

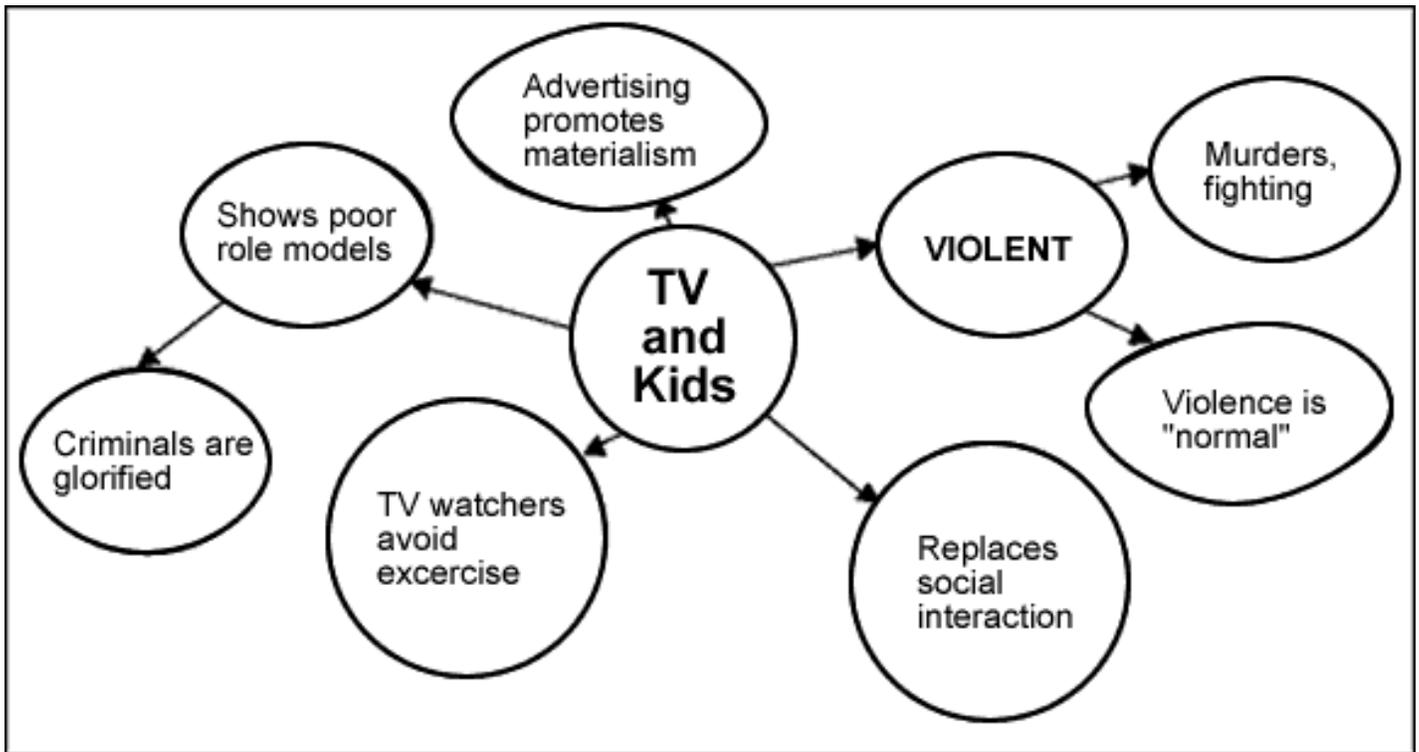
Clustering

Clustering is also called mind mapping or idea mapping. It is a strategy that allows you to explore the relationships between ideas.

- Put the subject in the center of a page. Circle or underline it.
- As you think of other ideas, link the new ideas to the central circle with lines.
- As you think of ideas that relate to the new ideas, add to those in the same way.

The result will look like a web on your page. Locate clusters of interest to you, and use the terms you attached to the key ideas as departure points for your paper.

Clustering is especially useful in determining the relationship between ideas. You will be able to distinguish how the ideas fit together, especially where there is an abundance of ideas. Clustering your ideas lets you see them visually in a different way, so that you can more readily understand possible directions your paper may take.



The Journalists' Questions

Journalists traditionally ask six questions when they are writing assignments, 5 W's and 1 H: *Who?*, *What?*, *Where?*, *When?*, *Why?*, *How?* You can use these questions to explore the topic you are writing about for an assignment. A key to using the journalists' questions is to make them flexible enough to account for the specific details of your topic. For instance, if your topic is the rise and fall of the Puget Sound tides and its effect on salmon spawning, you may have very little to say about *Who?* if your focus doesn't account for human involvement. On the other hand, some topics may be heavy on the *Who?*, especially if human involvement is a crucial part of the topic. Possible generic questions you can ask using the six journalists' questions follow:

- **Who?:**

Who are the participants? Who is affected? Who are the primary actors? Who are the secondary actors?

- **What?:**

What is the topic? What is the significance of the topic? What is the basic problem? What are the issues?

- **Where?:**

Where does the activity take place? Where does the problem or issue have its source? At what place is the cause or effect of the problem most visible?

- **When?:**

When is the issue most apparent? (past? present? future?) When did the issue or problem develop? What historical forces helped shape the problem or issue and at what point in time will the problem or issue culminate in a crisis? When is action needed to address the issue or problem?

- **Why?:**

Why did the issue or problem arise? Why is it (your topic) an issue or problem at all? Why did the issue or problem develop in the way that it did?

- **How?:**

How is the issue or problem significant? How can it be addressed? How does it affect the participants? How can the issue or problem be resolved?

The journalists' questions are a powerful way to develop a great deal of information about a topic very quickly. Learning to ask the appropriate questions about a topic takes practice, however. At times during writing an assignment, you may wish to go back and ask the journalists' questions again to clarify important points that may be getting lost in your planning and drafting.

Outlining your Paper

An outline is a plan for the paper that will help you organize and structure your ideas in a way that effectively communicates them to your reader and supports your thesis statement. You'll want to work on an outline after you've completed some of the other exercises, since having an idea what you'll say in the paper will make it much easier to write. An outline can be very **informal**; you might simply jot down your thesis statement, what the introduction will discuss, what you'll say in the body of the paper, and what you want to include in the conclusion.

Remember that all writing—even academic writing—needs to tell a “story”: the introduction often describes what has already happened (the background or history of your topic), the body paragraphs might explain what is currently happening and what needs to happen (this often involves discussing a problem, the need for a solution, and possible solutions), and the conclusion usually looks to the future by focusing on what is likely to happen (what might happen next, and whether a solution is likely). If you work on telling a story in the paper, it will help you to structure it in a way that the reader can easily follow and understand.

Develop an outline using the guide below. This will help you to demonstrate the relationships between the ideas, facts, and information within the paper. Here's an example of what this might look like:

- Introduction
 - Fact that grabs audience attention
 - Background/history of issue/problem/topic/
 - Thesis statement)
- Current state of issue/problem/topic
 - Topic/claim sentence: make a claim that explains the paragraph is about
 - Evidence that supports/explains the claim (this is often research from secondary sources)
 - Analysis that explains how the evidence support your claim and why this matters to the paper's thesis statement
- The need for a solution or course of action
 - Topic/claim
 - Evidence
 - Analysis
- Possible Solution
 - Topic/claim
 - Evidence
 - Analysis
- Conclusion
 - What might happen now?
 - Is a solution likely?
 - What's the future of the issue?

Your outline will contain more detailed information, and if there are certain areas that the assignment requires you to cover, then you can modify the outline to include these. You can also expand it if you're writing a longer research paper: the discussion of the problem might need several paragraphs, for example, and you might discuss the pros and cons of several possible solutions.