Decide on a Topic
Choose a specific topic for your essay, a topic of personal interest for you, one that is worthy of your time and efforts.

Develop a Research Question
Consider your topic closely, and then “get curious.” You may decide exactly what you wish to research right away, or more likely, you may need to do preliminary research to discovery the interesting issues, where the experts disagree, to develop a research problem concerning interpretation of meaning, criticism of quality, cause-effect relationships, etc. If you start with a specific thesis, it is helpful if you “turn it around” as a question, for your thesis will answer your research question.

Formulate a Thesis Statement
In answer to your research question, write out your thesis in the form of a one-sentence, assertive statement that sums up the main claim of your essay. The shorter your paper, the more limited and specific your thesis statement. Four criteria guide good research questions and thesis statements: concrete (specific, not too general in its terms), narrow (qualified, not too broad for the project), challenging (theoretically significant, not too bland or obvious), and grounded (provable, not too speculative) with a view to evidence. The thesis should be significant and argumentative. Write your thesis as clearly and directly as possible, and place it where readers expect to find it: at the end of your first paragraph.

Gather Evidence
After analyzing texts and sources, one should write out all of the quotations that might serve to support your thesis. Use direct quotations or summarize the text, and always provide the page number for prose or the line number for poetry (in parentheses after the quotation or in a footnote, depending on your citation style). Remember, quotations cannot stand on their own; writers connect them to their own sentences and interpret them in a manner that supports the thesis statement.

Make a Preliminary Outline
Map out some sort of logical outline, labeling each paragraph or section so that it contributes to your argument.

Add Headings to List of Quotations
Using your preliminary outline, decide how you want to organize your evidence under reasons and into manageable parts. Develop a short label or phrase that defines each category. Label each of your quotations using one of those short phrases.

Compose Your First Draft
Each reason supporting the thesis should serve as a topic sentence of each body paragraph in your essay. Draft the body paragraphs with topic sentences. Then go back and rewrite the introduction and a conclusion. Most writers start by writing an introduction, but this should be revised to account for your developing thesis, reasons, and evidence.

Revise Your Essay
Read your paper critically for ways to improve organization and argument. First, read the structure: Is your organizational scheme logical? Have you left out any important reasons or points? Second, focus on argument: Do you have a clear thesis statement? Do any of your key terms or technical terms need defining? Do your ideas or reasons need more explanation? Are there places where you do not support your claims? Can you weave key terms throughout your essay to improve coherence? Third, consider the conclusion: Does the conclusion do more than summarize? Consider discussing how your argument has significant implications or applications; consider adding a new perspective on the topic.

Polish, Proofread, and Print
After a day or two, read your paper again focusing on clarity, correctness, and style of your sentences. Your communication style should be clear, precise, and correct. Could you write your sentences more clearly? Have you avoided repetition? Is grammar and punctuation correct? Have you cited correctly each quotation and summary from sources? Do you have a nifty title that reflects your argument? One of the most helpful techniques is to read your paper out loud. Make all changes to help your target readers understand and appreciate your argument. Then print and submit your paper.