Writing is a repetitive process including four basic steps to reach a finished product: prewriting, drafting, revising, and proofreading. These steps may be approached in different ways under varying circumstances.

**Stages of the Writing Process:**

**Prewriting**

Prewriting is everything done before drafting the paper. Looking over the assignment, choosing and narrowing the topic, and assessing audience and purpose are usually considered part of this process; research may also be included in prewriting. Different prewriting strategies can be used to help choose and develop a topic:

- Brainstorm a list of ideas
- Read, annotate sources, and take notes
- Freewrite ideas
- Cluster (make a visual map of related ideas)
- Discuss ideas with others and take notes
- Make an outline of your paper

To narrow the topic enough to fit the assignment, consider possible purposes for writing the paper:

- to express
- to inform
- to analyze
- to persuade
- to entertain
- to explore

Identifying the purpose clarifies goals and helps develop a working thesis, which identifies the overall opinion and scope of the paper.

**Audience**

The audience should be considered prior to writing the paper. The audience can be identified by answering the following questions:

- To whom is this paper directed?
- How much does the audience know about the topic?
- How do they feel about the topic? Enthusiastic? Neutral? Hostile?
- What personal characteristics (age, gender, culture, socioeconomic background, values, politics, etc.) might affect the audience’s views of the paper?

Once you’ve narrowed your topic, identified your purpose and audience, developed a working thesis, and organized and expanded your ideas, you are ready to draft the paper.

**Drafting**

Drafting is the stage when the paper is put in paragraph form. The five elements and/or criteria necessary for a reader to understand a paper are as follows:
The thesis statement typically, but not always, appears at the end of the introduction and clearly states the writer’s opinion about the topic and the purpose of the essay.

Each paragraph typically, but not always, begins with a topic sentence, which states the main idea of that paragraph and helps the reader understand how it is logically connected to the thesis. Like the thesis statement, the topic sentence identifies what the reader can reasonably expect the paragraph to contain.

The body of the paragraph should be developed with sufficient supporting details. Supporting details come in many different forms: statistics, researched information, observations, real life examples, descriptions, case studies, interviews, personal experience, hypothetical situations, definitions, expert opinions, etc. The more specific the information, the more interesting and effective the paragraph.

An essay has coherence if each paragraph relates to the one before it and all sentences are logically connected. Transitional words and phrases help create bridges between sentences and paragraphs. Examples include however, in addition, in other words, consequently, for example, in contrast, nevertheless, etc. Repeating key words also helps craft links between sentences and paragraphs.

Unity within the essay helps avoid digressing from the main idea of the paper by making sure all sentences relate to the topic sentence and all paragraphs relate to the thesis.

While drafting, try to include these elements in the essay. However, do not expect to get them exactly right the first time. This is where revision comes in.

Revising
Revising is adding, deleting, and rearranging information. Begin by verifying that the logic and organization of the essay matches the thesis and does not deviate from the main idea. If there are any inconsistencies, rearrange the paragraph or sentences and delete unnecessary information. Also, make sure every paragraph has a topic sentence and transition. The revision process is often a major overhaul; in fact, the second draft may look much different than the first.

Proofreading or Editing
During this stage of the writing process, check the paper for spelling, grammar, punctuation, capitalization, and other mechanical errors. For a research paper, also check for accurate and correct documentation. Always consult a writer’s handbook, or ask for help at the TAMIU Writing Center for assistance with punctuation rules or research paper formatting.


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