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focus in these writing process chapters should be on completing each step and becoming comfortable with the process. There is no better way to learn the writing process than by doing it. Also, remember that you will come back to the writing process with each assignment you complete, and each time you will understand more about the paragraph or essay form and how to develop and refine your writing.

Once you have completed the initial steps of the writing process described in “First Steps,” you will continue the process in “Writing a Paragraph” in Chapter 4 or “Writing an Essay” in Chapter 6, depending on the assignment you have been given. Beth continues to develop her topic as both a paragraph and an essay in those chapters, and you may continue developing your topic, too. Afterward, we advise you to read the chapter on the structure of the paragraph or the structure of the essay (Chapters 5 or 7) to learn more about the structure for the kind of college writing you are doing.

Understanding the Assignment

It's important that you understand your assignment before you begin writing because each college assignment is likely to have different requirements.

First, make sure you are clear on requirements such as:

- due date
- length
- format of paper
- topic restrictions

Choosing a Topic

Usually you will be given a writing topic, or a choice of topics, to write about. Instructors choose topics that lead to good papers. It is your job to think carefully about the topic and find an area of the topic that you can write about. Sometimes the writing topic is a word or phrase such as “modes of transportation,” and sometimes the topic is a writing prompt or discussion question such as “Discuss a mode of transportation that you are familiar with.” Understanding the following words, commonly used in assignments, will help you focus your writing:

Analyze: Examine one or more of the parts of a topic.

Compare: Examine the similarities and differences in two topics, with the emphasis on similarities.

Contrast: Examine the differences in two topics.

Discuss: Present various sides of, focus on, or explain one topic.

Explain: Make clear, give the reasons for, or analyze a topic in a step-by-step fashion.

Prove: Provide evidence to persuade the reader that a statement is true.

Summarize: Restate the main points of an issue or article in a shortened form.