

Organizing Your Thoughts

So, you've read a ton, you've asked a ton, you've looked at a ton. You've recorded all of the information you've gathered on cards, sheets, or in a notebook. Chances are, you'll have well over a hundred individual pieces of information. What should you do next?

Organizing your information can seem impossible at first. However, it can also be exciting to see just how much of an expert you have become. Here are some steps to make organizing and getting ready to write and present a little easier:

1. Go through your notes with a highlighter or colored pencil. Circle the three or four facts you think are most important for each question you asked. **DON'T THROW AWAY ANYTHING YOU DIDN'T CIRCLE -- THOSE MIGHT BE THE DETAILS THAT WILL LIGHT UP YOUR WRITING AND PRESENTATION.**
2. If you used notecards, group the notecards with the information that you've circled together by question and try to put them in an order that makes sense. If you haven't used notecards, this may be a good time to transfer the information from the pages onto cards - one piece of information per card. You can also number the information bits you've circled for each question.
3. Create a web that shows your topic in the center with your subtopics (questions) around it and the information for each question attached to the subtopics. **Or**, you can create a formal outline with your topic at the top, a subtopic next and the information that you want to share about that subtopic beneath it. Then start the next subtopic. The benefit of an outline is that you can put your ideas in order.