

Category Development Worksheet

Phase 1: Topic & Core Question

Working Topic: _____

Core Research Question: _____

Why is this question complex? (Why can't it be answered simply?)

Phase 2: Brainstorm Potential Organizing Principles

Circle or highlight the most promising 1-2 for your topic.

Principle	Description	Best For Topics About...	Example Categories
Chronological	Time-based development or stages	Change, evolution, history	Origins, Development, Maturation, Decline
Comparative	Examining distinct, comparable cases	Systems, methods, regions	Case Study A, Case Study B, Case Study C
Thematic	Different aspects or themes of a subject	Complex phenomena, broad concepts	Political, Economic, Social/Cultural
Theoretical	Applying different analytical lenses	Abstract concepts, texts	Marxist, Feminist, Postcolonial readings
Causal	Explaining causes, mechanisms, effects	Problems, outcomes	Root Causes, Contributing Factors, Consequences

Hierarchical	Levels of scale or importance	Systems, influence	Individual, Institutional, Societal
Problem-Solution	Identifying and addressing issues	Challenges, reforms	Problem Definition, Barriers, Proposed Solutions
Rhetorical	Elements of argument/debate	Controversies, persuasion	Ethos, Logos, Pathos (or Claim, Counterclaim, Synthesis)

Selected Organizing Principle(s): _____

Why this principle fits: _____

Phase 3: Category Brainstorm Grid

Generate 5-7 possible categories. Then evaluate and select your final 3-5.

Category Idea	Core Insight It Provides	Key Evidence/Source Ideas	Strength (1-5)	Overlap Risk?
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				
6.				
7.				

Final Category Selections (Number them in logical order):

1. _____
 2. _____
 3. _____
 4. _____ (if needed)
 5. _____ (if needed)
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Phase 4: Category Characteristic Builder

Fill this out for EACH of your final categories.

Category #_____ : [Name]

- **Analytical Role:** (e.g., Foundational, Complicating, Synthetic)
 - **Relationship to Thesis:** (How does proving this category help prove the whole thesis?)
 - **Primary Source/Evidence Type:** (e.g., historical document, statistical data, literary passage, theory)
 - **Potential Counterpoint to Acknowledge:**
 - **Link to Previous Category:** (How does it build on or depart from the one before?)
 - **Link to Next Category:** (What question does it leave open for the next to answer?)
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Phase 5: Thesis & Blueprint Check

Draft Thesis Statement (Incorporate your categories):

Example: "Through an examination of [Category 1], [Category 2], and [Category 3], this essay argues that [your core claim]."

Narrative Flow Test: Complete this sentence:

"First, I will establish [Category 1] in order to show [insight], which then requires examining [Category 2] because [reason]. This combination leads to the nuanced factor of [Category 3], ultimately revealing [final insight]."

Example Planning Grids

Grid A: Literary Analysis (3 Categories)

Topic: *"Identity in The Great Gatsby"*

Principle: Thematic

Category	Core Insight	Key Evidence
1. Performed Identity	Characters create artificial selves	Gatsby's "old sport," parties; Myrtle's dress
2. Imposed Identity	Society limits self-creation	Tom's class assertions; Valley of Ashes
3. Inner vs. Outer Self	The conflict causes tragedy	Gatsby's glimpse of green light; Nick's final judgment

Grid B: History/Policy (4 Categories)

Topic: *"Causes of Urban Air Pollution"*

Principle: Causal + Hierarchical

Category	Core Insight	Evidence Type
1. Technological	Vehicle & industrial emissions	EPA data, fuel types
2. Economic	Growth priorities vs. regulation	Policy timelines, industry lobbying

3. Geographic	Weather & topography trap pollution	Meteorological studies, city maps
4. Social	Inequitable exposure by neighborhood	Health outcome data by zip code

Grid C: Argumentative (5 Categories)

Topic: *"Should Algorithmic Content Moderation Be Regulated?"*

Principle: Problem-Solution + Rhetorical

Category	Analytical Role	Purpose
1. The Problem	Foundational	Define harms: bias, censorship, opacity
2. Industry Defense	Counterpoint	Present tech co. arguments (efficiency, scale)
3. Regulatory Models	Comparative	Compare EU (DSA) vs. US (Section 230) approaches
4. Ethical Framework	Theoretical	Apply "right to explanation" & transparency principles
5. Proposed Solution	Synthetic	Argue for hybrid oversight: required audits + user appeals

Next Step: Use your completed worksheet to populate the relevant **Outline Template**. Your categories are now logically derived and purpose-driven.