



NO. 56 IN THE WRITING CENTER HANDOUT SERIES

Developing Your Ideas: Moves Writers Make

Experienced writers have a repertoire of writing “moves” they can make to develop their ideas on a given topic. These moves can work in almost any order and on almost any kind of a writing project. You probably also have moves of your own. What are they? Try some or all of these next time you are working on a writing assignment.

Collect quotations, images, actions, patterns.

Find quotations, images, actions, patterns, etc. from the text or material under study, the theory pertaining to your topic, or your area of interest that raise questions in your mind and make you want to think and write. Note citation details, including page number, so you can properly attribute these quotations and ideas later on.

Write questions about your topic.

Not just one, but a lot. Free write in response to them. Where do your responses intersect? Is there a topic there? Which questions can't easily be answered? Is there a topic there?

Figure out what you need to know to answer the question(s) you choose to pursue.

Theory? What Kind of Theory? History? Politics? Biography? Language? Technique? Other works? Details that will feed your creativity? Now go out and find more primary and secondary sources.

Let the primary sources guide you.

Don't lose sight of the primary sources you are focusing on as you carry out other kinds of research. Primary sources generate important questions and hold ideas and answers for you to discover.

Create, borrow, modify, refine key terms.

You need terms with which to set up and make your arguments. Get them from primary and secondary sources, but make them your own through definitions or new creations. Some analyses lend themselves to the creation of new terms or phrases.

Look for a new way of thinking, reading, or writing.

Others have done certain things, covered certain ground. Where does your work fit in? What space can you carve out for you to fill? Use quotations from other thinkers on this topic to show where your ideas fit in.

Determine the sections or steps or parts of the project.

This strategy will help you get the writing started and an organized approach will help you guide and meet readers' expectations. If you actually build in subtitles in the draft, you always have the option of taking them out once you've accomplished your writing goals.

(continued on reverse)



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Developing Your Ideas: Moves Writers Make, continued

Let your introduction establish common ground and destabilize the reader.

Tell us what we need to know to enter the world of your essay. Make us see that there are problems that need solving. Raise for us the questions that made you choose this direction. Then tell us how you plan to solve these problems! Use “howevers” to set the stage for your theories and ideas. You will supply from your own thinking and analysis whatever is to be on the far side of the “however.”

Contextualize!

Everything must be explained, illustrated with examples, put into context for the reader.

Consider the title of your paper as an opportunity.

You can do things with your title that complement, accentuate, surprise, emphasize—there are lots of possibilities.

Follow through on the promises you make to the reader.

We call this “developing your point.” It’s where the bulk of the writing comes from. Rise expectations and meet them—this is the rhythm of good, clear, forward-moving writing.