

Writing Process

First and foremost, writing is a process and as such it takes time. Never expect to sit down and write a perfectly polished paper in a single sitting. As you take steps to plan out completing your written assignments there are three primary phases to consider: pre-writing, drafting, and editing. The amount of time you should dedicate to each phase will depend on the assignment.

Prewriting

Some of the elements you may consider in the prewriting phase are:

- Understanding the assignment
- Determining your specific topic
- Identifying sources
- Reading while note taking or annotating for future reference
- Developing a basic idea of what your finished paper will be: analytical, persuasive, and so on.
- Create an outline, mind map, or something comparable to provide an estimate of your developing paper

Drafting

As you begin creating your initial draft keep in mind that it doesn't need to be perfect. At this point you should focus on getting the ideas down - this is the time for content, not format.

If you find it easier to start by handwriting your initial draft instead of typing, do it! The process of typing it up later can actually help to build in some of the future editing work.

If you find yourself stuck - whether in getting started or continuing - there are many strategies you can try, such as:

- **Skip around!** While your final paper should have an introduction, body, and then conclusion, you don't have to write in that order. If you can write the middle right now, do it! Sometimes that will help you to later come back to write the introduction.
- **Essay writing from the ground up¹.**

Begin with a quote

Type out a powerful, relevant quote from one of your readings.

Example:

“.....” (for efficiency, always cite as you go)

¹ “Essay Writing From the Ground Up,” Thriving in Action, accessed January 6, 2023.



Respond

Under the quote, informally describe what this quote means to you or why you chose it.

Example:

“.....” (cited)

- Low stakes response

Add a little

Next, add in one or two lines of further description or elaboration underneath.

Example:

“.....” (cited)

- Low stakes response

- Further description or elaboration

Add a little more

From there, add a connection to something else from your course, like a related lecture, reading, or presentation, along with a question you have, and even a counterargument.

Example:

“.....” (cited)

- Low stakes response

- Further description or elaboration

- Connection to lecture, reading, presentation

- Relevant question

- A counterargument, or compare and contrast

Taken all together, and fleshed into full sentences with connecting words, you’ve nearly completed a paragraph!

- **Activity break.** For many of us getting up and moving helps our brains to refocus. Some students will intentionally engage in exercise before going into a writing assignment for that reason. Sometimes you can just stand up for a few minutes and



stretch or otherwise move around. Sometimes taking a walk can do wonders! Most important is that you come back to your writing.

Editing

Try to give yourself at least a day between your final writing session and the beginning of your editing work. Many of us struggle to edit our own writing because we know what we are trying to say. Giving yourself that time and distance helps to ensure that you return with fresh eyes ready to catch the areas that you can improve on.

Much like your initial drafting, editing does not need to be done electronically. If you prefer to work by hand try printing your paper with extra line spaces to allow yourself space for notes and work with a colored pen so that your edits stand out.

As you edit, consider engaging multiple modalities by listening to your paper as you read it. This can be done by reading it aloud to yourself, asking a friend to read it, or using computer software.

As you edit you should consider:

- Content and alignment with assignment expectations
- Mechanics including grammar and punctuation
- Proper use of citations
- Overall flow

Some students chose to focus on one of those areas at a time which will require multiple read throughs. Regardless, always be sure to read once more after inputting your edits.

When it comes to editing writing it is easy to fall into a perfectionist trap. Language is very fluid and flexible and as such there are always possible changes that could be made. Keep in mind that the writing is yours and ultimately your words. You do not need to work through every possible way to phrase an idea to find the “right” words.

Use Your Resources

It's okay to ask for help when you need it. Really! First determine what exactly you need help with and then you can determine who to take that request to. For example, if you are struggling to understand the assignment instructions, visiting your professor's office is a good plan.

If you need assistance at any point in your writing process plan to connect with the Center for Writing and Speaking (COWS). The writing tutors are ready and waiting to work with you at any point in your process from brainstorming to editing and anything in between. Visit their website for details. <https://www.whitman.edu/academics/the-center-for-writing-and-speaking>