

“Writing is difficult” –anon.

The Writing PROCESS

1. Identify purpose, audience, topic
2. Generate ideas
3. Gather information
4. Organize ideas/formulate thesis
5. Write your initial draft
6. Revise
 - 6a. Revise
 - 6b. Revise
 - 6c. Revise

[Repeat steps 2-6 as necessary, in any order desired, until you attain a satisfying result.]

7. Edit and proofread

Step 1: Identify purpose, audience, topic

Purpose: to explain, entertain, express, persuade, inform, describe, analyze, recommend, summarize, instruct, hypothesize, . . .

Audience: Consider age, gender, interests, values, education.

How much does your audience *know* about your topic? How *interested* will they be? What kind of *vocabulary* should you use? What terms must you define? How much *background info* must you give? Will your audience be *sympathetic or adversarial* to your argument?

Topic: Consider your own knowledge about, interest in, feelings for, and thoughts on a topic as you decide whether / how to write about it.

Consider paper length—Make sure your topic is *sufficiently narrow* to allow you to develop a paper fully within the assigned page limit.

Generating ideas (Prewriting)

Freewriting:

Set a time limit and write *without pausing at all*.

Don't worry about grammar, spelling, organization, etc.

Harvest promising ideas from your freewriting and develop and/or narrow them with more freewriting, or other prewriting techniques.

Brainstorming:

Proceed as when freewriting, but using phrases rather than sentences.

Try it individually or with a group.

Clustering:

Create a *visual* arrangement of ideas and logical connections.

Use it to narrow topics, locate ideas that need development, and identify the logical and hierarchical relationships among ideas.

Keeping a journal

Answering questions

Formulating your thesis statement

broad area of interest

college admissions

topic

affirmative action in college admissions

question to answer

What problems can be caused by affirmative action in college admissions?

thesis statement Affirmative action in college admissions can cause divisions and resentments within the student body and so destroy the very unity it attempts to create.

Your thesis statement should

Narrow your topic to a single main idea;

Assert a position;

Express your opinion and attitude about the topic;

Stimulate curiosity in your readers;

Fit your purpose.

Place your thesis at the beginning of your paper (deductive development) or, as a climax, at the end of your paper (inductive development).

Organizing ideas—OUTLINING

The difference between a well organized paper and a holy mess generally lies in the outline.

An outline does NOT have to be sophisticated; it only needs to show levels of ideas and the order in which you will write about them.

BEFORE writing: 1. List all the points you want to make.
2. Group them according to relationships.
3. Decide which ideas are major and minor / main topics and subtopics.
4. Decide the order in which you want to cover the topics.
5. Indicate logical connections/transitions between them.

DURING writing: outline what you have written so far when you are stuck, or to make sure you are staying on topic.

Writing your first DRAFT—some helpful and unorthodox tips

Don't begin at the beginning: start with the section/point that seems easiest to you, work to the end, then write your intro.

Write quickly. Get your ideas down as quickly as possible, without worrying too much about grammar, perfect word choice, spelling, etc.

Write strongly. Capture your initial passion and excitement about the ideas, or else you'll lose them. You can tone down your writing later.

Save all drafts and notes. Save both hard and electronic copies, betting on the worst (it happens). Save multiple versions of your drafts, as you may decide to revisit ideas you've already deleted.

*When you take breaks—*finish a section or try to exhaust your current thoughts; if not, make notes about what you want to say next.

Write where you are free from distractions. You'll get more done in two intense hours of work than in six hours of interruptions by friends, phone, TV, email, etc. Don't waste your time.

Set deadlines, plan breaks, break up your work hours.

Setting aside a whole day to write a paper usually results in getting little done—the idea of spending an entire day writing a paper is just too awful.

Plan shorter work periods with rewards at the ends of them. (Start early.)
When all else, fails, take a shower—or do whatever makes
your
brain juices flow. Run. Sing. Sniff a rotten apple.

Stages of REVISION

I. BIG STUFF: Thesis statement (clarity, location, effectiveness), logical fallacies, assignment parameters

II. Overall organization

A. Unity

--Does each paragraph have a clear topic sentence?

--Does each sentence relate to that topic sentence?

--Does each topic sentence relate to the thesis statement?

B. Development

--Is each topic sentence sufficiently developed?

--Does the essay provide enough evidence and supporting detail for the thesis statement? too much?

C. Coherence

--Does each paragraph lead logically into the next? Are there any gaps in logic within or between paragraphs?

III. Introduction, conclusion, and title

IV. Style—sentence variety, word choice, conciseness, action, parallelism, etc. Is the essay lively, engaging, and original?

Stages of EDITING

I. Sentence faults (comma splices, fused sentences, fragments)

II. Pronoun use (vague PNs, PN shifts, PN agreement)

III. Punctuation (especially apostrophes and commas)

IV. Subject-verb agreement; other grammatical problems

PROOFREADING

Check for format (spacing, font, margins, page numbers, etc.), spelling, typographical errors, homonym mistakes, etc.

Tips to help you catch your errors:

1. Read your paper aloud.
2. Use a ruler to help you focus on one line at a time.
3. Read the paper backwards, sentence by sentence.
- **4. PUT YOUR PAPER AWAY FOR A WHILE before you proofread it.