Case Study: Writing Papers

Alan, a friend of yours, got another bad grade on a paper. The way he used to do papers back in high school just is not getting the job done at the U. Alan knows you are taking one of those “super student” classes and comes to you for help.

Here is what Alan has to say:

“Well, first, it always takes me forever to think of a topic. This was a ten pager on something in colonial U.S. History. I thought about a topic for weeks and looked in my text for ideas. A week before the paper was due I finally came up with the constitutional convention. When I went to the library, I found lots on the subject. I used 3 x 5 note cards and wrote information from books on them. I got about 50 of those done on that day and then when I got another couple of hours later in the week, I started writing. I had more stuff on ideas they covered in the convention so the paper ended up being on that. Well, I couldn’t quite get ten pages so I went back to the library and got some more information. By this time though, the paper was due the next day. I had to pull an all nighter to get it done and done legibly. Well, when I got it back the teacher said my paper was “unfocused, too broad, too wordy, and didn’t make sense in a lot of places.” He said it could be better organized and should have contained more of my own ideas. I don’t know what he wants. It was ten pages like he asked and it was in on time!”

What can you suggest to Alan to improve his paper writing?

Here are some suggestions of areas to consider:

How to generate ideas for a paper and refine an idea, collecting and organizing information, scheduling and time lines, the stages of writing a paper, and the age old question – why is it hard to write a quality paper the night before it’s due?

Oh, beware, too. Alan is going to want to know WHY these things work that you are suggesting.