

The Writing Process

Just as we all have idiosyncrasies that make us who we are, the writing process isn't the same for every person. The way we write depends on the way we think and work, as well as the specific task at hand. So you might say there is no such thing as the writing process. However, there are certain general steps that often lead to successful writing. This handout defines each of these steps so that you may implement them when necessary. Think about how you work best: What do you already do that works well? Then consider new steps and strategies you could try or new ways to more consciously order and combine them. Tune into your own needs and how you could adjust your writing process.



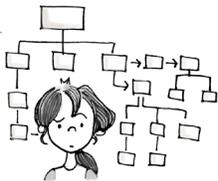
Assessing

How and what you write can change greatly depending on audience, purpose, discipline, and genre. These factors affect your voice and tone as well as the content you choose to include. Some class assignment sheets provide these parameters, but it is also up to you—especially in non-academic situations. Decide who you want to write to, how you want them to feel as they read, and what you want them to think or do by the end. Consider the expectations of the type of writing you're engaging in or drawing from—whether you want to follow or resist them. Establish these goals at the start of your process and keep them in mind throughout.



Brainstorming

The brainstorming stage, also known as the prewriting stage, involves the thinking and planning that comes before you start to write. It allows you to take stock of your ideas: What is your subject? What questions do you want to focus on? Why are you interested? Try not to be intimidated by a blank page: start by jotting down all of your thoughts and possible directions. This could be in the form of a list, a concept map, or a focused free-write. Once you have ideas down in front of you, you'll not only feel better, but also have the liberty to pick and choose which ones you like the best.



Organizing

Organizing your content is crucial to the logic, clarity, and meaning of a piece of writing. You may start by clustering ideas together without creating a hierarchy, but it's often helpful to create an ordered outline before drafting. This might be formal and detailed, or it might be a rough list of points. Either way, you can use it as a guide as you write, a set of checkpoints to get to along the way. You might refer back to the outline after you've completed a draft, assessing which points you've made and what's missing; if you've added new ideas, you can find where they work in the structure you set up.



Drafting

Once you have your ideas and outline, you are ready to start writing. Remember that this is only a draft and that nothing is set in stone. Don't stress about word count or spelling; instead, focus on getting your ideas down expansively and effectively. You might even try turning off your computer monitor in order to resist re-reading and editing until you have your thoughts down in writing.



Revising

This is the stage where the content of your writing goes under major reconstruction. You might add, delete, and/or reorganize points in your piece. There are many different components to consider: Does it meet all the assignment's requirements? Is the tone appropriate for the intended audience? Where can you elaborate and where can you afford to be more brief? Hack away at your essay as much as you please. While you might see opportunities to change things as you write, revision means taking a fresh look, often after a day or so away from the text. Leave the nitpicking for later; checking spelling, grammar, and formatting can happen in the proofreading stage.



Proofreading

After going through multiple drafts and revisions, you'll finally come to a product you are happy with. All you need to do now is clean it up and get it ready for sharing. Now is the time to go through your piece word by word and sentence by sentence, to correct grammar, clarify sentence structure, refine word choice, and make any last adjustments.



Final Draft

Like a sculptor, you have whittled down your mass of ideas into a piece of art. Give yourself a pat on the back, do a little victory dance, and frame your paper in gold—you are finished! Congratulations on braving the long journey, visiting and revisiting these various stages of the writing process.

What does your writing process look like?