

# Chapter 1

## Overview



### Warming up Exercises

1. We have been dealing with various kinds of writing tasks, like letters, paragraphs, and essays. Think about a time when you wrote an important paper for a class or for work. Then list the steps you took to complete this writing task from the beginning to the end. Try to be as specific as you can.
2. When you are done, form into small groups, and share your notes with your group members. Compare your notes in the group, find out the similarities and differences, and exchange ideas over the entries in the list.

### Writing as a Process of Discovery

Writing itself is an act of discovery. It is a means to explore the world around you and unleash your creativity. It differs from speaking, and it is more deliberate—more fully and carefully thought out, and more precise—more consciously crafted word by word to create just the right effect.

As you work through the writing process, you will discover the significance of your ideas as well as the connections between them. At the same time, you will discover how to present those ideas correctly in terms of usage, spelling, and punctuation.

Mastering writing is important because both in the classroom and in the world beyond, solid writing skills are primary requirement for success. But mastering writing is also important because the rewards are so great. When you write effectively in school and on the job, you earn respect of your instructors, your colleagues, your supervisors, and most important of all, yourself.

## The Three Stages of Writing Process

Do you know what writing is? Most people think of writing as a job that begins when you put pen to paper or sit down at a computer. It's over when you've written enough words to complete the task. That's it.

Actually, putting words on paper is only a small part of writing an essay, or writing a letter, or writing a book, or writing almost anything. Writing a paper involves the writing process, a series of stages called prewriting, composing, and revising.

Individual writing process certainly may vary, and various models of the writing process may include different numbers of steps. Yet nearly all models include the three stages: *prewriting*, *composing*, and *revising*.

*Prewriting* is the planning and thinking before you write. At this stage, you identify the topic, generate ideas, and organize them. That is, you decide what you are going to say first and what the main points will be. *Composing*, also called drafting, is what you do while you write. This stage involves selecting some of the ideas you have generated during prewriting, expressing them in sentences, and then organizing them into paragraph form. *Revising* occurs after you write. It is to go back over your paper, slowly and carefully, and try to spot the areas that need improving or correcting. A successful piece of writing is not a one-time effort, but the result of several versions.

## Writing as Both a Linear and Circular Activity

The three-stage writing process is linear in that it shows separate, distinct writing stages. When you write, you begin with prewriting, move to composing, and then advance to revising. But in reality, writing is not a perfectly straightforward process. It is a circular process as well.

Writing is a complex task that usually includes several stops and starts. It involves creation, and creation requires freedom, experimentation, and missteps. Instead of proceeding in a straight line over a clear path, you might start writing

without knowing what you have to say, circle back to explore a new idea, or keep going even though you are sure you will have to rewrite later. For example, after assessing a completed draft, you may find a part that needs to be developed more completely. If so, you will need to return to the prewriting stage to generate some new ideas. The steps may also seem to blend together so that it is not clear when you are completing one step and moving to the next.

## The Purpose Behind Your Writing

When you write, you fulfill one or more of the three main aims, or purposes: to inform, to entertain, or to persuade. A paper discussing the popularity of bicycle trails, for example, would inform. So would a paper spelling out how to upgrade a computer system.

A paper about performing in a production of a local theater company would clearly entertain. Writing that entertains doesn't always raise a smile, though. A paper about coming home to discover that your home had been robbed would also entertain because it would arouse your readers' interest and emotions.

A paper asserting that new organizations should respect the privacy of people, famous or not, who experience personal tragedies, would persuade. So would a paper proposing that the government should not place limits on the types of information that are available on the Internet. As a college student, you will find that you are frequently called upon to prepare persuasive writings, often called arguments.

Of course, you will discover a degree of overlap in these purposes. The entertaining paper about bike trails might also inform if it explains the process of converting an abandoned railroad route into a recreational area. And the same paper might be persuasive if it advocates spending tax income to create a bike path in your city or town.

You might think that it isn't necessary to specify the primary purpose of a piece of writing because the assignment itself often dictates this aim. But you should always take a moment to identify your purpose. This way, you will be sure that the paper you write fulfills that purpose and thus meets the needs of your reader.



## The Audience of Your Writing

Focusing on the reader is the key to successful communication in writing. Writing that doesn't communicate its ideas to readers is not effective. In some cases, you actually know who your reader is, but often you won't know exactly who your reader will be. In these cases, focus on the average reader. The average reader is like most of us. We all know a little about many subjects, but lack detailed information about most of those subjects. Think of yourself before you understood or learned what you know about your subjects. That's what the average reader is like, and that's the type of person you should focus on when you write.

For details on audience analysis, please check Chapter 2 (considering your audience)

## The Dynamics of Writing

Writing is an act of communication. When you write, you use words to convey your ideas so that your intended reader can understand them. The act of writing involves five basic interacting components:

- (1) a writer, the person expressing the ideas;
- (2) a reader, the audience;
- (3) a topic, the subject of writing;
- (4) a message, the writer's idea about the topic;
- (5) a means, the written language.

A writer first focuses on a topic to be communicated to the reader. Then the writer tries to convey message, which includes the various ideas, details, and examples the writer wants to communicate about the topic. The means—written language—enables the writer to convey that message to the reader, resulting in communication.

## Assignments

1. On writing as a process of discovery:

- (1) How is writing different from speaking?
  - (2) Do you prefer to speak about a subject or write about it? Why?
  - (3) Work with a classmate; consider situations in which writing would make it easier to communicate a message than speaking would. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, list two of the situations you have identified and explain why writing would be the better way to express your ideas.
2. On the three stages of writing process:
    - (1) In your words, explain the three stages of the writing process.
    - (2) How do you feel about writing? Work with your classmates, and briefly explain your attitudes about writing.
  3. On writing as both a linear and circular activity:
    - (1) Think about your experience in writing. Do you agree that writing is both a linear and circular activity?
    - (2) How often do you have to come back to a previous stage in the process of your writing? When does it usually occur? How do you feel then?
  4. On the purpose of your writing:
    - (1) What are the three main purposes you fulfill when you write?
    - (2) Why should you always consider your purpose when you are creating a piece of writing?
    - (3) Work with a classmate, choose one of the following subjects, and list examples you might include for a writing that entertains, one that informs, and one that persuades; shopping on the Internet, space-exploration, roller-blading.
  5. On the audience of your writing:

Suppose you are going to write an essay on computer games, persuading your audience high school students that it does more harm than good. Analyze your audience.
  6. On the dynamics of writing:
    - (1) In your own words, explain how the five components of writing interact with each other when you write.
    - (2) Considering the five interacting elements of writing, what should we do to produce a piece of satisfactory writing? Discuss with your classmates.



# Chapter 2

## Pre-writing



The word prewriting, which literally means before writing, refers to everything you do before you actually write a first draft. At this stage of your writing, you assess the writing situation, generate ideas, and organize them.

### Assessing the Writing Situation



Any writing you do for others occurs in a context that both limits and clarifies your choices. You are communicating something about a particular *subject* to a particular *audience* for a specific *reason*. You may need to do *research*. You will probably be up against a *length requirement* and a *deadline*. And you may be expected to present your work in a certain *format*.

These are the elements of the writing situation, and analyzing them at the very start of a project can tell you much about how to proceed. Answering the following questions in each element can help you correctly assess your writing situation.

### Finding Your Subject

1. What does your writing assignment instruct you to write? If you don't have a specific assignment, what do you want to write about?
2. What interests you about the subject? What do you already have ideas about or want to know more about?
3. What does the assignment require you to do with the subject?

*Basic requirements of a topic :*

- It should be suitable for the assignment.
- It should be neither too general nor too limited for the length of the paper and the deadline assigned.
- It should be something you care about.

## Considering Your Audience

1. Who will read your writing? What do your readers already know and think about your topic?
2. Do your readers have any characteristics—such as educational background, experience in your field, and political views—that could help their perception of your writing?
3. What is your relationship to your readers? How formal or informal should your writing be?
4. What do you want your readers to do or think after they have read your writing?
5. What ideas, arguments, or information might surprise your readers, excite them, or offend them? How should you handle these points?
6. What misconceptions might your readers have of your topic and/or your approach to the topic? How can you dispel these misconceptions?
7. What will your readers do with your writing? Can you help them with a summary, headings, illustrations, or other special features?

## Defining Your Purpose

1. What aim does your assignment specify? For instance, does it ask you to explain something or argue over a point?
2. Why are you writing? What do you want to accomplish?
3. How can you best achieve your purpose?

## Considering the Research

1. What kind of evidence, such as facts, examples, and the opinion of experts, best suit your topic, audience, and purpose?
2. Does your assignment require you to consult sources of information or conduct other research, like interviews, surveys or experiments?
3. Besides your assignment requirement, what additional information do you need to develop your topic? How will you obtain it?
4. What style should you use to cite your sources?



## Clarifying Deadline and Length

1. When is the assignment due? How will you apportion the work you have to do in the available time?
2. How long should your writing be? If no length is assigned, what seems appropriate for your topic, audience and purpose?

## Designing Document Layout

1. What organization and format does the assignment require?
2. Even if a particular format is not required, how might you use margins, headings, illustrations, and other elements to achieve your purpose?

## **Generating Ideas**

Writers use a host of techniques to help invent or discover ideas and information about their subjects. The following techniques can help explore ideas, and give you access to ideas you are unaware of. Whichever of the techniques you use, do your work in writing, not just in your head. Your ideas will be retrievable, and the very act of writing will lead you to fresh insights.

## Freewriting

Freewriting is to generate ideas and information from within yourself by going around the part of your mind that doesn't want to write or can't think of anything to write.

When you freewrite, you write down all your ideas on a subject without stopping for ten or fifteen minutes or a full page. Here you follow your minds wherever it leads you. You simply let words themselves suggest other words, and write down or type on your every idea that pops into your mind as fast as you can. What you write is not important; that you keep writing is.

Don't stop, even if that means repeating the same words until new words come. Don't go back to reread and censor ideas, even if they are dumb, repetitious or irrelevant. Don't stop editing, even if there are grammar,



punctuation, and spelling errors.

When you are done with your freewriting, go back and look at what you have written. You can find some interesting ideas that can be shaped into a successful essay. Highlight them and try to find the connections between your ideas. This will help you sort out your thinking, and thus enable you to find your possible thesis and key supporting points.

Here is an example of freewriting, which brings out the subject of writing as a disguise:

Write to write. Seem pretty obvious, also weird. What to gain by writing? Never anything before. Writing seems always—always—. Getting corrected for trying too hard to please the teacher, getting corrected for not trying hard. Frustration, nail biting, sometimes getting carried away making sentences to tell stories, not even true stories, esp. not true stories, that feels like something. Writing just pulls the story out of me. The story lets me be someone else, gives me a disguise. Writing can magnify good qualities, and conceal bad qualities. Make things happen the way they should. It can disguise the world as well.

## Brainstorming

Brainstorming is a process in which you list all of the ideas that come to your mind when you think about a given subject. It is a more focused prewriting activity than freewriting. In it, you focus intently on a subject, pushing yourself to list every idea and detail that you can think of. You don't need to set a time limit, although some people feel more comfortable if they do. Like freewriting, it requires turning off your internal editor so that you keep moving ahead.

Here is a brainstorm list for an essay about “summer”.



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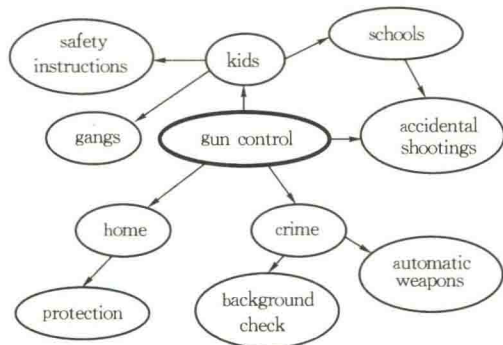
no school	volleyball
no assignments	soccer
no tests	the lake
cookouts	vacation
hamburgers and hot dogs	hot rainy afternoon
shorts	summer work
sandals	earn some money

With brainstorming, you may generate fewer ideas, but the connections between them will probably be clearer. You will probably still generate more ideas than you can use. When you plan your essay, you will discover which items on your brainstorm list will actually make it into your essay. You need to go through the list carefully, group the ideas, delete the weak ones, expand the strong ones, rearrange them, and thus get your preliminary outline.

## Clustering

Like freewriting and brainstorming, clustering also draws on free association and rapid, unedited work. But it emphasizes the relations between ideas by combining writing and nonlinear drawing. To begin, you write a general topic in the middle of the page and circle it. When an idea occurs, you write them down on the page around your topic and circle each of them. Draw lines to connect these related ideas to the topic. As the ideas you list lead to further new ideas and examples, write them down and circle them too. Once again, use lines or arrows to connect related ideas.

Here is an example of clustering on “gun control”:

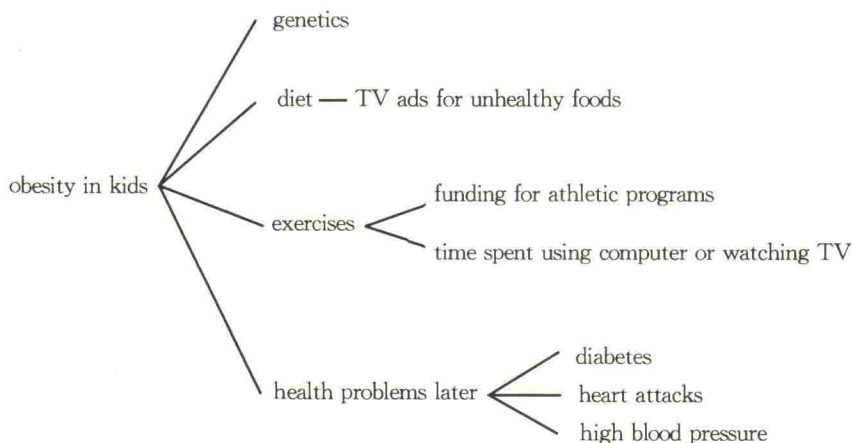


As you can see, clustering enables you to explore a subject in a variety of ways and from different perspectives. The result is a broad listing of ideas emphasizing the connections between them.

## Branching

Branching is another prewriting technique that emphasizes the connections between ideas. You begin by writing your topic on the left side of the paper. Then you write the ideas that your topic inspires to the right of it, connecting them to the topic with lines. Those categories will bring to mind more related thoughts and details. Write these to the right again, letting the list branch out across the paper.

Here is an example of branching on “obesity in kids”.



## Asking Questions

Asking a set of questions about your subject—and writing out the answer—can help you look at the topic objectively and see fresh possibilities in it.

A journalist with a story to report poses a set of questions:

1. Who was involved?
2. What happened, and what were the results?
3. When did it happen?



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4. Where did it happen?
5. Why did it happen?
6. How did it happen?

These journalist's questions can also be useful in probing an essay subject, especially when you are telling a story or examining causes and effects. By asking relevant questions, you can generate many ideas—and you can make sure that you have adequately surveyed your subject.

In the academic world, scholars often generate ideas with questions related to a specific discipline; one set of questions for analyzing short stories, another for evaluating experiments in social psychology, still another for reporting field experiences in anthropology. If you are writing in a particular discipline, try to discover the questions that its scholars typically explore.

### Keeping a Journal

For writing practice and a valuable source of topics, use journal writing in a notebook or a separate section of your class notebook. Your journal will be your idea book. Several times a week, in addition to whatever other writing you are doing, write in your journal. Keep track of ideas that impress you, topics you want to explore, day-to-day experiences you want to examine more closely.

Each time you write in your journal, spend at least ten to twenty minutes exploring your subject. Then look back at the material and decide which ideas you might be able to develop more fully. Highlight, underline, or circle them for future exploration and development.

Don't worry if your entry isn't complete or correct as you would like it to be. The purpose of your journal is not to create perfect writing, but to practice writing. The best way to improve as a writer is to practice. Journal entries are great opportunities to develop your skills as a writer. As with any other activity, writing becomes easier the more you do it. Writing often in your journal is one of the best ways to make writing seem as natural as talking and thinking.

## Organizing ideas



Once you have completed your prewriting, you have generated lots of

information, and you are ready to move on in the writing process to organizing that information. No matter which technique you use to collect information, you should strive to have more information than you could possibly use in your essay.

## Identify Your Main Idea and Supporting Details

With all the generated ideas, you need to identify the idea that you would like to write about more, and the details that you can use to best support your main idea. You can do this by using a highlighter or by underlining or by circling them. Remember you don't need to use all the ideas that you have gathered. Moreover, you should be interested in the main idea you have identified and have a lot to say about it.

In organizing the ideas, you can categorize the items on your list; you can put the key ideas in climatic order (from least important to most important), or chronological order, or spatial order; and you can outline them.

## Conceiving a Thesis Statement

Your readers will expect your essay to be focused on and controlled by a main idea, or a thesis. A thesis statement serves three crucial functions and one optional one:

### 1. Functions of the thesis statement:

- It narrows your subject to a single, central idea that you want your readers to gain from your essay.
- It names the topic and asserts something specific and significant about it.
- It conveys your reason for writing, your purpose.
- It often provides a concise preview of how you will arrange your ideas in the essay. (optional)

A thesis will not usually leap fully formed into your head; you will have to develop and shape the idea as you develop and shape your essay. Trying to draft a thesis statement early can give you a point of reference when you write your outline and draft your essay.





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### 2. Characteristics of an effective thesis statement;

- A thesis must require proof or further development through facts and details; it cannot itself be a fact or a description.

e. g.

Original: The polygraph was developed by Dr. John A. Larson in 1921.  
(too factual)

Revised: Because the polygraph has not been proved reliable, even under controlled conditions, its use by employers should be banned.

- A thesis should be of sufficient scope for your assignment, not too broad and not too narrow.

e. g.

Original: Mapping the human genome has many implications for health and science. (too broad)

Revised: Although scientists can now detect genetic predisposition to specific diseases, not everyone should be tested for these diseases.

- A thesis should be sharply focused, not too vague. Avoid fuzzy, hard-to-define words such as interesting, good, or disgusting.

e. g.

Original: The way the TV show ER portrays doctors and nurses is interesting. (too fuzzy)

Revised: In dramatizing the experiences of doctors and nurses as they treat patients, the TV shows ER portrays health care professionals as unfailingly caring and noble.

### 3. Examples of thesis statements;

- Two months working in a large agency taught me that an office's pecking order should be respected.
- To compete well in the global economy, China must make higher education affordable for any students who qualify academically.
- Juveniles can be diverted from crimes by active learning programs, full-time sports, and intervention by mentors and role models.
- Strip mining should be tightly controlled in this region to reduce its pollution of water resources, its destruction of the land, and its devastating

effects on people's lives.

4. Checklist for revising a thesis statement:

- Does the statement make a concise assertion about your topic?
- Is the assertion limited to only one idea?
- Is the assertion specific and significant?
- Does the statement at least imply your purpose?
- Is the statement unified so that the parts relate to each other?

## Drafting an Outline

Once you have generated enough ideas and formulated a tentative thesis, you might want to sketch an information outline to see how you will support your thesis and how to begin to structure your ideas either in an informal outline or a formal outline.

Early in the writing process, informal outlines have certain advantages over their more formal counterparts. They can be produced more quickly, they are more obviously tentative, and they can be revised more easily if the need arises. Moreover, too detailed a plan could prevent you from discovering ideas while you draft.

1. Types of outlines:

- Informal outline:

An informal outline, also called a scratch outline, is the most basic type of outline. It gives only the roughest idea of your plan for an essay. It includes key general points in the order they will be covered, and may also suggest the specific evidence for them. Sometimes, an informal outline may prove to be too skimpy a guide, and you may want to use it as preliminary to a more detailed outline.

- Formal outline:

A formal outline, also called a topic outline, are more formal than informal outlines and requires you to have thought through your essay a bit more. It not only lays out main ideas and their support, but also shows the relative importance of all the essay's elements. In this type of outline, you express



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your ideas in a balanced or parallel manner and show how ideas relate to each other within the essay by using indentation, Roman numerals and numbers, and uppercase and lowercase letters.

### 2. Functions of an outline:

- Aids in the process of writing.
- Helps you organize your ideas.
- Presents your material in a logical form.
- Shows the relationships among ideas in your writing.
- Constructs an ordered overview of your writing.
- Defines boundaries and groups.

### 3. Way to create an outline:

First:

- Determine the purpose of your paper.
- Determine the audience you are writing for.
- Develop the thesis of your paper.

Then:

- Freewrite: generate all the ideas that you want to include in your paper.
- Organize: group related ideas together.
- Order: arrange material in subsections from general to specific or from abstract to concrete.
- Label: create main and sub-headings.

### 4. Sample outlines:

An informal outline:

Thesis: By lowering the barriers of physical appearance in communication, the Internet's uniquely anonymous form of interaction could build diversity into communication.

No fear of prejudice

Physical attributes unknown—age, race, gender, etc.

No shut-out due to appearance

Inability to prejudge others

Assumptions based on appearance

Meeting of minds only

Finding shared interests and concerns

A formal outline:

**Thesis:** To apply for a college efficiently and successfully, we need to follow the process of choosing desired college, preparing application, and compiling resume.

#### I. Choose Desired Colleges

A. Visit and evaluate college campuses

B. Visit and evaluate college websites

1. look for interesting classes

2. note important statistics

a) student/faculty ratio

b) retention rate

#### II. Prepare Application

A. Write personal statement

1. choose interesting topic, like an influential person in your life

2. include important personal details

a) volunteer work

b) participation in varsity sports

B. Revise Personal Statement

#### III. Compile Resume

A. List relevant courses

B. List work experience

C. List volunteer experiences

1. tutor at foreign language summer camps

2. counselor for suicide prevention hotline

## Assignments

1. On assessing the writing situation:

(1) Why is it important to assess the writing assignment?

(2) What should you consider to assess a writing assignment?