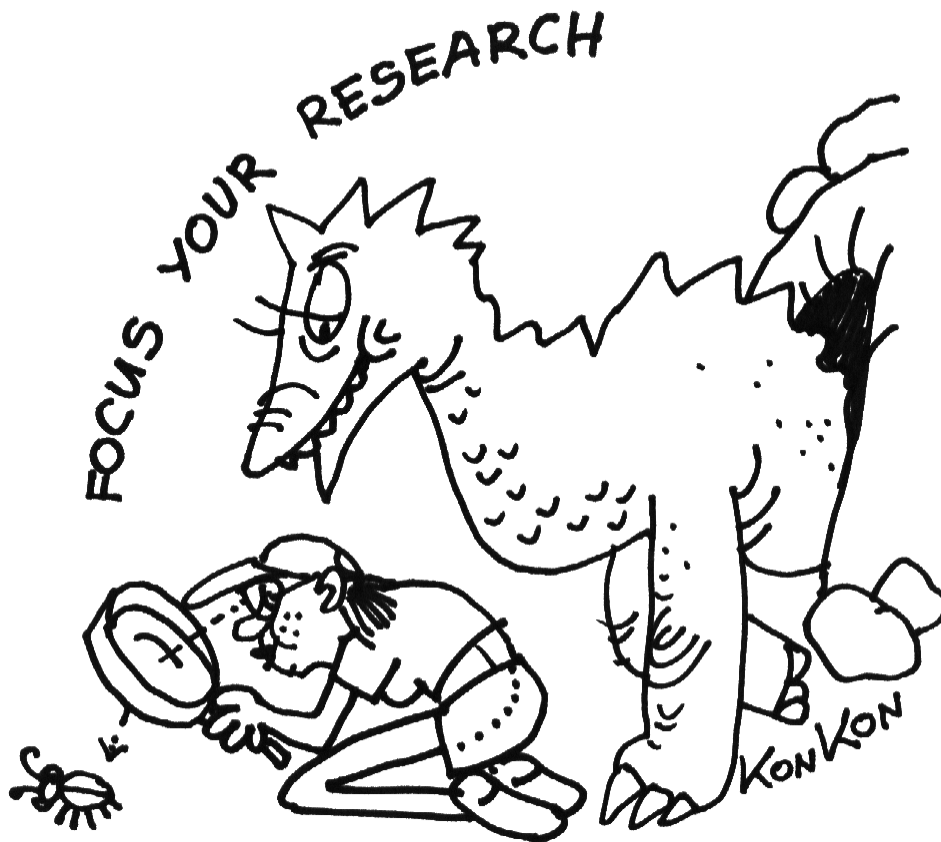


FOCUS YOUR RESEARCH

4

A successful writer has a plan of what to say.

- ◆ **Focusing your research: the preliminary thesis statement and working outline**
- ◆ **Writing an outline**



How do you focus your research?

Write a preliminary thesis and create a working outline.

Why do you need a thesis and an outline?

A thesis tells you the direction you want to go; an outline is a chart or map telling you how to get there without getting lost or off course.

Research Question: When you decide on a topic and choose your resources, you need to determine what question your research will answer. For example, suppose your topic is the author John Doe and his years in Paris. After general reading on this subject, you arrive at the question: **How did his years in Paris influence John Doe's writing?**

Preliminary Thesis: Your early reading should lead you to a possible answer which becomes your preliminary thesis: **John Doe's years in Paris from 1910-1915 influenced the characters and settings of several of his novels.**

Preliminary Outline: Based on what you have learned from your reading so far, brainstorm a list of questions or main points you might want to develop in your paper. Sample questions might include the following: What did he write? Whom did he meet that influenced him? What places influenced him? What about these people and places influenced his writing? What did he write while he was in Paris? Now turn these questions into your preliminary outline.

Checklist for Writing an Outline

1. Organization

- The title of your page is *Outline* (center)
- Next comes the word *Thesis:* (align left)
- The label *Introductory Paragraph* or *Introduction* follows (your teacher may prefer you write your Introductory Paragraph on your outline).
- Roman numerals beginning with *I.* indicate your main topics
- Capital letters beginning with *A.* indicate your subtopics
- Arabic numbers beginning with *1.* indicate supporting information and details for subtopics.
- Lower case letters starting with *a.* indicate additional supporting details
- Begin each topic and subtopic sentence or phrase with capital letters.
- Supporting information listed under a topic or subtopic contains at least two pieces of information in the list
- The label *Concluding Paragraph* summarizes the main idea of the outline. (your teacher may prefer you write your Concluding Paragraph on your outline).
- See examples on next page.

2. Format

- Topics and subtopics: double spaced with one-inch margins.
- Sentence outline: each outline entry is a complete sentence with a period
- Topic outline: each outline entry is a phrase with no punctuation at the end
- All sentences and topics must be in parallel form: Roman numerals are parallel to each other. Capital letters are parallel to each other as are Arabic numerals within a topic.

3. Content

- Each Roman numeral of your outline develops some part of your thesis. When added together the Roman numerals prove your thesis.
- The subtopics of each section support the topic.

Sample Outline

John Doe and Paris 1910-1915

Preliminary thesis: John Doe's years in Paris from 1910-1915 influenced the characters and settings of several of his novels.

Introductory Paragraph

Main Topic

I. Reasons for going to Paris

Topic

A. To study the architecture

B. To visit old friends

II. People he met in Paris

A. Interview with Marie DeFarge

B. Debate with Jacques L'amour

III. Influences in Paris

A. Architectural

Subtopic

1. Stately homes

a. Palaces

b. Chateaux

2. Gardens

B. Personal

IV. Books he wrote in Paris

A. *The Bridge*

B. *Lost Dreams*

Concluding Paragraph

Parallel infinitives

Note: You must have at least two supporting points under each topic or subtopic.

Parallel nouns

Parallel adjectives

The working outline will allow you to focus your research on particular areas that relate to your preliminary thesis. An outline keeps you from wasting your time on unrelated information. As you continue to read and begin taking your notes, you will reach a point where you may need to refine your preliminary thesis statement. You may have discovered that you do not need all the sections of your preliminary outline or that you need to expand your outline.

Compare this preliminary thesis and outline to the final thesis statement and outline on page 39.

Thesis: The main characters and the setting in John Doe’s novel *Lost Dreams* are based on Marie DeFarge and her Paris residence with its splendid gardens.

Once you have limited and refined your thesis in this way, you will want to change or adjust your outline, omitting sections that no longer apply and adding sections where necessary.



NOTES: