University of Vermont Graduate Writing Center
Moving from Research to Writing

You have completed your major experiments, emerged from the field or archive, and/or combed your project's primary and scholarly texts. Now what?

Brainstorming: Try these brainstorming questions to help you move from research to writing.

- What problem/need/question/issue/conversation does your research address?

- Is your topic still interesting to you? What can you do to revive your interest in it?

- How many sets of data/ideas/main points do you have?

- Do you have any competing data/ideas/main points?

- What are you reluctant to discard and why?

- What story do your data tell, or what story might they tell? Or what conversation(s) in your field does your research prepare you to enter and advance? What are the lines of thinking you hope to carry forward? To counter or complicate?

- What's one thing you can start writing now, with the research you've done?

- What's one thing you need to investigate further in order to write about it?

Storyboarding: Use post-its, notecards, or PowerPoint slides to gather your key data, references, sources, and/or points for a project or section of a project. Through storyboarding, you can see what you have and what is missing, try out different arrangements, or begin drafting at any point within the story you've mapped out.

Imitating: Take a "mentor" text that gives you a good idea of what your own finished project will look like, and then examine sentence to sentence and paragraph and paragraph how a section of that text starts and proceeds. Try writing an imitation of that section of the text, swapping out its writer's particular topic and particulars and swapping in your own.

Storytelling: Science stories most commonly start with a limitation or a mystery: e.g., "X does Y but [something about X does Y] is poorly understood" or "X is common among Y, but little research has been done/no satisfactory explanation exists …" How would you tell the story of the limitation or mystery your research tackles? What work in the field would you need to describe and summarize to lead up to your hypothesis, theory, or experiment that will address the limitation or solve (some part of) the mystery?

Teach It: If you were to teach a unit on your project to undergraduate majors in your field, what would your lesson plan be? You might consider the unit's learning outcomes, what the final class would focus on, and what key concepts, activities, and methods should be introduced and when.

Talk It Out: Working with a partner, friend or spouse, explain the results of your data out loud. As your partner listens have them take notes and ask them to say back to you at the end what story/argument/lines of thinking were especially prominent.

Big-Picture Brainstorm: Move away from the particulars of your data or research for the moment and brainstorm some big-picture claims you'd like to be able to make. Be bold with this step—don't worry if some are beyond your project's scope or beyond what your research can support. Then take one or more of the most important of these claims and work backwards: What are the steps and what is the evidence you would need to support such a claim? What do you have and what else would you need to advance this claim?

Concept Mapping: With a concept map you move from brainstorming key topics, ideas, and data points for your topic to grouping them (consider using post-its for easy shuffling and reorganizing) and adding key linking words and phrases to show their relationships, contrasts, or progression.

Sample concept map: