

The Writing Process

Writing is never “right” the first time and can always be improved. Because writing is a process, following these steps will help you move from the blank page, into a first draft, through revision and editing, into an acceptable final draft.

Pre-Writing is the first step of the writing process in which you explore your subject through brain-storming, note-taking, in-class discussions, questioning the text, journal writing, charting and other techniques your teacher might suggest to generate data about your topic. The important thing to remember in this step is to get your ideas down on paper without worrying about spelling or organization.

The next step is to **narrow your topic** – too broad a subject can result in a rambling essay, so you want to be sure to restrict the general subject of the essay before starting to write. Keeping your purpose and audience in mind, use this pre-writing data to organize your thoughts and compose a central thesis.

The thesis statement should represent your slant on a subject, should focus on an interesting and significant issue, and should signal the essay’s scope and direction. It presents the limited subject of your paper as well as your attitude about the limited subject. The following examples contrast statements that are too broad with thesis statements that are focused effectively.

Broad Statements

A high school education is often meaningless nowadays.

The newspaper industry is catering to the taste of the American public.

The computer revolution is not all we have been led to believe it is.

Thesis Statements

High school diplomas have been devalued by grade inflation.

The success of *USA Today* proves that people want their newspapers to be entertaining.

Home computers are still an impractical purchase for most people.

After creating a thesis statement, you are ready to develop the **evidence** needed to support it. This supporting material validates your viewpoint and gives your writing the specificity that makes an essay enjoyable to read. In traditional essays you usually need at least three major points of evidence to develop your thesis. These major points eventually will become the supporting or **body paragraphs** (those paragraphs between the introduction and the conclusion) of the essay. Return to your pre-writing notes or use the pre-writing techniques to generate more data. Strong supporting evidence should be unified, adequate, and specific.

The next step involves **organizing the essay's supporting evidence**. Most people need to spend some time organizing their thoughts; otherwise, they tend to lose their way in random ideas. You may be asked to follow a certain pattern of development (narrative, descriptive, persuasive, expository, analytical, compare/contrast, process, cause-effect, definition), and your outline and organization will follow the patterns suggested.

Once these steps have been effectively carried out, you should be ready to write a **rough draft**. This draft is an exploration of ideas, so don't be discouraged if the rough draft proceeds slowly in spots, if a point no longer seems to fit, or if you must return to a pre-writing activity to generate further evidence. We encourage you to share this draft with other students, the teacher, a parent or parents, peers, or even strangers off the street, for evaluation, suggestions, and reader-response.

Once you have finished the pre-writing and writing steps, you are ready to **revise**. It is the revision process which turns a mediocre paper into a good (or even great) paper. Revision adds variety, emphasis, coherence, transition, and detail. Revision eliminates wordiness, irrelevancies, and inconsistencies. Revision polishes and perfects. Revision doesn't mean merely recopying; it also doesn't mean only correcting spelling and punctuation errors. Revision does mean taking another look at what you have written, and reading through your essay (perhaps aloud) for ways to rearrange phrases, sentences, and paragraphs and to cut or sharpen words to clarify your meaning.

Proofreading is a more mechanical task than revising, but it, too, is essential. Once you feel satisfied that the essay is sound, you should reread the final draft closely, correcting any grammar, spelling, and punctuation problems that remain. Although proofreading may seem to involve relatively minor matters, an accumulation of small errors can make an otherwise good essay weak and ineffective. You do not want readers to be distracted from the main point of your essay by misspelled words or misplaced commas.

After several drafts and readings, you are ready to submit a final draft for evaluation by your teacher.