Architect: Designs a clear plan before starting. Fills in details when writing.



Patchwork: Writes sections early on. Makes connections on the go, and joins information like a patchwork.

4 Strategies for Planning

1. Employ Common Orders

When ordering information, it helps to be aware of the common writing patterns below adapted from Macmillan and Weyers (2007, p. 96).

Analytical	Situation – problem – solution – evaluation - recommendation
Chronological	Past - present - future
Comparative	Similarities - differences
Discussion	Positive - negative; for - against; pros - cons
General to Specific	Definition/context – specific examples/studies
Thematic	Theme (a) – theme (b) – theme (c)

2. Collate Your Notes

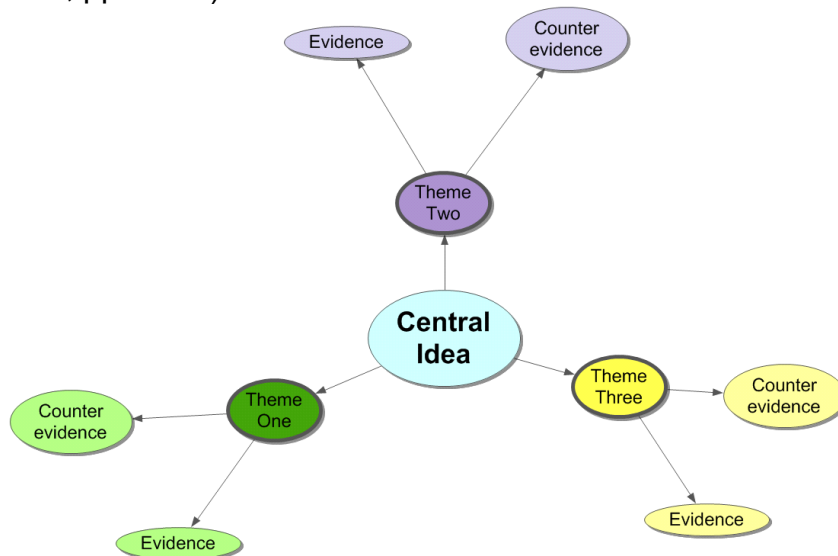
- Try to identify patterns and links between the information.
- Group notes into physical or digital filing systems.
- You can also use tables to see connections more clearly. In the example below, the top row records the source, and the side row lists a theme or aspect of your research.

	Source 1	Source 2	Source 3	Source 4
Theme/Aspect A ...				
Theme/Aspect B ...				

3. Build a Mind Map (Visual Planning)

- Start with a central image or word.
- Create branches out from the centre with your main ideas.
- Make smaller branches (associated ideas) that stem from the main ideas.
- Use images and symbols to represent ideas.

(Buzan, 2002, pp.28-31)

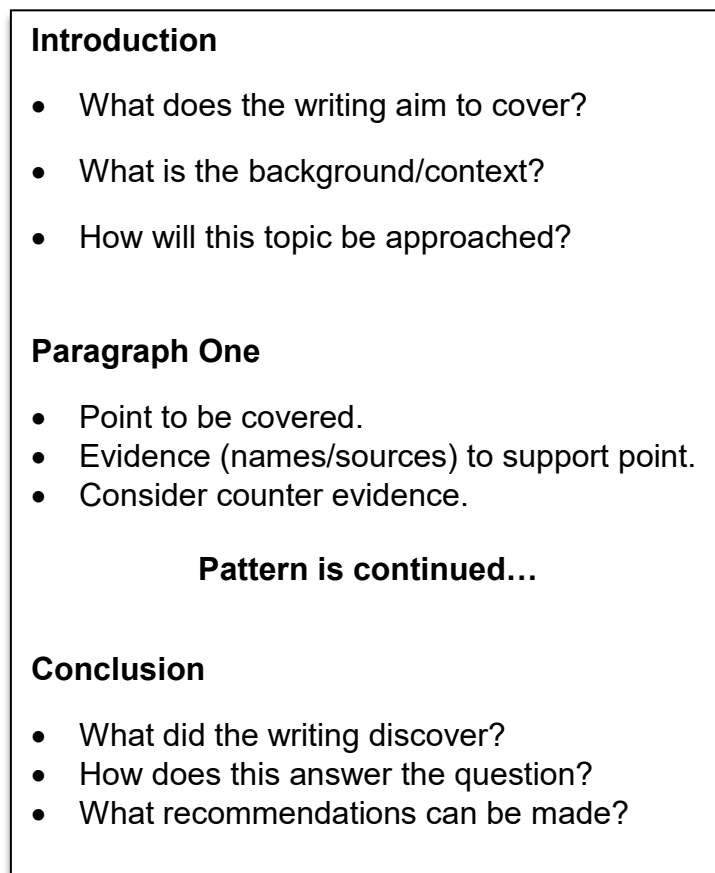


Example: digital mind map created in inspiration.



4. Create an Outline

- Linear planning displays information in a top to bottom sequence. This creates what Cottrell (2003, p. 153) calls an 'outline' structure with headings for key themes or paragraphs.
- Add detail by briefly noting what you will cover and relevant sources.
- It might also help to allocate a rough word count for each section.



Reference List

Buzan, T. (2002) *How to mind map*. London: Thorsons.

Cottrell, S. (2003) *The study skills handbook*. 2nd edn. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Crème and Lea (1997) *Writing at university*. 2nd edn. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Macmillan, K. and Weyers, J. (2007) *How to write essays and assignments*. Harlow: Pearson.