

## For Writers and Would-Be Writers: Starting the Writing Process

**TOOLS:** PAPER: PEN OR PENCIL THAT YOU LIKE: WORD PROCESSOR: A COLLEGIATE  
DICTIONARY: THESAURUS: RESOURCE BOOKS AND MATERIALS

**WHERE DO I START?** THERE WILL BE SOME STIMULUS: A DESIRE TO WRITE OR ASSIGNMENT  
GIVEN. REACTION? FLIGHT OR FIGHT

FLIGHT? Even professional writers do it. One writer, for example: reads soup-can labels: another sharpens pencils; another takes a hike.

WRITERS SHOULD EVENTUALLY SAY TO THEMSELVES: "I have something valuable to say that I must communicate to a reader."

### **PROCESS:**

- I. If you have not been given an assignment, think carefully about the purpose for your desire to write and the intended audience. For example, have you just recovered from a major illness and wish to share your experience? With Whom? Why?

If you are responding to a given assignment, **read and understand** the assignment carefully. Hopefully, you have accurate, careful notes or a handout or written instructions. Look for key words such as **paragraph, essay, position paper, report, define, compare and contrast, illustrate, argue, causes, effects, and classification.**

This stage, called *conception* by some writers, is when writers must make up their minds to write in spite of their confusion and insecurity. There is often the need for clarification directions, or reading. Time to determine an audience profile and a clear purpose for writing (to inform, persuade, entertain, or a combination).

- II. **Let your ideas incubate.** Let them *hatch*. Start early, so you can wait, doing nothing or very little. Relax and wait for a "voice" – an unconscious motivation to get started with words on paper.  
Write down small ideas that may come to mind from time to time. Often ideas pop up at the strangest times such as when you are brushing your teeth. Just keep gathering bits and pieces until you are ready for a draft.

If you can no longer wait for inspiration, try a brainstorming technique such as listing, free writing, or clustering. (See Writing Handout. “Development: Generating Ideas for Writing”)

**III. Start writing.** One word on a page often leads to another. You don’t necessarily have to start

the paper at the top, for introductions are often best written when you have something specific to introduce. You may write sections of the paper at any time to be assembled later. Become aware of the internal rhythm of writing—pausing—writing. Pauses because of the need to edit or read or verbalize or gather information or scream.

Then there may be inevitable external distractions. Hang a sign that says: **STAY AWAY.**

**WRITING IN PROGRESS** (if you wish).

Keep getting back to production, however. Write incomplete sentences or fluent thoughts, but stay on task. Remember that writing is recursive, so keep rereading as often as you need to. If your pauses have become too long and your diagnosis is writer’s block, try some specific strategies such as those given by Jean Wyrick (see Writing Center handout: “How to Treat Writer’s Block”). Avoid being too critical of your writing at this stage.

**IV. Remind yourself** periodically about what the end product should be and what key elements should be present. For example, if you are writing an essay, are you writing supporting paragraphs that relate to the thesis?

**Complete a first draft, but the work is not yet finished!**

**V. Edit.** Now you have discovered what you have to say, decide how best to say it. Remember your audience. Become aware of your necessary role as reader, as well as writer.

A. Check for completeness of information. Is information accurate, specific, and sufficient? Make necessary additions or deletions.

B. Review form and structure. Is genre appropriate? Are structural requirements met? Write an outline to verify that these requirements have been met, and use it as a guide for effective organization.

C. Does the draft flow well with effective use of connecting words and ideas?

**VI. Proofread. Read out loud** for clarity. Edit line by line, phrase by phrase, and word by word. Check for effective style, accurate diction, and correct spelling, grammar, and punctuation.

**VII. Reluctantly, submit your composition because you have now run out of time!**