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Writing up a storyboard to avoid restructuring

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Thread Tools Display Modes

- [Guest](#) [Lovely Explanation, Bombay. Thanks so much!](#) 20th January 2006, 5:42 PM
- [Guest](#) [dang. Dang, Inspiration is expensive here.](#) 20th January 2006, 6:05 PM
- [Guest](#) [Sounds exciting. No luck with the images...](#) 20th January 2006, 6:42 PM
- [Guest](#) [Thanks Bombay!! Re Images - I copied the whole post and pasted into...](#) 20th January 2006, 9:06 PM
- [Guest](#) [Thanks much, B! Images fixed](#) 20th January 2006, 9:04 PM
- [Guest](#) [Fantastic, Tom. A medal for you.](#) 20th January 2006, 10:28 PM
- [Guest](#) [ditto! excellent groupwork!](#) 21st January 2006, 5:19 AM
- [Guest](#) [thank you so much, Dr. B!! Very, very helpful! & *thanks* Tom! /nm](#) 21st January 2006, 11:27 AM

[Prev](#) [Next](#)

20th January 2006, 10:06 AM

#1

Bombay

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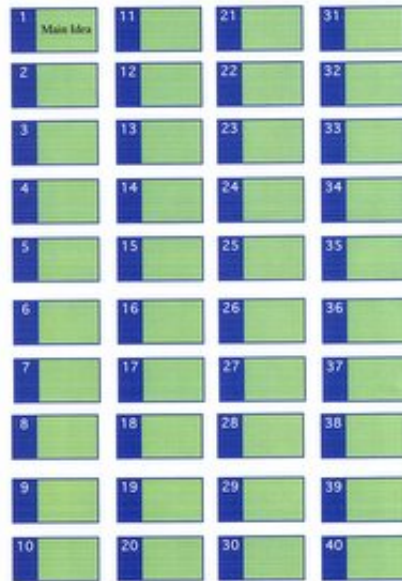
Writing up a storyboard to avoid restructuring

I've struggled with improving my writing process, and I hate hate hate having to restructure because you have to come up not only with new text but new transitions. Ick. This method works very well for me, and I have not had to restructure a paper since I have adopted it.

My writing usually begins with some crappy little idea I think rocks the world. This I mess with and fuss with for weeks until it starts to feel like it needs its life. I'll read some research on the idea and try to figure out who the big-wigs are in the field. But I don't read a lot. Just enough to figure out if somebody has said whatever I am thinking about already. Chances are they haven't, not because I'm so gosh-darned original, but because if you've been researching awhile, you generally know what's out there in your chosen area.

When I'm ready to roll, I'll do sheets and sheets of concept maps on giant pieces of paper taped to my drawing board. I'll add to it stuff on an easel in my office. Eventually, I'll start ordering all the ideas I've braindumped into the concept maps. Because my writing follows a rhythm, I know that each of my paragraphs runs about 200 words. With a program called [Inspiration](#), I have a template for a storyboard.

It looks like this:

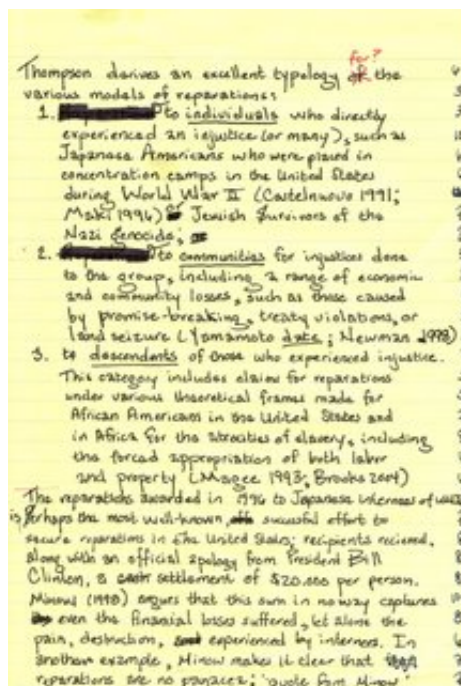


(Click on the images to see larger versions.)

If I am writing for a journal (aiming for a journal...I'm not important enough to be invited to do stuff), then I look at their word limits. If they are suggesting somewhere between 6500 and 7500 words, I'll aim for 6800. That means I've got 34 paragraphs with which to build my argument, more or less. In boards 1 through 34 in the template, I'll write the topic sentence for each paragraph. If supportiing ideas come, I'll put those in to. But each topic sentence has to build on the other in the linear narrative. By using this method, I have avoided for my last four papers the thing I hate most in the world: restructuring a paper once I have a complete draft. The storyboard will often take me as long as a month to complete, because I am very picky with it. When I am not picky--when I get sloppy--I find during writing that I can't work because I don't know where I am going. So it's worth it to take time. The completed storyboard looks like this (this is for the PT paper I just finished):



Once the storyboard is in place, I take out my most princess-y and expensive fountain pen or the magic Hello, Kitty pencils I have and begin composing the first draft. I write longhand on long narrow legal papers or on rough newsprint--I like both. This example happens to be legal paper. I keep a word count of each line going, and then at the end of the page I get to have a nice little break adding it up (I'm good at math and in my head arithmetic, so it's a few seconds of break). I edit as I go along, obviously, with the big black Sharpie of Death. When I decide to get rid of a word, I don't want to even see it. The handwriting looks like this:



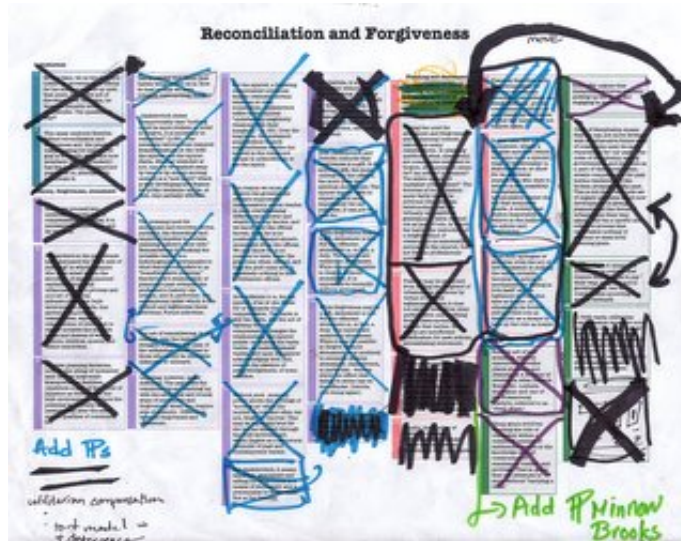
I generally don't stop writing for the day until I have 1000 to 1500 on good days. During the evening when I am watching sports or something stupid, or when I have a working date with my friend and she's chatty, I'll type. I type about 90 wpm (former secretary) and so it doesn't take me a long time to type, though I do edit some as I

type. When I am done typing the day's output, I print it off (wasteful, rotten thing that I am).

When I begin writing the next day, I edit through the paper from the beginning, again with the big black Sharpie of Death. After I've edited, I sit down with the storyboard. When I go to type the day's work, I then input all the edits, making sure that I highlight each edit as I go along (I hate having to re-do an edit. Makes me feel sloppy). I use drylighters (crayons, essentially) to make every edit as I go, and then I cross off the page when I've done everything so I know I am done with it and it is ready for recycling:



I repeat this, day after day, until I have gone through the storyboard. Inevitably, I have to change the storyboard as I go along, because something I thought was really important...isn't, really...and other types of evidence or support needs to go in. Thus the storyboard looks like this when I am done with the paper, with stuff added and deleted. I cross out each paragraph as I go when I am done with that paragraph. Paragraphs that get moved have arrows. Deleted things get completely colored away:



Original Phorum post #107299

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