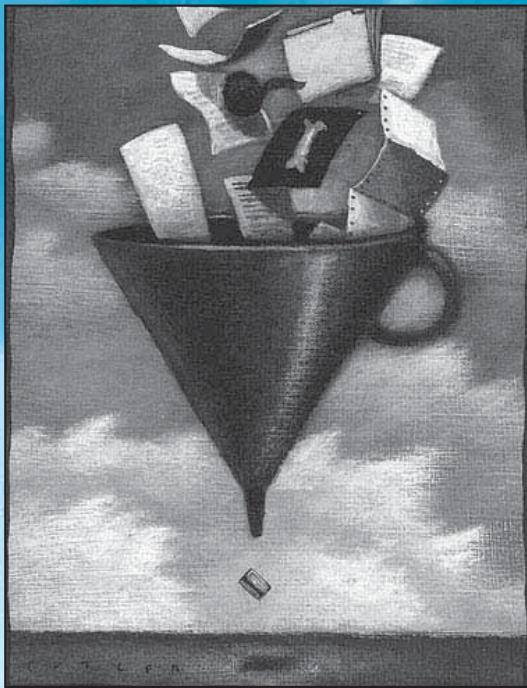


CHAPTER 1

The Writing Process

Chapter Goal: Develop an understanding of the writing process and write a clear, organized paragraph.



Your ideas may seem scattered, disorganized, jumbled, and downright messy, but the writing process can help you funnel them and shape them into real

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Writing is not a single act, but a process composed of several steps. As with most processes—swinging a baseball bat, playing the clarinet, or surfing the Internet—it is sometimes easier to do than to analyze. When people try to analyze how they write, their descriptions of the process are uniquely their own. Yet from a sea of individual accounts, the same steps emerge.

Focus on the Writing Process: Completing the Steps



Admittedly, the “Sorry we’re open” sign in the photograph is probably the product of someone’s slightly warped sense of humor. But as it brings a smile to your face, it may also serve as a reminder of the need to proofread carefully.

Often, the temptation to let prewriting, revision, or proofreading slide is hard to resist. But every step contributes to the final product. Taking time to complete all the steps in the writing process can be your personal form of quality control.

Reflect on It

1. Write down a process that you do that requires several steps.
2. List the steps in the order in which you do them.
3. Analyze the process. Is it a flexible process, like the writing process, that allows you to go back to a previous step if you need to? Or is it a process more like cooking, which does not allow you to add an egg once the cake is in the oven?
4. Finally, think about the importance of each step in your process. What would happen if you left out a step?

One writer, Antonio, describes the process this way:

Well, first, I need time to think. If I have a while before the paper is due, I never start right away. Some people might call it procrastination, but it works for me. After the ideas have had time to percolate, I sit at the computer and just start writing. I just let my ideas flow, good or bad. If that doesn’t work, sometimes I try a more organized approach, jotting down an outline. It’s all a part of finding my focus. Then, once I know what I want to say, I just write. I am a slow writer because I try to get it right the first time. But I never do. If I look at it the next day, I see where the holes are—where I’ve left out details. I’m bad about that. So my second draft is always better than my first. When I’m finished, I check to make sure my commas are in the right place and my grammar is okay. Then I’m ready to turn it in.

The Writing Process

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Though everyone approaches writing a little differently, most people follow a process similar to the one just described. The writer in the example above may not be aware of it, but he is following all of the steps in the **writing process**: prewriting, planning, drafting, revising, and proofreading.

Prewriting

“. . . first, I need time to think.”

Prewriting covers a range of activity from casually thinking about your topic to going through a prewriting exercise to get your thoughts on paper. You will probably find yourself doing some form of prewriting throughout the writing process. When you are sitting at a traffic light and the perfect example to illustrate your point pops into your head, you are prewriting. When you realize that your paragraph isn't working the way you wanted and you stop to list ideas or figure out another approach, you are returning to the prewriting stage. Prewriting is thinking, and the more thought you put into your paper, the stronger it will be.

Planning

“It's all a part of finding my focus.”

Careful and thoughtful **planning** makes a paragraph easier for you to write and easier for your readers to read. Your plan may include a topic sentence—your statement of the main idea. Because it states the main idea, the topic sentence forms the cornerstone of your paragraph. Besides a topic sentence, your planning will probably include an informal outline. An outline can be as simple as a list of the points you will develop in a paragraph. Don't be afraid that planning will waste your time. Careful planning—or lack of it—always shows in the final draft.

Drafting

“I just write.”

Sometimes **drafting** is a quick process, with ideas flowing faster than you can get them down on paper. At other times, the process is slow and difficult. Your thoughts grind to a standstill, and you become frustrated, thinking you have nothing to say. If you get stuck during the drafting process, don't quit in frustration. The creative process is still at work. What is happening to you happens to all writers. Write through the problem, or, if necessary, return to the planning or prewriting stage.

As you draft your paper, you should not worry about grammar, spelling, or punctuation. Stopping to look up a comma rule will only distract you. Concentrate on ideas and save the proofreading for later.

Revising

“I see where the holes are.”

In its Latin roots, the word *revising* means “seeing again.” **Revising** is difficult because it is hard to see your work through the eyes of a reader. Writers often see what they *meant* to say rather than what they really said. Sometimes they take for granted background knowledge that the reader may not have. Because of these difficulties, it helps to put your draft aside for a day or so before trying to revise it. With twenty-four hours between writing and revising, you will see your paper more clearly. It is also helpful to ask someone else to look at your work—a friend, classmate, or relative. Ask the person to focus on the *content* of your paper rather than on grammar, spelling, or punctuation. Ask which ideas are clear and which ones need more explanation. Ask how well your examples illustrate your points. A reader’s comments can help you see your paper in a new light.

One word of advice—if you don’t know how to use a computer, learn. Writing multiple drafts is much easier on a computer. Once you learn to write on a computer, the paragraphs, essays, term papers, and reports you will write in college will look much less intimidating.

Proofreading

“I check to make sure my commas are in the right place and my grammar is okay.”

Proofreading is the final polish that you put on your paragraph. When you proofread, consider such things as grammar, spelling, and word choice. Replace vague words with specific words. Take out words that are not carrying their weight. Look at connections, making sure ideas flow smoothly from one sentence to the next. Because the stages of the writing process overlap, you have probably done some minor proofreading along the way. Before the final proofreading, set your paragraph aside for a while. Then proofread it once more to give it the luster of a finished piece.

An Important Point

If you go through the writing process expecting the steps to fall in order, like the steps involved in changing the oil in your car, you may think the process is not working. However, writing a paragraph is not a sequential process. It is a repetitive process, more like driving a car than changing its oil.

If you take a two-hundred-mile trip, the steps you follow might be described as “Turn on the ignition. Put the car in drive. Accelerate. Brake. Put the car in park. Turn off the ignition.” Yet it is not that simple. During a two-hundred-mile drive, you repeat each step not once but several times, and you may even stop for rest or fuel.

Writing a paragraph works in the same way. You may list the steps as “pre-write, plan, draft, revise, proofread,” but it is not that simple. You may change the order of the sentences as you write the first draft or correct a spelling mistake as you revise. Sometimes you repeat a step several times. You may even stop for rest or fuel, just as you do when you drive. Eventually, both processes will get you where you want to go.

EXERCISE 1 THE WRITING PROCESS

Answer the following questions to review your knowledge of the writing process.

1. The five steps in the writing process are _____, _____, _____, _____, and _____.
2. The “thinking step” in the writing process is called _____.
3. The part of the writing process that involves correcting grammar and punctuation is called _____.
4. Major changes would most likely be made during the _____ step in the writing process.
5. True or false? The steps in the writing process often overlap. _____

The Writing Process: Stephanie’s Paragraph

The next section follows the development of one writer’s paragraph from start to finish. In writing her paragraph, Stephanie went through several forms of prewriting, made two different outlines, conferred with members of her writing group and her instructor, and wrote two rough drafts. (Only the first of the two drafts is shown here because the final draft reflects all of the changes Stephanie made.) Before turning in her final draft, Stephanie also proofread the paragraph once from top to bottom and twice from bottom to top. Then she asked a member of her writing group to look over the final draft for any mistakes she might have overlooked.

The steps that Stephanie goes through are the steps that you will take as you learn the writing process. You will also share some of her frustrations. But, like Stephanie, you will find that what seems difficult at first is attainable, one step at a time.

Stephanie's Assignment

Stephanie's instructor handed out a list of three paragraph topics. Stephanie chose to write on this one: "Write about a piece of music or art that has a message for you. Don't just describe the piece of music or art; tell your reader how it affected you."

Stephanie's instructor suggested that the students prewrite, then make an outline. Earlier, the class had been divided into writing groups of four or five people who would help one another during the term. The instructor suggested that the writing groups meet to discuss each student's outline. Then, students would write rough drafts and bring them to individual writing conferences with the instructor.

Stephanie's Prewriting

In class, Stephanie did a form of prewriting called *freewriting*. (For more information on freewriting and other forms of prewriting, see Chapter 2.) In this prewriting, Stephanie did not worry about grammar or spelling, but focused on gathering ideas. Stephanie's prewriting is reproduced here without correction.

I remember the day my art class went to an exhibit at the museum and I saw a piece of art—I don't know what to call it. Not a painting or a drawing, but something the artist had put together. Built. I was trailing behind the class and something just pulled me over into the corner where it was. It was just me and that piece of art, and when I lifted the curtain—Wow! I was so knocked out. I remember my art teacher used to talk about what art meant, and I never understood until that day. I felt all sorts of emotion. I think I'll go over to the Tubman this weekend and see if it's still there.

Later, Stephanie visited the museum and took the following notes:

"Beauty Standard" by Ce Scott

Black frame, masks placed at top & bottom. Each side has female figure tied at ankles, wrist, and eyes with golden cord. They have bodies like models—thin & beautiful. Masks are just blank—no real features. Frame has tiny words repeated over and over "dark brown eyes big full lips flat wide nose." Velvet curtain—very mysterious hangs there. Golden tassels hang down. "Mirror" embroidered on. Card says "Lift the curtain to see the image by which each of us should be judged."

Stephanie's Rough Draft

Ce Scott's artwork *Beauty Standard* is a piece of art with a message. It hangs in the Tubman African American Museum. It has a black frame decorated with female figures bound at the wrists, ankles, and eyes with golden cord. They have bodies like models, thin and beautiful. At the center of the frame is a black velvet curtain embroidered with the word "Mirror." On the frame, in small writing are the words "dark brown eyes big full lips flat wide nose." A card beside the work invites the viewer to lift the cloth and see "the image by which each of us should be judged." Underneath is a mirror—not the one held up by society, but one that reflects the image of whoever looked into it. The message is that the only beauty standard you need to meet is your own.

Stephanie's Writing Group Meets

Next, Stephanie met with her writing group. A transcript of the portion of the session dealing with Stephanie's prewriting and rough draft appears below.

Transcript: Writing Group Session, Monday, September 7

Eddie: Okay, who's the first victim? Tran?

Tran: I don't want to go first. Stephanie?

Stephanie: I may as well. I think I need major help. (Stephanie passes out copies of her prewriting and rough draft, and the group reads silently.)

Tran: I like it. You have good grammar and spelling.

Stephanie: You're just saying that because I got you off the hook. You didn't have to go first. (Laughter.)

Kelly: I like it, too. But your prewriting is really different from the rough draft.

Stephanie: Yeah, the prewriting doesn't have much detail. I had to go back to the museum to look at the piece again because I had forgotten a lot.

Eddie: Yes, but I like the prewriting. I can tell you were really excited about the painting.

Stephanie: It's not a painting. I'm not sure what you'd call it.

- Eddie:** Whatever. But in the prewriting, I can tell it really had an effect on you. In the rough draft, the excitement disappears. It's just a description.
- Kelly:** Eddie is right. I mean, it's a good description, but it needs more of you in it.
- Stephanie:** Yeah, I see what you mean.
- Tran:** I chose the same topic, except I'm doing my paragraph on music. Anyway, I remember that the assignment said to tell how the music or art affected you.
- Stephanie:** That's right! I do need to put more of my reaction in there somehow. But won't that make it too long?
- Kelly:** Well, you heard what Dr. Pettis said. Plenty of support.
- Stephanie:** Okay, guys. Thanks. You've been a big help. Anything else?
- Tran:** Yeah. Will you help me with my grammar? (Laughter.)

Stephanie's Final Draft

Stephanie wrote a second rough draft. Then, she met with her instructor for a conference before writing her final draft. Stephanie's final draft appears below.

Beauty Standard

I always thought of art as something to hang on a wall, never as something that had a message for me. Then last fall, at the Tubman African American Museum, I saw a piece of art called *Beauty Standard* by Ce Scott. It had a black frame decorated with female figures bound at the wrists, ankles, and eyes with golden cord. At the center of the frame hung a black velvet curtain embroidered with the word "Mirror." A card beside the work invited the viewer to lift the cloth and see "the image by which each of us should be judged." On the frame, in small writing, were the words "dark brown eyes big full lips flat wide nose." The words made me think of the sixties slogan, "Black is beautiful." It was a statement of pride and at the same time a demand to be included. At the time, society's beauty standard was a white one. Even though ideas of beauty now include different races, so many people are still left out—the old, those who are overweight, and even those who are just average. Suddenly, I felt angry and a little afraid to lift the velvet curtain. I looked at the bound female figures and understood that society binds me, too. Hesitantly, I lifted the curtain. My own face, skeptical and a bit

defiant, looked back at me. It was a mirror—not the one held up by society, but one that reflected the image of whoever looked into it. As clearly as if she were in the room, the artist was telling me, “The only beauty standard you need to meet is your own.”

Stephanie’s Approach to Writing—and Yours

Stephanie’s final draft is the product of many hours’ thought and work, and it is at least partly a result of her willingness to listen to the advice and comments of others.

Writing is a process of trial and error, and sometimes it feels like mostly error. Even experienced writers often find writing difficult, often wonder if they have anything worthwhile to say or the ability to say it. If you fear writing, even if you dislike it, you are not alone. But writing is a skill that improves with practice, and if you give it serious effort, you will amaze yourself. The following list, “Five Quick Takes on Writing,” may help you put the task of writing in perspective.

Five Quick Takes on Writing

1. Take it a step at a time. Writing is often a slow process, and it always requires thought.
2. Take it seriously. The ability to write clearly and well will benefit you academically, professionally, and personally throughout your life.
3. Take it easy. Don’t expect yourself to be perfect.
4. Take it to the limit. Stretch the limits of your imagination. Refuse to limit yourself by labeling yourself a poor writer.
5. Take it with you. Writing is a vital part of the real world. Make it a part of your life.

Group Exercise 1 The Ideal Conditions for Writing

In a group of three or four, discuss the ideal conditions for writing. Think about questions such as these: What tools do you enjoy working with? Do you write best with music in the background or in absolute silence? Do you like having others around, or do you prefer to be alone? Do you need coffee or snacks when you write? Do you need room to pace, or do you think best seated in front of a desk or computer? After each group member has contributed to the discussion, jot down

the differences and similarities that exist among members of your group. Have a spokesperson report your group's findings to the rest of the class.

Writing for Right-Brained Writers

This section is for those of you who rebel at the idea of a step-by-step approach such as the one described in this chapter and outlined in the writing assignment at the chapter's end. Although prewriting, planning, drafting, revising, and proofreading are identifiable steps in the writing process, there's no law that says everyone has to approach them in exactly the same way.

For some people, a step-by-step approach does not come naturally. These people have a thinking style that is most often called "right-brained" or "holistic." The human brain is divided into halves, or hemispheres, and most people are wired to rely heavily on the left hemisphere—the half that is responsible for logical, sequential, step-by-step thinking. Some people, however, rely more heavily on the right half of the brain, the part that is responsible for seeing the whole, for thinking in images, and for flashes of insight.

The following questions may help you decide if you are a right-brained thinker.

1. If you were asked to analyze how you write, would your answer be "I don't know. I just do it"?
2. When you are required to turn in an outline, do you usually complete it *after* you have written the paper?
3. If you were asked to describe your usual prewriting technique, would you say, "I never prewrite"?
4. Do you often arrive at the right answer to math problems without following the steps?
5. Do you have a hard time getting detail into your writing?
6. Are you a "big-picture person" rather than a "detail person"?

If you answered "yes" to three or more of the questions above, you may have been seen as a rebel because you don't always follow a step-by-step, conventional approach to your work. But chances are, whatever other characteristics you possess, you are also a right-brained writer.

Right-brained people are often intuitive, seeing the big picture before others do. They have a strong creative streak. They sometimes grasp ideas easily without knowing why or understanding how. But unlike their persistent, list-making, left-brained brothers and sisters, right-brained people often have trouble with the details. Planning isn't in their natures, and they tend not to have systems or specific steps to rely on. Whatever the task is, they "just do it."

If you are right-brained, does that mean that the methods in this text can't work for you? No. They *will* work. But you may have to work at them a bit

harder. Give them a chance. Don't count them out until you have had enough experience with them to determine whether they work for you or not.

There are other strategies you can use, too. Unlike more conventional methods, the following tips were crafted with you in mind. These ideas may give you the extra boost you need to harness your creativity and let your right-brained way of thinking work for you, not against you. If your thinking style is left-brained, read on anyway. There may be something here that you can use along with the logical, step-by-step approach that works so well for you.

Tips for Right-Brained Writers

Find your most creative time and use it for writing. Some people find that they are at their best in the mornings. Others find that their creative juices begin to flow around 9:00 or 10:00 P.M. Writing will be easier if you schedule it to coincide with your natural period of creativity.

Use your rough draft as your prewriting. Since you think in terms of the whole, you may find it easier to do a rough draft than to prewrite. Consider your rough draft a form of prewriting, to be extensively revised before you turn it in.

Give your brain an assignment. When you have writing to do, let your right brain work on it while you are doing other things. At the beginning of the day, for instance, look over the assignment for a few minutes. Then come back to it in the evening and reap the benefits of having worked on the topic subconsciously. Or think about your topic before you go to sleep at night, then write in the morning. This technique can work not only in prewriting but also in revising.

Realize that doing the grunt work is a necessary evil. Right-brained people are less likely to put in the time it takes to master the basics because doing so may be tedious and boring to them. They are also less likely to plan. But even the most brilliantly creative people need self-discipline. It's a hard lesson to learn, but mastering the basics is essential to creative work. Singers spend endless time on breath control and scales. Artists learn anatomy and basic drawing techniques. It is those efforts that set them free to do their best work. The payoff in mastering the basics is that once you have learned them, you can forget about them. They will be second nature. The same goes for planning. Once you have made a plan, you are free to do the creative work. Doing the grunt work now always pays off in more freedom later.

Make a commitment to writing. Many professional writers are right-brained and face the same resistance that you do. Invariably, they say that the only way they can maintain the extended effort it takes to write books, plays, or novels is to have a routine and to write every day.

WRITING ASSIGNMENT 1 Writing and You

Write a paragraph describing your attitudes toward writing. Use the following steps.

Step 1: Prewrite. Jot down a few of the words that come to mind when you think of writing. Think of any significant experiences that have shaped your attitude toward writing. Consider your writing habits. Are you organized? Do you procrastinate?

Step 2: Plan. Look over your prewriting. Try to sum up your attitude toward writing in a single word or phrase, and then construct an opening sentence for your paragraph using that word or phrase. Use one of the following sentences, filling in the blank with your word or phrase, or construct your own sentence.

My attitude toward writing is _____

When I think about writing, I feel _____

My feelings about writing have always been _____

Once you have constructed an opening sentence, decide how to organize your paragraph. A couple of possibilities are listed below.

1. Take a historical approach, describing the influences that have shaped your writing. Use chronological (time) order.
2. Try a step-by-step approach, describing what you do and how you feel as you go through a writing assignment.

Complete the planning stage by making an outline that briefly lists the points you plan to make in support of your opening sentence.

Step 3: Draft. Write out a rough draft of your paragraph. Focus on expressing your ideas rather than on grammar and punctuation.

Step 4: Revise. Read over your rough draft. Have you left out anything important? Is each idea clearly expressed? Does the paragraph flow smoothly? Is the sequence of ideas logical and effective? If possible, ask a classmate to look over your rough draft with the same questions in mind. Then revise your paragraph, incorporating any necessary changes.

Step 5: Proofread. Check your paragraph for mistakes in spelling, grammar, or punctuation. Look at each sentence individually. Then proofread once more. You have now completed all the steps in the writing process.



For support in meeting this chapter's goal, log in to www.mywritinglab.com and select **The Writing Process**.