

THE WRITING PROCESS

The following is a step-by-step procedure for approaching and completing writing assignments. Before taking any of these steps, however, be certain that you understand the assignment.

1. **Choose a topic.** Then ask yourself these questions:

- a. Am I interested in this topic?
- b. Do I know this topic well enough to write about it?
- c. Is this topic appropriate for the assignment?

NOTE: Do not waste time waiting for an inspiration that may not come—begin working on the paper.

2. **Brainstorm.** Write down all ideas, good and bad, on the topic. Bad ideas may lead to good ones. These ideas do not have to be in complete sentences.

3. **Group the ideas** into similar or dissimilar ideas or specific arguments.

4. Decide what **type of paper** to write.

- **Exposition:** a paper explaining something—for example: “What I Want Out of Life”
- **Argument and Persuasion:** a paper to sway someone's opinion.
- **Description:** a paper that conveys a sensory impression (what it looks like, feels like, sounds like).
- **Narration:** a paper that tells a story, usually in the order it happened.
- **Comparison and Contrast:** a paper that tells how two things are alike and how they are different.

5. **Limit the topic** to something that can be handled within the required length of the assignment. For example, when writing a six-to-eight page paper, you might be able to think of twenty arguments for/against capital punishment, but limit the paper to five or six arguments.

6. **Write a thesis sentence** (the main idea of the paper, or what you are trying to prove). The thesis sentence gives the entire paper direction. Do not include extra information that is irrelevant to the paper topic. You may write a general or specific thesis.

EXAMPLE: SPECIFIC THESIS—Colorado is my favorite vacation spot because I can camp, hike, and ski there.

The **specific thesis** leaves little to the reader's imagination, but some professors like this type of thesis because the paper tends to be more organized. The reader knows that the writer will discuss camping, hiking, and skiing.

EXAMPLE: GENERAL THESIS—Colorado is my favorite vacation spot because it offers a variety of outdoor activities.

The **general thesis** sentence implies the activities of camping, hiking, and skiing without directly stating this type of thesis sentence.

NOTE: One way to test the strength of the thesis statement is to imagine it beginning with "I am about to try to prove that."

7. **Think about how to introduce the topic.** The introduction should catch the reader's attention and let the reader know what the topic is without writing "My topic is. . ."

You may begin a paper in any of the following ways:

- a. with a quote relevant to the topic. (Remember to include the source of the quote.)
- b. with an analogy (comparing two unlike things for the purpose of illustration or clarification). An example of this technique is "She is like a butterfly coming out of her cocoon."
- c. with statistics relevant to the topic. (Remember to include the source of the statistics.)
- d. with background information that is necessary for the reader to relate to the topic.
- e. with a definition. (Use this sparingly since it tends to be boring.)
- f. with a statement recognizing an opinion or approach different from the writer's. You would state that opinion in order to disprove it.
- g. with a humorous anecdote.
- h. with a basic premise (a proposition upon which an argument is drawn)

"If . . . then . . ."). The basic premise must be believable, or the paper will fail to persuade.

8. Using the ideas generated during brainstorming, **write an informal outline** in order to organize the paper. This step is extremely valuable; you can save yourself a great deal of work later on by taking time to create a workable outline. Contrary to what you may have learned in high school, outlines are not always meant to look beautiful, so feel free to draw out unnecessary ideas. Do not worry about spelling mistakes or putting the information in sentence form; the outline is strictly for your benefit. Make sure that the information is logically presented and that it supports the thesis with concrete examples. If the outline does not support the thesis but is stronger than the thesis, rewrite the thesis so that the outline will support it rather than rewriting the outline.
9. **Write the body of the paper.** This should be in "rough draft" form. Do not expect it to be perfect at this time.
10. Think about how to **conclude the paper.** The purpose of the concluding paragraph is to strengthen the message conveyed by the whole paper, usually by summarizing, and to leave the reader with a feeling of completion. Some of the ways suggested for introductory paragraphs are also suitable for concluding paragraphs. Sometimes, only a concluding statement is required, not a complete paragraph, depending on the length of the paper and the topic covered.
11. **Proofread the paper for content and mechanics.** Sometimes it is helpful to ask someone to read the paper because s/he can spot awkward, unclear, and confusing statements more easily than you can. If at all possible, do not proofread something right after it is written. Instead, let it "rest" for one or two days.

Content: When proofreading for content, ask yourself the following questions:

- a. Is there enough support for the thesis?
- b. Does each paragraph have a clear topic sentence?
- c. Are concrete examples included?
- d. Does the paper flow smoothly from thought to thought.
- e. Could a person who knows relatively little about this topic understand this paper?
- f. Is it interesting?
- g. Does it adhere to the guidelines of the assignment?

Mechanics: When proofreading for mechanics, ask yourself the following questions:

- a. Are all of the statements complete sentences?
- b. Are commas and other punctuation marks used correctly? (If in doubt, refer to a grammar handbook.)
- c. Are the verb forms correct and do they agree with their subjects?
- d. Are any of the words misspelled?
- e. Have any words been omitted or unnecessarily repeated?

12. **Rewrite and revise the paper** at least one more time. First drafts of a paper are never perfect, so do not be afraid to make several drafts.
13. **Give the paper an interesting and original title.**
14. **Turn in the paper.** Make sure the paper is typed neatly, is double-spaced, and is easy to read. Follow the professor's specifications for all essays. If you need a works cited page, for example, include it. On in-class essays, make sure the paper is written very neatly. Write on the front of the paper only and double-space unless your professor says it is okay to do otherwise.
15. When the paper is returned, if there are errors learn how to correct them! There are several

places at Texas State where you can learn to improve your writing. You can meet with the professor, or visit SLAC (Student Learning Assistance Center), The Writing Center, or hire a private tutor. (Ask about SLAC's private tutor referral service.) By seeking help, you can prevent making the same mistakes twice.