

申屠菁 编著

English Writing

Process, Cases and Handbook

英语写作

过程、案例及手册

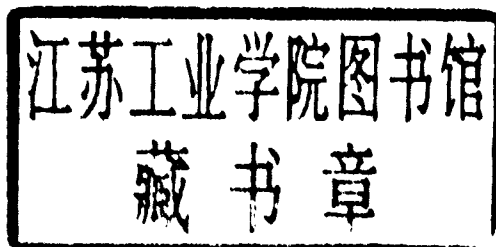
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Part I Writing Process

Writing is a messy business. It is full of stops and starts and sudden turns and reversals. In fact, sometimes writing an essay can be one of the most confusing, frustrating experiences a college student will encounter. Fortunately, writing does not have to be a horrible experience. Like almost anything in life, writing becomes much easier as you become familiar with the “process” that makes up the act of writing.

Writing is often called a recursive process. This means that the many steps to writing an effective paper do not necessarily follow neatly one after the other. In fact, often you will find yourself repeating the same step a number of different times, in a number of different places, as you write a paper. For example, you might jot down notes on scratch paper before you start writing your first draft, but at any time while you write, you might stop to jot down more notes or to rethink what you are writing. To help yourself understand this writing process, think of it as divided roughly into three stages: prewriting, writing, and rewriting. Chapter 1 covers these three stages. And Chapter 2 concerns the paragraph composing and developing in details.

Prewriting involves anything you do to help yourself decide what your central idea is or what details, examples, reasons, or content you will include. Freewriting, brainstorming, and clustering (discussed below) are types of prewriting. Thinking, talking to other people, reading related material, outlining or organizing ideas—all are forms of prewriting. Obviously, you can prewrite at any time in the writing process. Whenever you want to think up new material, simply stop what you are doing and start using one of the techniques you will study in this chapter.

The writing stage of the process involves the actual writing out of a draft. Unfortunately, many people try to start their writing here, without sufficient prewriting. As you may know from firsthand experience, trying to start out this way usually leads directly to a good case of writer’s block. During this stage of the Writing process, you should be ready to do more prewriting whenever you hit a snag or cannot think of what to write next.

Rewriting consists of revising and editing. You should plan to revise every paper you write. When you revise, you examine the entire draft to change what needs to be changed and to add what needs to be added. Perhaps parts of your paper will need to be reorganized, reworded, or thoroughly rewritten to express your ideas clearly. Perhaps your paper will need more examples or clearer explanations. Unfortunately, people pressed for time often skip this stage, and the result is a very poorly written paper. Finally, after you have revised your work, you must edit it. When you edit, you correct spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors. A word of warning: Do not confuse editing with revising. Merely correcting the spelling, grammar, or punctuation of a poorly written paper will not make much difference in the overall quality of the paper.

Chapter 1 Getting Started

§ 1.1 Prewriting: From One’s Block to Writing

Have you ever had a writing assignment that absolutely stumped you? Have you ever found yourself

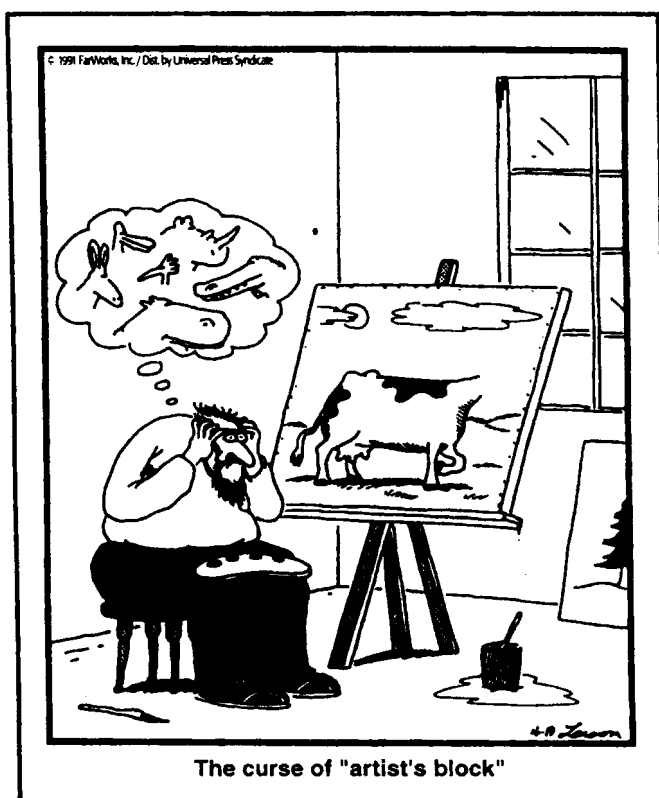
stuck, staring at a blank sheet of paper for fifteen minutes (or thirty? or sixty?), wondering what in the world you could write to meet the assignment?

If you have not had this experience, you are a lucky person: Certainly almost everyone knows the frustrated, sinking feeling that comes as minute after minute passes and nothing seems to get written. In fact, for many writers, getting started is the most agonizing part of the entire writing process.

What we're talking about here is **writer's block**, a problem as common to professional writers as it is to student writers. Because it is so common, you need to learn how to get past it quickly and painlessly so that you can get on with your assignment. Here are a few prewriting techniques to help you.

1.1.1 Freewriting

Since writer's block means that you aren't writing, one of the quickest ways to get around it is to write anything at all. You can write whatever you are thinking, feeling, wondering about, or trying to get out of your mind—just start writing. The only rule here is that you must not stop to correct spelling, grammar, punctuation, or other parts of your writing. Set a time limit for yourself—five or ten minutes—and just keep writing.



Cartoon by Gary Larson

Let's say you were asked to write a paragraph or an essay explaining your reaction to the Gary Larson cartoon. To help yourself get started, you might try freewriting first. Here is how some freewriting

might look:

Okay—time to start writing—but what to write? The cartoon is funny, but so what? What could I possibly write about this? I really don't know. What a frustrating assignment! I thought it was funny, but I don't really know why. And I'll bet some people think it's stupid. What could I write? Maybe I could—no. Why do I think it's funny? Well, partly because I've been stuck just like the guy in the picture. I guess I kind of relate to him. But it's also funny because of the cow. I mean, anyone knows what a cow's head looks like, so why is this guy confused? Maybe that's why it's funny. He really shouldn't be confused. And he doesn't have a clue! He hasn't even thought of a cow's head yet. It would really be funny if he ended up thinking of a different head. Also, I think the guy's appearance looks pretty strange. He's really freaking out—bug-eyes—and he's just an overall strange-looking guy.

As you can see, freewriting is very informal. Notice that the above freewriting moves from questions that express general frustration (“What could I write?”) to answers that the writer might be able to use in a paper (“I’ve been stuck just like the guy in the picture.” “But it’s also funny because of the cow.” “He’s really freaking out—bug-eyes”). This movement—from searching for ideas that you might use to focusing on specific details—is very common in freewriting.

1.1.2 Brainstorming

Brainstorming is like freewriting in that you write down whatever comes to mind without stopping, but it is different because it looks more like a list of ideas than a string of sentences. Here's an example, again about the Gary Larson cartoon:

How I reacted—laughed—why?

Funny—what's funny here?

—cow with no head

—man stuck—can't think of cow's head

—bug-eyes

—look of panic

—frustration—hands by head

—even his body

—fat stomach—scraggly beard

Maybe he'll use wrong head!

Funny because I've felt same way (Why is that funny?)

This writer has a number of specific observations about the cartoon that she could use in a paper, but she did not waste time staring at a blank page. Instead, she just started making a list.

1.1.3 Clustering

A third technique to help you generate ideas is called clustering. It differs from brainstorming and freewriting in that what you write is almost like an informal map. To *cluster* your ideas, start out with a topic or question and draw a circle around it. Then connect related ideas to that circle and continue in that way. Look at the following example of how the brainstorming material might look if it were clustered.

As you can see, clustering provides a mental picture of the ideas you generate. As a result, it can help you to organize your material as you think of it.

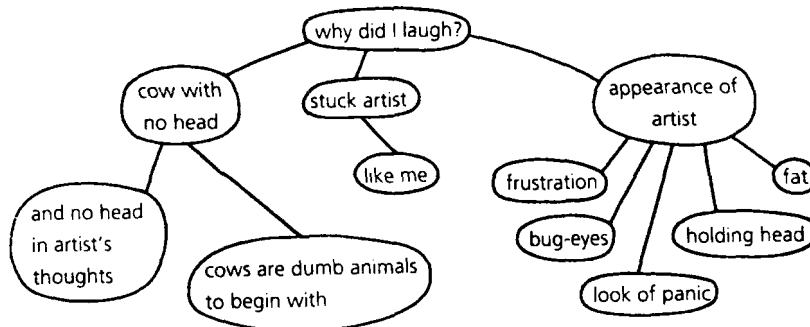


Figure : Clustering

Freewriting, brainstorming, and clustering are only three of many techniques to help you get past writer's block. When you use them, you should feel free to move from one to the other at any time. And, of course, your instructor may suggest other ways to help you get started. Whatever technique you use, the point is to **start writing**. Do your thinking on paper (or at a computer), not while you are staring out the window. Here's something to remember whenever you have a writing assignment due: **Think in ink**.

§ 1.2 Prewriting: Choosing a Preliminary Topic Sentence or Thesis Statement

Once you have developed some ideas by using the prewriting techniques discussed so far, you are ready to decide on the topic and central idea of your paper and to focus those two elements into a **topic sentence** (for a single paragraph) or a **thesis statement** (for an entire essay). Your ability to write clear topic sentences or thesis statements can determine whether or not your readers will understand and be able to follow the points you want to make in the papers you write. In college classes, that ability can make the difference between a successful paper and one that is barely passing (or not passing at all).

1.2.1 Finding the Topic

In academic writing, deciding upon the topic of your paper is often not very difficult because it is assigned by your instructor. You may be asked to write about child abuse or a piece of literature or a particular political issue—but rarely (if ever) will your assignment simply be to “write about something.” Of course, many times you may be asked to choose your own topics, but even then you will know what topics are appropriate and what are not. (For example, in a class studying the history of the Arab-Jewish tension in the Middle East, you probably would not choose state lotteries as the topic of your paper, right?)

1.2.2 Finding the Central Idea

This is where many student writers get stuck. The problem is not “What is my topic?” but “What should I be *saying* about my topic?” For example, if you were asked to write a paragraph explaining why the Gary Larson cartoon causes many people to laugh, you would know what your topic is (the cartoon), but you might not have *any* idea why people laugh. To put it another way, you wouldn't know what your *central idea* is, so how could you possibly write a topic sentence or a thesis statement? How do you decide what your central idea is? Here are two suggestions.

Look at your prewriting to find a central Idea. As you examine your prewriting, watch for recurring ideas or for any idea that sparks your interest. For example, in the prewriting about the Gary Larson cartoon, you might notice that there seem to be several different reasons that people may laugh at the cartoon. Your preliminary central idea might be expressed this way:

central idea

People might find the Gary Larson cartoon funny for several different reasons.

Start writing your first draft to find a central Idea. You may have been taught in the past that you should not even start writing until you have focused your central idea into a topic sentence or thesis statement—and you might have found that such advice led you right back to a good case of writer’s block. Certainly, it would be convenient if you could simply sit down, think up a perfect topic sentence or thesis statement, and start writing, but the process of writing is just not that neat and orderly. So if you are not sure what your central idea is, but you do have details or ideas you know you want to write about, just start writing about them. Many times your precise central idea will develop while you write.

1.2.3 Forming the Preliminary Topic Sentence or Thesis Statement

Once you are somewhat sure what your topic and central idea will be, write them as a single sentence. If your assignment is to write one paragraph, this sentence will serve as its **topic sentence**. If you are writing an essay, this sentence will serve as its **thesis statement**. In either case, it will state the topic and central idea of the assignment. As you prepare this sentence, keep these points in mind:

Make a statement that demands explanation. Do not merely state a fact. Because a central idea demands some explanation, argument, or development, a simple statement of fact will not work as a topic sentence or thesis statement. Note the difference between the following two statements:

Fact The Gary Larson cartoon shows an artist trying to paint a cow.

Demands Explanation The Gary Larson cartoon elicited some very strange reactions from my family.

Make a limited statement that can be reasonably supported with facts or examples. Do not be too general, vague, or broad. Very general topic sentences and thesis statements result in very general papers. When you choose a topic and a central idea, limit your choice to something that can be covered in detail.

Ineffective

broad topic *vague central idea*

Gary Larson’s cartoons are funny.

The sentence above commits the writer to discussing *all* of Gary Larson’s cartoons (a very broad topic), and its central idea focuses on a vague term (*funny*) that will mean something different to every reader.

Ineffective

limited topic *vague central idea*

Gary Larson’s cartoon about “artist’s block” is interesting.

In the above sentence the topic “Gary Larson’s cartoon about ‘artist’s block’” is limited well enough, but the central idea—that the cartoon is “interesting”—is much too vague and noncommittal.

Effective

limited topic *limited central idea*

Several characteristics of Gary Larson's cartoon about "artist's block" reflect how I feel whenever I have to write a paper.

The statement above would work as a topic sentence or thesis statement because it is focused on a limited topic (several characteristics of one cartoon) and because its limited central idea (how they reflect the writer's feelings when he is writing a paper) could be fully explained in one assignment.

1.2.4 Placing the Topic Sentence or Thesis Statement

As we mentioned above, the primary difference between a topic sentence and a thesis statement is that the topic sentence identifies the central idea of a paragraph and the thesis statement does the same for an essay. Topic sentences and thesis statements can appear many places, depending on the purpose of a particular piece of writing. However, in college classes you will be writing academic papers, and in almost all academic writing the topic sentences and thesis statements must be placed very carefully.

Place the topic sentence at the start of the paragraph. Although there are exceptions, the first sentence of most academic paragraphs should be the topic sentence. The body of the paragraph should explain and support that topic sentence.

*Topic
sentence*

One serious problem for many newly arrived immigrants is that they do not speak English well, if they speak it at all. For example, when my parents left Hong Kong in 1972 and came to America, they couldn't understand what people were saying, so they didn't know how to respond to them. Not knowing how to speak English was a horrible experience for them. Because everything was in English, they couldn't even watch TV, go to the store, or read the newspaper. The only thing they could do at that time was to stay home. One of the most terrible experiences that my mom had happened when she got lost while trying to pick me up at school. Because she didn't speak English, she couldn't even ask for directions, so she just drove around in circles for hours. Although people in the neighborhood tried to help her, my mom just couldn't understand what they were saying. One group of people just pointed and laughed as my mom drove by. After that experience she said, "If I don't learn to speak English soon, people will take advantage of me all the time." (Nancy Kwan, student writer)

Place the thesis statement at the end of the introductory paragraph. Again, there are many exceptions, but the thesis statement in most academic essays appears as the last sentence of the introductory paragraph.

*Thesis
statement*

Doesn't almost everyone want a good education? That is why most people, after graduating from high school, go on to college. Whether it is at a community college or a four-year university, people young and old spend their mornings, afternoons, or evenings in class studying and getting closer to a college diploma. Currently, I am completing my second year at Palomar College, and my attitude today about my education has drastically changed from when I started my first semester. I believe that if I had known how important education is when I first enrolled in college, I probably would have done things quite differently during my freshman year. (Elizabeth Santos, student writer)

§ 1.3 Prewriting: Preparing a Rough Outline

If you have ever been required to turn in a complete outline of a paper before the final paper was due, you know how difficult—even impossible, sometimes—it is to predict exactly what you will include in a paper, much less what *order* it will follow. So rest easy—although preparing a *rough outline* is part of the prewriting process, it is not at all the same as writing a complete, perfect, formal outline. Instead, it involves looking at what you have written so far in your prewriting, deciding what ideas you *may* use, and listing those ideas in the order in which you will *probably* use them. Essentially, you are trying to give yourself some direction before you start writing the first draft.

1.3.1 Grouping Related Points

Let's use the Gary Larson cartoon again as an example of how to write the rough outline. The first step is to look at the prewriting and group any details that seem related. (You might notice, by the way, that the clustering example has already grouped some of them.) They could be organized this way:

A	B	C
appearance of artist	cow with no head	artist is like me
bug-eyes	no cow head in	artist's block = writer's block
look of panic	artist's thought	I've felt same way
fat stomach	cows seem dumb anyway	
scraggly beard		
holding head		

1.3.2 Choosing a Tentative Organization

Once you've grouped the details that you want to include, you need to decide in what order you will discuss them. Here are three common ways to organize your material.

Emphatic Order

If you think some of your details should receive more emphasis than others because they are more important, complex, colorful, or memorable, arrange them so that they move from the least important to the most important. This type of organization will leave your readers with a strong impression of your most effective details.

For example, when organizing the above material from the Gary Larson cartoon, you might decide to use category A last because the appearance of the artist seemed to be the funniest part of the cartoon to you, and you want the reader to focus on it. On the other hand, another writer might choose to save category C until last because she wants to emphasize how strongly she identified with the artist in the cartoon.

Chronological Order

Chronological order presents details in the order they actually occurred. Whatever occurred first is discussed first, whatever occurred second is discussed second, and so on. This type of organization is very effective when you want to describe an event or explain how something happened. If your first reaction to the Gary Larson cartoon was that you have felt exactly the same way as the frustrated artist, then you would present category C first in your paper.

Spatial Order

Spatial order consists of describing a place or an object in such a way that a reader can clearly picture the various details and their relationship to each other. One way to do so is to describe the larger elements of a scene first, identifying where they are in relation to other elements, and then moving to a description of the smaller details. For example, to describe the Gary Larson cartoon, a writer might decide to completely reorganize the three categories listed above, placing all larger details in one category and then moving to smaller, more subtle, details as the paper progresses.

§ 1.4 Writing: The First Draft

If you have a preliminary topic sentence or thesis statement and have prepared a rough outline, you have everything you need to write your paper. So now is the time to sit and write. However, now is still not the time to worry about whether everything is spelled exactly right or worded perfectly. If you try to write your first draft and avoid all errors at the same time, you will end up right back where you probably started—stuck. Of course, you can correct some errors as they occur, but don't make revising or editing your primary concern at this point. What you want to do now is to write out your ideas. You can "fix" them later.

1.4.1 The Single Paragraph: A First Draft

If your assignment is to write one paragraph, open the paragraph with your preliminary topic sentence. Then use your details from your rough outline to explain and support the central idea of your topic sentence. Here is the first draft of a paragraph about the Gary Larson cartoon.

*Preliminary
topic sentence*

I found the Gary Larson cartoon funny for a number of reasons when I first read it. First, the artist was feeling just like me when I have writer's black. I guess I just related to him—but I was laughing at myself as well as at him. As I did some free writing about it, I realized there were other reasons the cartoon is funny. The overall appearance of the artist is ridiculous. There he sits. He has his head in his hands. His eyes are bugging out in panic, and his fat stomach is hanging over his belt. The whole thing is just really funny. The funniest part of the whole thing is that he hasn't even thought of a cow's head yet. (I think someone else showed me this.) I can just imagine him putting a crocodile's head on the cow. The cartoon really sums up how I feel when I'm stuck with writer's block. The whole situation is ridiculous and absurd.

1.4.2 The Brief Essay: A First Draft

If you are writing an essay, open your draft with an introductory paragraph that ends with a *preliminary thesis statement*. Then start each body paragraph with a preliminary topic sentence that supports or explains the central idea of the thesis statement.

In the following first draft, notice how the previous sample paragraph has been restructured to serve as the start of a brief essay. Each body paragraph is quite short, needing more details and explanation, but a clear topic sentence opens each one.

<i>Preliminary thesis statement</i>	Gary Larson's cartoons always make me laugh, but I have never really thought about why. However, as I considered his cartoon about "artist's block," I finally decided that it is funny for a number of different reasons.
<i>Preliminary topic sentence</i>	First, the artist was feeling just like me when I have writer's block. I guess I just related to him—but I was laughing at myself as well as at him.
<i>Preliminary topic sentence</i>	As I did some free writing about it, I realized there were other reasons it is funny. The overall appearance of the artist is ridiculous. There he sits. He has his head in his hands. His eyes are bugging out in panic, and his fat stomach is hanging over his belt. The whole thing is just really funny.
<i>Preliminary topic sentence</i>	The funniest part of the whole thing is that he hasn't even thought of a cow's head yet. (I think someone else showed me this.) I can just imagine him putting a crocodile's head on the cow. The cartoon really sums up how I feel when I'm stuck with writer's block. The whole situation is ridiculous and absurd.

§ 1.5 Rewriting: Revising and Editing

1.5.1 Revising

As we mentioned at the start of the chapter, rewriting consists of two stages: revising and editing. Unfortunately, many people—especially if they are pressed for time—omit the revising stage and move directly to editing, often with disastrous results.

The problem is that editing will correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation errors without improving either the content or the organization of your paper—and these larger areas do need to be addressed before you submit your work. Now is the time to read what you have written, *think* about it, and decide what changes you should make. Here are some suggestions.

Refine your topic sentence or thesis statement. Usually, writing the first draft of a paper will help you become more specific about what your central idea really is. In fact, if you look at the concluding sentences of your first draft, you will often find a statement that sums up your central idea better than your preliminary topic sentence or thesis statement did. When the writer of the first draft about the Gary Larson cartoon (above) read the last sentence of her draft, she realized that the key to the humor in the cartoon is its absurdity. When you read the revised draft (below), note how she refined her central idea.

Reorganize your material. The writer of the above first draft reorganized the groups of detail (A, B, C) so that they appear in the order *C, A, B*. This reorganization allowed her to follow a chronological pattern, ending with what she sees as the funniest element of the cartoon.

Add details. The first draft has left out several details. Note how the writer has restored them in the revised draft below.

Reword sentences. Many times you will find that your original wording of sentences can be improved. Note the changes made in the middle of the revised draft below.

1.5.2 The Single Paragraph: Revised Draft

Here is a revised version. Changes are shown in boldface.

Refined topic sentence

Added details

Reworded sentence

Added details

Added details
Reworded sentence

I found Gary Larson's cartoon about the painter with "artist's block" very funny because the situation it describes is so familiar yet so absurd. The first thing I noticed was that the artist was feeling exactly what I feel when I have "writer's block." His frustration and look of panic reminded me of myself, and I had to laugh because the situation really is ridiculous. I guess I just related to him—but I was laughing at myself as well as at him. As I did some free writing about it, I realized that the overall appearance of the artist is ridiculous. He's just sitting there, with his head in his hands, his eyes bugging out in panic, and his fat stomach hanging over his belt. The whole thing is just really funny. He's even dropped his paintbrush on the floor, as if he can't hold it any more—or maybe he's thrown it down. Finally, the most absurd part of the whole thing is that he hasn't even thought of a cow's head yet. He's thought of a bird, a duck, a donkey, a rhino, a hippo, even a crocodile—but no cow! I can just imagine him putting a crocodile's head on the cow. The cartoon really sums up how I feel when I'm stuck with writer's block. The whole situation is just absurd.

1.5.3 The Brief Essay: Revised Draft

Here is a revised version of the brief essay. Changes are shown in boldface.

Expanded introduction
Refined thesis statement

Gary Larson's cartoons always make me laugh, but I have never really thought about why. As I examined his cartoon about the painter with "artist's block," I began to realize that his humor comes from at least two sources. The cartoon is funny because the situation it describes is so familiar yet so absurd.

Refined topic sentence

The first thing I noticed was how familiar the situation was. That poor artist, sitting there completely stuck, was feeling exactly like me when I have "writer's block." His frustration and look of panic reminded me so much of myself that I had to laugh. The situation really is ridiculous. I guess I just related to him—but I was laughing at myself as well as at him.

Added details

Refined topic sentence

As I did some freewriting about it, I realized that the overall appearance of the artist is ridiculous. He's just sitting there, with his head in his hands, his eyes bugging out in panic, and his fat stomach hanging over his belt. The whole thing is just really funny. He's even dropped his paint brush on the floor, as if he can't hold it anymore—or maybe he's thrown it down.

Added details

Refined topic sentence
Added details

Finally, the most absurd part of the whole thing is that he hasn't even thought of a cow's head yet. He's thought of a bird, a duck, a donkey, a rhino, a hippo, even a crocodile—but no cow! And, to make matters worse, two of the heads that he is considering are facing in the wrong direction. I can just imagine him putting a backwards crocodile's head on the cow.

Added details

Expanded conclusion

The cartoon really sums up how I feel when I'm stuck with writer's block. I'm frustrated, angry at the situation, and starting to panic. The whole situation is just absurd.

1.5.4 Editing

Now for the final step. You need to edit your draft before typing the final copy. Read your draft over

carefully, looking for spelling, grammar, or punctuation errors as you do. If you are using a computer, be sure to proofread a printed copy of your paper, not just what appears on the screen. Once you have corrected and are satisfied with the final product, prepare a clean copy and submit it to your instructor.