Hello, and welcome to the Medical College of Wisconsin’s Master of Public Health Program Student Writing Tutorial. This tool has been created especially for you to aid you in your writing efforts while in the MPH Program.
You are now viewing part II of the MPH Writing Tutorial. In this section of the tutorial, I’ll discuss what you need to know before you start writing, choosing an appropriate topic to write about, creating a project or paper timeline, and how to prepare a paper outline.
The best way to begin a writing project or assignment is to simply get started. However, prior to beginning a writing project, be sure to review the parameters and criteria for the writing assignment provided by your instructor. If anything is unclear, contact your instructor early to get clarification. Once you have a clear understanding of your instructor’s expectations, spend some time exploring and choosing a topic to write about if the topic is not provided by your instructor. In general, appropriate topics are those which:

• Meet the assignment criteria, and

• Provide a topic for which there is a sufficient amount of information known. By sufficient, I mean that there is enough available literature on the topic to provide you with the supporting details and evidence necessary to support your ideas. For instance, if you are writing an argument paper and there is little known on your topic, you are likely to have great difficulty arguing your point using research-based evidence, unless your point is that there is a dearth of literature on a certain topic.

• Furthermore, it is ideal if you choose a topic that holds your personal interest—a topic that you will enjoy exploring and writing about.

Any topic that you choose should be shared with and approved by your instructor before you begin to write. Your instructor’s approval is valuable in that they have likely encountered many writing pieces over the years for the assignment and know which ones result in quality writing pieces, which receive high marks, and those topics that generally result in poor outcomes due to lack of available information, the inability of the topic to provide a platform for sufficient discussion, etc.

Throughout the writing process, please try to remember to be patient with yourself and understand that papers often develop in a cyclic manner and tend to evolve as you go along. You will likely complete a number of drafts before your final paper is complete.
Once you have a solid understanding of your writing assignment, it is often helpful to establish a writing, or project, timeline. One benefit of establishing a timeline is that it allows you to plan the completion of your assignment given your existing activities, course assignments, and other obligations. In addition, it allows you to set benchmarks for your assignment, which discourage procrastination and encourage productivity. If you're really feeling adventurous, establish a project timeline with a classmate and hold each other to the timely completion of each benchmark. Constructing an assignment timeline need not be an extensive process. The main point is to identify the steps necessary to complete the assignment, then situate those steps within a timeframe that will allow you complete the assignment on time, and leave a cushion for yourself in cases of such unforeseen challenges as technical trouble, delayed delivery of necessary resources to complete your paper, unexpected work schedules, and last minute appointments or meetings. To get started, refer to the sample timeline on this slide for completing an assigned paper in one month. Typically, however, you'll have more than one month to complete course writing assignments in the MPH Program.
Many students begin the writing process without any sort of outline of what they plan to include in their paper. If you’re thinking that you’d rather forego the outlining step in writing, here are some reasons, which may change your mind.

• First, outlining allows you to gain a bird’s eye view of your final paper—enabling you to recognize missing components early.

• Next, outlining provides a way for you to streamline your research efforts in order to focus only on those topics and resources relevant to your paper.

• It’s important to note that outlining also helps you to organize your thoughts and writing efforts in order to save time.
When creating an outline, it is best to do so electronically—for instance, via Microsoft Word or Works. The benefit of creating an outline this way is that you may delete and insert ideas with ease and without having to go back and constantly alter a paper and pencil version of your outline. Another benefit of creating your outline electronically is that most computers have a built-in outline formatting tool, which adds the Roman or Arabic numerals and letters for you.

To begin, using your syllabus and instructor’s notes as guidelines, start by listing the main components your paper must have. For instance, an introduction, literature review, methods section, results, discussion, and conclusion. These main sections of your paper will be numbered in your outline as they appear in this slide with large roman numerals.
Once the main parts of your paper have been added to your outline, add the major points within each main part of your paper, which are listed using capital letters—just as they appear in this slide. However, these components need not appear in your paper in this specific order. Rather, you should organize the components in the way which makes your particular paper flow well. I’ll now consider each of these components.

Somewhere in the introduction you must clearly state the topic of your paper. Also, it adds depth to your paper and credibility if you discuss your stake in the topic, or the reason you have chosen to write about a particular topic. In addition, you should convey to the reader both the specific and broad or global significance of your topic. Within the introduction, you may also need to define terms used in your paper, which the reader may not necessarily know. You’ll want to define these terms the first time you use them in the paper. In order to identify the terms the reader may not know, you must have a target audience in mind who is likely to read your paper. This intended audience should be stated in your introduction. Then, the purpose of your paper should be clearly identified, as well as how the duration of your paper will flow—this way the reader knows what to expect.
Under the main points, the supporting ideas will be listed using lower case letters and arithmetic numbers as shown in this slide. This process is one which you will use for each main component of your paper. Once complete, this outline will make completing your assignment easier and more efficient, as the outline will dually act as a roadmap and scaffold as you write your paper. I have provided a sample using the topic of access to dental care for rural and underserved areas. This example provides a visual sample of how general ideas are organized by capital letters, while more supporting ideas are denoted by lower case letters and numbers. In general, this is the format most paper outlines take on.
This slide marks the end of part II. Please progress to part III of the MPH Student Writing Tutorial.

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