

The Writing Process

5 Basic Stages

1. Pre-writing
2. Drafting
3. Revising
4. Editing
5. Publishing

Stage 1: Pre-writing

The key to a great paper is in the planning. Before you sit down to write something, you need to figure out what you are going to write about. Most of us start with a topic, and then decide what we have to say about this topic. For an essay, you might generate a “working thesis” or a main idea that you would like to explore, and then start collecting information and ideas that relate to that idea.

Ways to Generate Ideas

- *Free write or use a journal
- *Brainstorms your likes and dislikes, and things, people, place, and hobbies that are important to you
- *Review assignments and discussion questions, and notes
- *Use graphic organizers
- *Participate in class or small group discussions; talk out ideas others
- *Determine the who, what, where, when, why, and how of a topic
- *Determine what you already know and what you still need to learn

Ways to Plan Your Writing

- *create a cluster, diagram, or web
- *create a storyboard
- *make an outline
- *identify pros and cons
- *list supporting arguments
- *sort and organize note cards by topic

Stage 2: Drafting

Once you have planned out your ideas, the next step is to start drafting, or writing. As you write, keep referring back to your notes and the plan that you determined in Stage 1, but don't be afraid to change the plan when needed. During the drafting stage, you should concentrate on getting your ideas on paper, organizing your information logically, and developing your topic with enough detail for your audience and purpose.

As you work, keep the following things in mind:

Drafts are for the writer:

Our brain processes information as we write things down. You will find yourself making connections and discovering new ideas as you are wiring your first drafts. When this happens, you should go back to the planning stage (State 1) to work in the new ideas. You may even need to change your thesis or the angle you are taking on the topic. Many writers wait to write their introduction until they have finished the body of the paper.

Drafts are not perfect:

Because you are really drafting for yourself, to understand your ideas and put them into words, you might be unhappy with your early results. Don't agonize over every word and sentence because you'll give yourself writer's block! You will never send off a draft to your audience without at least SOME sort of revision or a least editing. Just get some words down on the paper even if they sound silly or awkward. You can always go back and fix it later- that's what revision is for.

Drafting takes time:

The more complicated your writing task is, the more time you should allow yourself for drafting. As you discover new ideas and connections, you need the time to incorporate them into your plan! Don't procrastinate, and don't feel that you have to finish your whole paper in one sitting.

Stage 3: Revising

Revision works best when you have some time to let your writing sit. You will be better able to look at your writing with a reader's eye if you can put it aside for a day or two before working on it again.

If drafting is for the writer, revision is for the reader. During revision you consider your writing from your audience's point of view. In fact, to revise means literally to "re-see" or "re-look" at your writing.

You may need to change the order of your information, expand certain sections, or cut details in others. Often, you will need to go back to the drafting stage and re-word parts of your paper. Revising is NOT editing! Save the spelling, grammar and sentence fixes for later.

Most writers find it helpful to have someone else read their writing and thesis statement. A reader who is unfamiliar with your document can help you identify which parts are working and which parts are still unclear.

Revising for Audience

- Is the level of detail appropriate for my audience (not too general or too specific.)?
- Are my ideas presented in a logical order that will be evident to the reader?
- Do I use clear transitions to help the reader follow my train of thought?
- Are my sentences clear and specific?
- Do I say what I mean and mean what I say?
- Is my tone and style appropriate for my audience?

Revising for Purpose:

- Is my purpose clearly stated for the reader?
- Do I clearly maintain that purpose throughout the document?
- Does all of my supporting information clearly relate to my purpose?
- Do I organize my ideas to best fulfill my purpose?

Revising for Form:

- Do I follow the established form of the document I am writing?
- Do I separate ideas into paragraphs with clear topic sentences?
- Do I maintain balance among my points, developing each to the same extent?

Stage 4: EDITING

While revising focuses mainly on making your content clear for your readers, editing focuses on making your documents meet the conventions of standard written English. During the editing stage, check the following:

- Grammar
- Sentence structure
- Word choice
- Punctuation
- Capitalization
- Spelling
- Citation and document format

Stage 5: Publishing

Writing is communication- if you have written something, you must have intended for someone to read it, even if that person is only yourself. When you publish a document, you are releasing it to the public for others to read. Not all of your writing will be taken through the publishing stage, but even turning a paper in to your teacher constitutes “publishing.”

Ways to publish your writing include:

- Turning in a paper to your teacher.
- Entering an essay contest
- Sending a letter to the editor.
- Writing for your school newspaper, yearbook, or literary magazine.
- Posting a piece of writing on the Internet.
- Writing a letter to a public official or company
- Submitting your work to a young writer’s magazine