

Writing the Essay

1. The writing process is not linear. It is cyclical.
2. Very few writers 'get it right' first draft.
3. Writing is a process of discovery.

The Writing process involves the following activities:

- Identifying your purpose, audience, topic
- Generating ideas
- Organising ideas
- Drafting
- Revising, editing, proof-reading

These do not occur in linear fashion. You may change your topic while gathering information; or revise and reorganize as you write your drafts.

Remember the parts of the process

Keep notes of good ideas that occur to you as you go along and save all your notes and drafts.

Defining your Purpose

Before you begin writing consider the main purpose of your piece of writing.

Generally your writing at university will be expository (explain an idea or provide information) persuasive/argumentation (persuade readers to see things your way/move them to action) and technical (describe an experiment or detailed process)

However, they can be considerable overlap in these categories.

Some assignments may require you to explore and test concepts and opinions against what you know from your own experience and to connect other people's ideas to your prior knowledge.

Others may require you to blend explanation with persuasion.

Whatever you determine to be the purpose of your essay, let that guide you as you begin writing.

Assessing Your Audience

You need to think carefully about who your audience is and what needs and expectations this audience will have.

If your audience is your lecturer/course instructor you must remember that he/she is a "stand-in" for a larger 'general' audience. Consider what a general reader would already know about the topic, and what he/she will need you to explain.

Consider what the reader/audience requires from you in terms of purpose, content, presentation on page (format), length, level of formality and objectivity (tone) organization, date of delivery.

Ask yourself, "How can I best engage and interest my reader and make the experience of reading my work rewarding and not frustrating?"

Your writing should meet the following criteria:

- A clear thesis – have a clear main point message that unifies the entire piece of writing.
- Specific points that support your thesis.
- Paragraphs – each with a clear main idea.
- Relevant details to support each paragraph's main idea
- Direct, concrete language
- A relatively formal tone, with no slang and colloquial expressions but not stuffy or full of stiff words and phrases like "notwithstanding" "in this regard" "the aforementioned."

Generating Ideas

Journal

Record observations, comments, quotations, references, questions for research, ideas on an assigned topic/text. A college journal is different from a personal diary in that it records ideas, observations, rather than personal events.

Freewriting

The idea is to let words on a page generate more words and let one idea lead to another in free association without concern for correctness. This flexes your writing muscles (like warming up).

Writing the Essay

The important thing is to keep writing. Choose best idea, free write with this as focus.

Brainstorming

Can be done singly or in group.

It involves making a lot of ideas as they occur to you. You can then reorganize them, eliminate them and arrange them as you choose.

Finding a Focus

Narrowing your topic

Sometimes you are given a broad, general subject area e.g. Genetic Engineering/Global Warming. You then have to decide how to narrow it down. Sometimes you may be given a specific question to address.

Whenever you begin, you must work towards finding a main question that concerns you and expressing a **thesis** in answer to that question. A thesis is an **opinion main point or message** that unifies your piece of writing.

Steps in finding a focus

Subject



Topic



Main Question



Thesis

E.g. Global Warming – This topic is broad for a writing topic. You must narrow it to a more precise topic. Such as: "The Effects of Global Warming on the Sea Level (Corn Belt States)". To narrow your topic even further, ask a question about that topic to provide a perspective/focus for generating ideas, formulating a thesis and writing a draft.

Writing the Essay

Subject:	Global Warming
Topic:	The Effects of Global Warming on the Sea Levels in the Tropics
Question:	How will Global Warming affect corn production/sea levels positively/negatively in the tropics?

If your topic and question are too broad, you will find it difficult to generate a thesis with focus ideas and examples.

If your topic and question are too narrow you will end up being repetitive probably because you cannot find enough material.

Basic Test:

If you feel swamped with material – narrow your topic

If you feel you have enough material to fill a page and can't imagine how you will find more – broaden your topic.

Formulating a Thesis

If someone asked, "What is the main idea you want to communicate to your reader in your piece of writing? Your answer would be your thesis. Your thesis tells your readers what point you are going to make about your topic, what stand you are going to take. It is not enough to say, "I am writing about Global Warming." That is too wide-ranging. What point do you intend to propose and argue about global warming? E.g. "Global Warming will most likely lead to increased sea levels in the tropics. The rest of what you write will support and explain that thesis.

A good thesis does the following:

- Narrow your topic to a single main idea that you want to communicate.
- Asserts your position clearly and firmly
- Expresses your opinion on attitude toward your topic.
- States not simply a fact, but an opinion
- Makes a generalization that can be supported by details, facts and examples within the assigned limitations of time and space.
- Stimulates curiosity and interest in readers and prompts them to read on

You need to state your thesis clearly in the essay usually at/near the beginning. See your thesis statement as a sign-post – for you as you write and for your readers as they read your essay

Be prepared to change/redefine your thesis as you go along. Writing is an act of discovery.

Many writers begin with a tentative thesis and find that they come to a new conclusion by the end of the first draft. If this happens, start the second draft by focusing on the thesis that emerged as you wrote your first draft. Be flexible.

OUTLINING

Scratch Outline

A scratch outline is a rough list of numbered points that you will cover in your essay.

Make a scratch outline if you already have a rough idea of what ground your essay will cover. A scratch outline lets you see what ideas you already have, how they connect, what you can do to support and develop them and what further planning/research you still need to do.

Formal Outline

A formal outline is an outline with a definite form structure. Usually this kind of outline is more feasible after you have written your first draft. The outline then serves as a kind of check on the logic and completeness of what you have written, revealing any gaps, repetitions or illogical steps in the development of your essay. (See textbook pp.)

Writing Drafts

Writing drafts gives you the opportunity to work on a piece of writing until you have made it meet your goals

- Don't necessarily begin at the beginning i.e. the introduction
- Write your first draft as quickly and fluently as you can. Fill up pages, don't be concerned with spelling, grammar, right words. If you can't think of a word, just leave a space, write yourself a note/highlight the section so you can remember to return to it. If you get ideas about points you want to bring up later, jot them down in the margin, so you will not forget them.
- Keep your topic, question and thesis very much in mind.
- Write strongly in your drafts. Readers respond well to firm convictions, original insights and details, persuasive language. You can always tone down language and modify ideas in later drafts.

Save Your Drafts

Remember to save all your notes and drafts until the course is over. Don't discard a draft,

you might want to use a sentence/paragraph later.

Review Your Draft

- Check that each paragraph supports your thesis
- Look for generalizations and specific supporting details
- Make an outline of your draft to check that you have presented your ideas logically, in the best possible order and that paragraphs are unified, developed and coherent.

Paragraphing

Each paragraph should contain **ONE** controlling idea. It should not digress or switch topics in mid-stream. The main, controlling idea is usually stated in a **topic sentence** at the beginning of the paragraph. Repetition of keywords help to preserve the unity of the paragraph.

Readers should flow/move with ease from one paragraph to another. All parts of your essay should be connected clearly to each other.

How?

- Make summary statement referring to what has gone before and contrasting the new point with previous points.
- Make connections by using words that link to words used previously or use explicit connecting words like "this, that, these, those," and transitional expressions such as "also, therefore, however".
- Write a brief transitional paragraph whose sole function is to smooth the path of logic and take your reader to the next point deftly and convincingly.

Supporting Your Points

While writing, keep in mind the skeptical reader who will ask, "Why on earth do you think that?" "What could possibly lead you to that conclusion?" You have to show your reader that your opinion is well-founded and supported by experience, knowledge, logical arguments, the work of experts and reasoned examples.

- Narration, anecdote
- Provide reasons, illustrations: examples, facts, incidents or statistics

Avoid Plagiarism

'Plagiarize' comes from the Latin word meaning to 'kidnap'. You plagiarize if you:

1. do not acknowledge a quotation;
2. fail to put an author's words inside quotation marks;
3. paraphrase or summarize facts, or opinions from sources without stating exactly where they came from;
4. use in your paper long sections that have been rewritten by a friend or a tutor;
5. buy, find or receive a paper that you turn in as your own work.
6. Make sure you do not steal or borrow, **cite** instead.

What to Cite

1. An original idea derived from a source, whether quoted or paraphrased.
2. Factual information borrowed directly from a source that is not common knowledge.
3. Wording that is exceptional in expression or style, even if it repeats common knowledge information.
4. Any exact wording copied from a source.
5. Your summary of original ideas by a source.

What not to Cite

- Personal notes and synthesis of library notes are your own, along with the thesis, topic sentences, analyses and most of the opening and concluding discussion.
- Factual information of a general nature called "common knowledge" in source after source. Information that occurs in five or more **sources may be considered general knowledge**.

Plagiarism is a very serious breach of ethics. Fundamentally, plagiarism is the offering of words or issues of another person as one's own. The most blatant form is the use of another student's work; however, the most common error is carelessness with reference sources. The obvious form of plagiarism is to copy direct quotations from sources without placing quotation marks and crediting the source. The more subtle form is to paraphrase material that is not properly documented. Remember that an

Writing the Essay

author's ideas, interpretation and words are his/her property, in fact, they are protected by laws and must be acknowledged whenever borrowed.

Follow these rules for the use of sourced material:

1. Acknowledge borrowed material by introducing the quotation or paraphrase with the name of the authority. This indicates where the borrowed materials begin.
2. Enclose all quoted materials within quotation marks.
3. Make certain that **paraphrased** material is written in your **own style and language**. Sometimes paraphrase never quite becomes paraphrase – too much of the original is left intact. Simply rearranging sentence patterns is not acceptable. Do not alter the essential idea.
4. Provide specific in-text documentation for each borrowed item.
5. Provide a bibliography entry in the "Works Cited" list for every source cited in the paper. Omit sources consulted but not used.