

# The Writing Process

## DePauw University Writing Center<sup>1</sup>

Facing a blank white page and desperately trying to figure out “what the teacher wants” or “what I have to do to get an A” is indeed paralyzing. Such thinking wastes time and leads to more unnecessary stress.

Concentrate less on the grade and the person giving it and more on the fact that you are intelligent and have something to say. Remember, too, that writing is an on-going process of trial and error, refinement, and sweet successes. While this idea seems idealistic, there is some practical advice that may not guarantee an A, but should at least reduce your anxiety and probably help you improve as a writer.

BREAK DOWN THE WRITING STAGES. If you sit down and “wing it” or try to write the paper in one-shot, you set yourself up for frustration and ensure that you are not writing to the best of your ability. Such a method forces you to generate ideas, organize, provide examples, perfect your phrasing, and worry about spelling and punctuation all at the same time.

Instead, consider a process with steps like the following:

### I. PREWRITING

- A. If you are using a source or sources (i.e. novels, essays, research materials) for the basis of your paper, make sure you understand clearly what the writer has said. It may help to write a summary of the plot as you finish the assignment. Reread the material you intend to analyze before you begin the paper to see if you can gather new, fresh insights.
- B. Cluster – not once, but several times. Whenever you are when the idea for a paper pops into your head, sit down and begin drawing circles to connect ideas. Clustering is a quick and painless process that becomes easier with practice.
- C. Gather your clusters together, and eliminate the ideas that seem flat or unimportant or impossible to develop. This is important! What happens is that good ideas and bad ideas chase themselves around in your mind and get all mixed up. This causes frustration and you feel as though you’re not making any progress. Eliminating some ideas is a positive step in the writing process because with weak ideas gone, your good ideas stand out clearer.
- D. Try doing a focused cluster: for example, you may choose the general theme “love” and then draw circles from that indicating all of the different characters’ viewpoints on love. Or if you want to do a character analysis, try writing the character’s name, making circles for “physical characteristics,” “moral qualities,” “relationships with others,” etc.
- E. Use your cluster(s) to formulate a thesis statement and as a basis for your outline.

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from California Lutheran University Writing Center handout; used with permission by Sally Jo Millward.

## II. DRAFTING

- A. Draft I. Before you begin, write at the top of the page these facts: your audience, your purpose, your deadline, and the required length of your essay. Get the words and ideas down on the page. Don't worry about phrasing or punctuation or spelling – just write! Don't be afraid to expand on or drop ideas that appear in your outline if it feels right. Whether typing or handwriting, double-space and leave wide margins.
- B. Draft II
  - a. Outline the rough draft. Identify the central point of each paragraph and your examples in the margins. Now write those down in outline form and look at this objectively.
  - b. Note where you've mentioned similar ideas in different paragraphs and consider reorganizing.
  - c. Note paragraphs that seem underdeveloped and think of what you need to convince your reader that your view is correct. One mechanical way to spot underdevelopment is to simply eyeball your draft. Paragraphs that have only two or three sentences should be expanded, joined with another paragraph, or dropped. Dropping ideas is sometimes hard, but a short paragraph may indicate that the idea is an interesting tangent, but not essential to your thesis.
  - d. Think about structuring your paper from points of lesser interest to greater.
- C. Draft III. Bring this draft to class for work in writing groups or to the Writing Center (though W-Center tutors are happy to help at any stage).

## III. REVISING THE DRAFT:

Get away from the draft for a while so that you can return to it with more objectivity. The best way to identify where and what you revise is to either read your paper aloud to someone, or better yet, have him/her read it aloud to you. You'll "hear" how it sounds to the public, and this will give you a new perspective.

- A. Look for an excess of the "to be" verb.
- B. Look for series of long sentences that may need breaking up.
- C. Check for repetition of terms.
- D. Check for fragments and comma splices, etc.
- E. Check for transitions between paragraphs.
- F. Check to make sure you have included enough examples
- G. Check to make sure you have drawn conclusions that advance your thesis.

## IV. PROOFREAD FOR MISSPELLINGS AND TYPOS