

Nutshelling

Nutshelling is a useful strategy for laying out the substance of your paper in a few concise sentences. This strategy is useful after you have done some preliminary research but you are feeling overwhelmed by the multitude of ideas, details, examples, etc. You are looking for a way to clarify your central purpose, identify your main ideas and show the relationships among these ideas. That is, you want to explain to a potential reader your argument “in a nutshell”.

The over-riding purpose of nutshelling is to answer the big question: “what are you trying to say?”. To help you address this big question, ask yourself one or more of the following questions. Try to keep your answers concise, ideally to a single sentence.

1. Overall, the purpose of my paper is to...

2. The key question I intend to ask is...

3. A working title for my paper is...

4. What initially sparked my interest in this topic?

5. What do I believe to be the most common view on this topic? Is that the view I would like to argue to my readers?

6. The most important argument that I want to make is...
