

Understanding the Writing Process

There is no universal writing process. There are many different types of processes, some highly organized and some very informal. This is because everyone who has ever written any sort of paper—whether it be a lab report, a research paper, or a timed essay on a midterm exam—has used some form of a writing process. The more papers a person has written, the more likely it is that they have adopted or developed a process that works for them (and some people have multiple processes that they use for different kinds of writing). However, we understand that not everyone has a go-to writing process, and it can be difficult to find one that truly helps you produce your *best* work. In this resource, we break down one common method that many writers use to get their projects done, as well as a simplified version. Feel free to experiment with these processes to get the most out of your writing experience!

The Traditional Process

If you were ever taught the writing process in high school, it most likely followed this general format. This method is very commonly used and works well for many people.

1. **Prewriting:** In this first stage, you are essentially doing anything you need to do before sitting down and writing. This includes initial research, note taking, generating ideas, and organizing. For some, this stage is the most challenging to get past because it is difficult to come up with ideas or organize them into something workable. Some suggestions to get around this include:
 - *Freewriting:* Set a timer for 5-10 minutes and simply write whatever comes to mind. Next, read what you wrote down and underline the key thoughts. The purpose of this exercise is to aid in idea generation.
 - *Bubbling/mapping:* If you are a visual learner, this is a great way to help you organize and make sense of your ideas. In creating a bubble-map, you might have one bubble that houses your main idea (a potential thesis) and multiple smaller bubbles that house your supporting ideas. Links between bubbles can even act as connecting/transition ideas.
 - *Outlining:* This is another tried and true way for writers to organize their ideas! A traditional outline is like the bubble map, except it is in a bulleted style. An outline can often be the “skeleton” of your paper. .
2. **Drafting:** This is when you start putting your ideas into full sentences and paragraphs. You are expanding upon chosen ideas you came up with during the previous stage and strengthening connections between those ideas. A cohesive paper should start to form here.

3. **Revising:** This is **where** you will look over your draft and refine it as needed, with the goal of making sure that your reader will be able to clearly understand what you are bringing to the table and why it is important. In this stage you might need to restructure your paragraph placement, clarify your writing, elaborate on certain ideas, cut down on others, etc. Make sure that your work has followed the prompt!
4. **Editing:** This step is much like the previous one, except more mechanical. You want to correct any mistakes regarding grammar, spelling, capitalization, punctuation, word choice, and format (MLA, APA, CMOS, etc). Do not rely fully on automatic editing programs such as autocorrect or spellcheck, as these programs can often make mistakes that change the meaning of your sentence. If you need a refresher on the rules of grammar or style, we recommend the *Purdue OWL* (accessible online at owl.purdue.edu) as a one-stop resource for all kinds of writing assistance.
5. **Postwriting:** Share your final product!

A Simplified Process

We understand that not all writers may benefit from a highly structured, step-by-step process. Here is a simplified version that covers all the bases (short and sweet processes such as this one may be quite useful in situations of timed writing!):

1. **Brainstorming:** After doing the initial research and/or reading the prompt, come up with as many ideas as you possibly can! You might list them or draw a diagram. In timed situations, try to limit this stage depending on the time allotted.
2. **Organizing:** In this stage, you will take some of your ideas and organize them into a workable format. It is suggested that you create an outline or a bubble map, that way you have a skeleton for your paper and can flesh out from there. You should have a main idea/thesis, and a few supporting ideas that all connect.
3. **Writing:** This stage seems self-explanatory, but here is where you build on your organized ideas and create paragraphs and sentences that are cohesive.
4. **Proofreading/Editing:** After writing, read over your work to make sure that you are getting what you want to say across to your audience in the clearest way possible. You will likely need to revise your work to achieve this. Finally, edit your work for any mechanical mistakes! If you writing in a timed situation, watch the clock to make sure that you have a few minutes to proofread.