How to Write an Essay

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Suppose that you are asked to write 7 topical sentences to organize an essay. Think out loud with a tape recorder. Then transcribe or have someone transcribe the ideas on a computer. It's not important to write sentences, just phrases or ideas or bullets. Let the ideas flow in any manner. Either shrink the text so you can see all of it at once on the screen or print it out and look at the whole project.

Reorganize the whole text so that it flows the way you like it. Then chunk it in your mind. Each chunk is a paragraph. Then chunk it on paper. Map the whole assignment in terms of the requirements. A 7-paragraph essay usually includes an introductory paragraph where you tell what you are going to talk about. The second paragraph should be your best supporting example of your concept. Often, you'll need a couple more examples, a couple qualifying or contrasting ideas, and then a concluding paragraph.

See if you can find a sentence in each chunk that expresses the main idea of the paragraph. Remember, it doesn't have to be the first sentence. If you don't have seven chunks, add more ideas until you have enough. Play around with it until you like it.

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