Articulate a question or problem that is driving your paper

The question/problem may change throughout the writing process, but if that happens, just keep revising it. The more specific and complex you can make your question/problem, the more it will help you develop and refine your argument. It is useful for keeping you on track and can remind you of what ideas still need to be addressed when you are in the midst of the writing process.

Create a main claim

This is the most important part of your paper. A claim is a statement supported by REASONS based on EVIDENCE. It acknowledges and responds to other (opposing) views, and you can make a case for its significance (STAKES, or the "so what?"). A main claim should be specific (nuanced and detailed, not general), substantive (compelling and original), relevant to a scholarly conversation (something that would interest other professionals in your academic field), and contestable (something a reader in your field could doubt). The more contestable your main claim is, the higher the stakes your argument will have. But you never want to make a claim that is too big to be supported with the evidence you can supply within the scope of your paper. It is usually better to make a smaller claim that you can support well than a grand claim that you cannot. The main claim should be stated explicitly in your paper. This usually happens at the end of the introduction section. Revise your claim at any point in the process.

Craft an introduction

An introduction usually lays out the conversation you are entering into, and how you are doing it. It tells your reader the question or problem your paper is pursuing, and why this question or problem is important. It also offers your main claim as the answer to the question or the solution to the problem.

Craft a body

Most body paragraphs make one clear point that supports the main claim, and then discuss the reasons and evidence for that point. The main variation is that some paragraphs might address counter-arguments.

Craft a conclusion

Conclusions do more than restate the main claim. They can be thought of as a broadening-out, or opening-up, of your initial question in light of the work you have now presented. How does your interpretation help your field move forward? Now that the readers have read your analysis, what new questions might they pursue? What areas should we look at because of your new research? This is a good place to speculate about ideas that deserve further exploration.