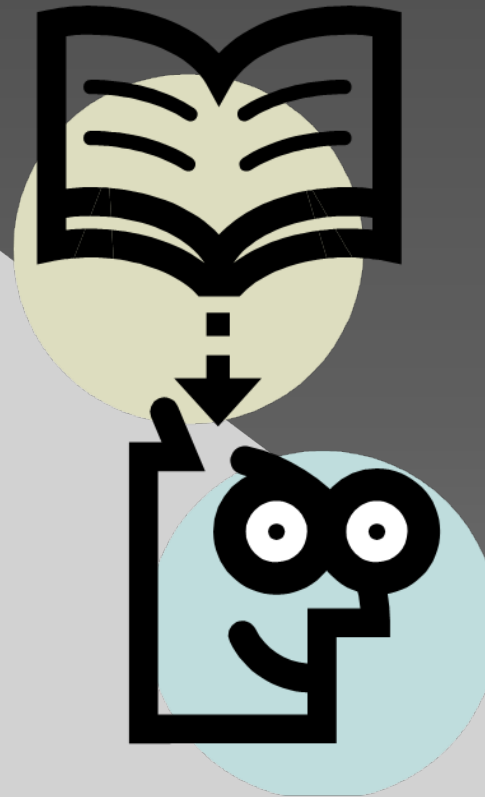


# Let's Get Organized:

## Organizing Your Thoughts and Your Paper



Cindy Porter, [ccporter@email.unc.edu](mailto:ccporter@email.unc.edu)

# Where do I begin?

- Think of writing your paper as painting your house. The “big picture” can seem overwhelming, which can lead to lots of frustration.
- By developing a strategic plan for tackling the job, the big picture is then broken into manageable parts, making the task a lot less daunting.



- Getting organized and developing a plan for writing your paper can streamline the process, keep you on track, and guide both your research and your writing.

# Where do I begin?

- ◉ There are several ways to approach your paper.
- ◉ Use the syllabus as an outline
  - > **variation:** Use grading rubric as outline
- ◉ Do research, then create outline
  - > **variation:** Create Reference section first
- ◉ Create outline, then do research

# Approach 1 : Using the Syllabus

- The course syllabus often provides a basic outline for the paper.

**Example:** Experience assignment- Attend a support group.

Paper assignment in the syllabus: "Your paper should review the experience, relate the experience to course concepts, provide your personal reaction, and examine the implications (using at least three scholarly sources)."

One possibility for organizing your paper is to use the syllabus description as a guideline.

The next slide provides a sample outline based on the syllabus description.

# Sample Outline from Syllabus

- I. Introduction
  - > Introduce your topic
  - > Thesis
- II. Review of Experience
  - > Demographics
  - > Organization/process
- III. Course Concepts
  - > Take a key course concept and use your experience to illustrate/analyze this concept
  - > Take another concept and repeat
  - > Take another concept and repeat
- IV. Personal Reaction
  - > What was the experience like?
  - > How will experience influence your work?
  - > What did you learn?
- V. Implications
  - > Look at one specific area
    - You might answer, "In what ways do support groups influence treatment?"
    - Do the research
    - Outline what information you need to fully address the question
- VI. Conclusion
  - > Restate thesis and major points.
  - > Tips for writing a conclusion: <http://leo.stcloudstate.edu/acadwrite/conclude.html>

## Approach 2: Research first, then Outline

- Collect all of your research.
- Start reading and organizing your research (for example: "Articles 3 and 5 address the history; Articles 1, 2 and 4 address theoretical foundation" and so on).
- Narrow the focus of your paper & define your *thesis* (i.e., the point you will try to prove or perspective you will try to persuade reader to accept as valid).
- Do a basic run-through of collected sources; discard any that are beyond the focus of your paper
- Make brief notes on the articles
- Use your notes to create an outline for the paper
- Create a draft of your Reference section
  - > **Remember:** Every reference entry must be cited in the text. You must cite all works that have contributed to your knowledge of a topic or have influenced your thinking/ perspective on a topic.

## Approach 3: Outline first, then research

- Already familiar with the topic? You may be able to create your outline first and use the outline to guide additional research.
- Suppose you're writing a paper on the speech Robert F. Kennedy gave addressing the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr.
- Even if you know only basic facts, you can use that knowledge to create an outline for the paper (example shown on the next slide.)

# Sample outline

- I. Introduction\*—give broad historical context and facts about the event; introduce what is to come in the paper; clearly state your thesis
- II. Robert Kennedy-background about RFK
  - > A. Kennedy family's prominence in American politics and public service
  - > B. Brief look at Robert Kennedy's professional history
  - > C. How RFK was viewed in 1968 as a result of brother's assassination
    - Some info. on RFK's 1968 presidential campaign
  - > D. What RFK was doing the night he gave the address
- III. Martin Luther King, Jr.-background about MLK
  - > A. Some information about the political/social climate in MLK's time
  - > B. Look at the highlights of MLK's career
  - > C. Popular view (s) of MLK at the time of his assassination
- IV. The Speech
  - > Who, what, when, where, why, how and reaction
- V. How the Speech Worked
  - > Pull in rhetorical concepts and offer an analyses
  - > Burke's Pentad
  - > Ethos, Pathos, Logos
  - > Exigency
- VI. What Narrative the Speech Offered
- VII. Conclusion

*\*Note : Remember, APA does not include Introduction header in the final paper!*



# Sample outline-continued

- ◉ Because the outline's author was familiar with Kennedy, King, and some key concepts of rhetorical communication, she had the basics to create an outline for a paper.
- ◉ **The outline also guides her research.** Looking at "II." on the outline, the writer sees that she will need to find sources about (a) Kennedy's 1968 presidential campaign, (b) his professional history, and (c) prevailing public opinions about RFK in 1968. Although the writer knows the Kennedys were a prominent family in American politics, she will need to find sources to support that claim.
- ◉ As the writer conducts her research, she can flesh out the outline by adding details.
  - For example, "A. Brief background of Kennedy family
    1. Joe Kennedy, Sr. (father)
      - a. Ambassador to UK (Kennedy Scholar, 2010)
      - b. Political connections
    2. John Kennedy (brother)
    3. Ted Kennedy (brother)"

# Variation: Complete References as 1<sup>st</sup>-step



-Do your library search and find all the related articles you think you **might** want to use by reading abstracts, scanning headings, and skimming first paragraphs.

-Create your Reference page with all the resources you pulled.

-Next, start reading the articles in-depth , rejecting any that are off-target. Organize "the keepers" - - making brief notes, highlighting key points or statistics.

-Then, start an outline, making notes that direct you to the articles that might be useful in each section.

(Example: "How social support influences treatment" - Laurel & Hardy; Wallace & Grommit; Lennon, McCartney, Harrison, & Starr.)

-After you've written your paper, check your References against your paper, and be sure to remove any sources that are not cited in the text\*

\***CAUTION:** Citations are not limited to quotes! You must cite all sources that either contributed to your knowledge or substantially influenced your thought on a topic.

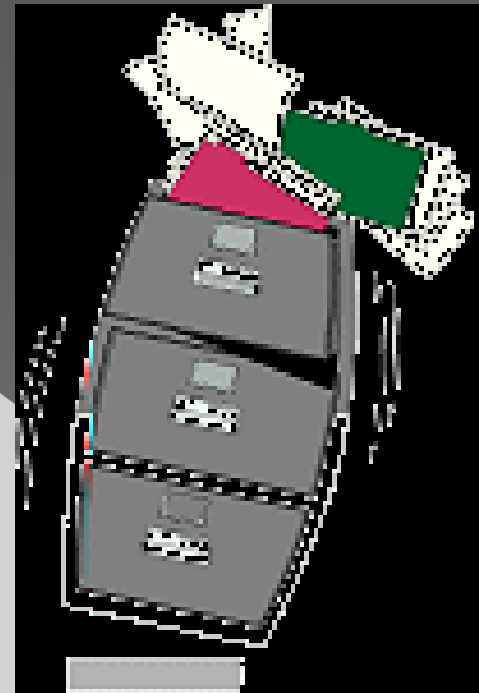
# Tips and Suggestions

- Remember: Sections don't have to be equal length. The goal is to make sure that each point/argument is clear and well supported; you likely won't have the same number of sources for each point.
- Narrow the scope of the paper. Depth tends to work better than breadth.
- Limit research time. *Too much* research can be overwhelming (because you'll have more material than what can be adequately covered in the page limit). Too much info also invites writers to simply string facts together, rather than analyze the literature and offer their own insights
- Check Blackboard to see if your professor has posted any sample papers.
- Visit the Writing Resources and References website: <http://ssw.unc.edu/students/writing>



# Methods of Outlining

- The sample outlines you've seen in this PowerPoint aren't for everyone. Feel free to use other, less formal methods, such as:
  - Post-Its
  - Index cards
  - Diagram Outlines
  - Electronic versions



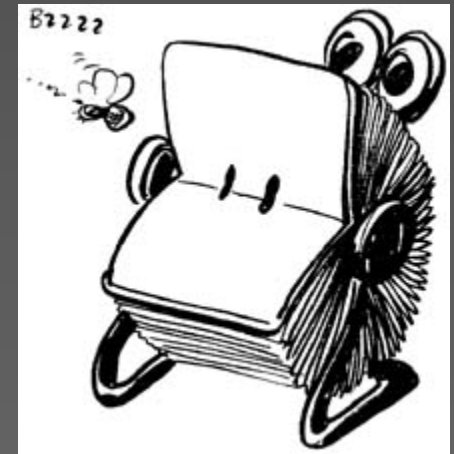
# Post-Its

- Find a large area (a large clipboard, whiteboard, clear desk, wall)
- Write down main ideas/topics/etc. Begin expanding on those, adding notes below. Outline your paper by arranging the Post-Its in a logical order. The nice thing about the Post-Its is that you can easily change and rearrange items without having to redo the entire outline.
- Here is a sample, using the Robert Kennedy speech outline:

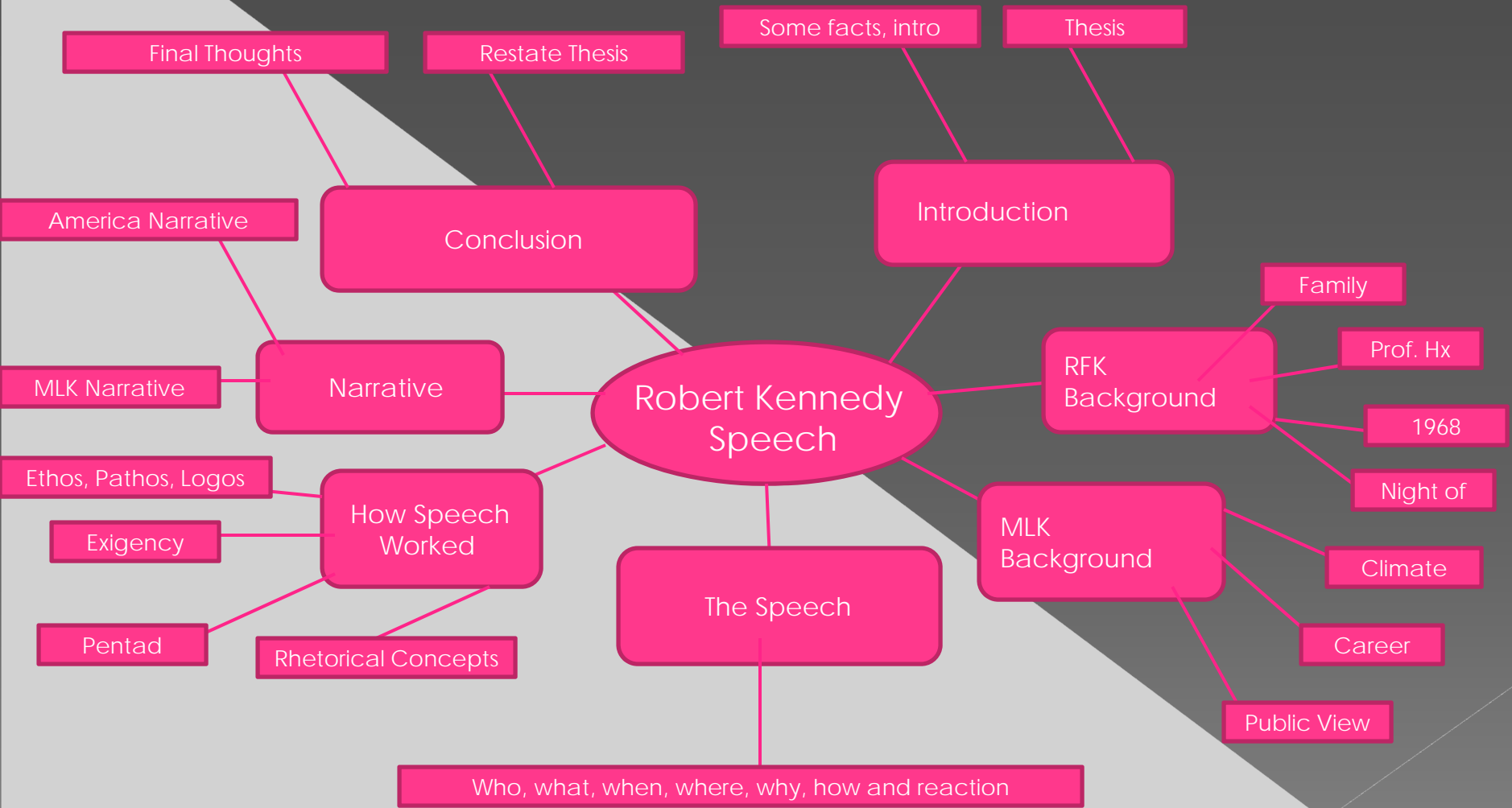


# Index Cards

- The index card outlining method works much like the Post-It method. The benefits of going this route:
  - Easy to store and carry with you
  - More space to add details
  - Like Post-Its, you can easily rearrange items, throw out items, add new items



# Diagram Outline



# Electronic Outlines

- Create a folder containing all of your research (e.g., PDFs, DOCs, scanned hard copies).
- Create a word document for each section in your paper(e.g., "RFK\_Background," "MLK\_Background"), and reference which articles you want to include in that section.
  - You may also want to highlight text in the PDFs of the articles you've read and make comments, such as, "Use in 'RFK Background-Family History-Father.'"
- Begin building content from those references. Copy and paste\* information/statistics you plan to use into the proper document.
- When you've gone through all of the research, begin arranging the information in your documents.
- Once the information is arranged, start fleshing out the pieces and adding details. Decide what you'll quote and what you'll paraphrase. **Use quotes sparingly!**
- At this point, you'll have several smaller outlines on multiple documents. Copy and paste them into one, large document.
- This method will provide you with an extensive outline from which to begin your paper.

**CAUTION:** Use Cut 'n Paste with care to avoid unintentional plagiarism!  
Add page numbers and quote marks in your notes!



# Finally, some tips from the masters....

FROM PURDUE OWL ONLINE WRITING LAB-

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/544/03/>

- Why create an outline? There are many reasons; but in general, it may be helpful to create an outline when you want to show the hierarchical relationship or logical ordering of information. For research papers, an outline may help you keep track of large amounts of information. For creative writing, an outline may help organize the various plot threads and help keep track of character traits. Many people find that organizing an oral report or presentation in outline form helps them speak more effectively in front of a crowd. Below are the primary reasons for creating an outline.
- Aids in the process of writing
- Helps you organize your ideas
- Presents your material in a logical form
- Shows the relationships among ideas in your writing
- Constructs an ordered overview of your writing
- Defines boundaries and groups
- How do I create an outline?
- Determine the purpose of your paper.
- Determine the audience you are writing for.
- Develop the thesis of your paper.
- Then:
- **Brainstorm:** List all the ideas that you want to include in your paper.
- **Organize:** Group related ideas together.
- **Order:** Arrange material in subsections from general to specific or from abstract to concrete.
- **Label:** Create main and sub headings.
- Remember: creating an outline before writing your paper will make organizing your thoughts a lot easier. Whether you follow the suggested guidelines is up to you, but creating any kind of outline (even just jotting down some main ideas) will benefit your writing process.



The End