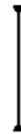




Division of  
Academic Enhancement  
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**PLaTO**  
Peer Learning and Teaching Others

## **Writing is a PROCESS**

*And one of the most important steps? Prewriting*



## Writing is a PROCESS

### *And one of the most important steps? Prewriting*

Perhaps you've heard this before, perhaps you haven't, but writing is a *process*. No one sits down one day and writes an entire paper without putting any thought into it beforehand or any editing afterwards, at least it is *highly advised* you do not do this. Even on nights when you are cramming to write a paper due at 8am the next day, chances are you have thought about that paper beforehand and are editing in some capacity.

So, why does it matter if there is a writing process? Well first, a little about the process:

It is generally agreed that there are 5 steps to the writing process:

1. Prewriting
2. Drafting—writing your paper
3. Revising—fixing sentences, changing format or flow.
4. Proofreading—working on smaller grammar mistakes, polishing paper!
5. Publishing (which is just sharing your finished product)

In this guide, I will focus specifically on the first stage: prewriting.

*What exactly is prewriting? Why should we prewrite?*

- If your paper is due tomorrow, it's tempting to think the best thing to do is to skip the process of prewriting. However, this is not the case.
- Effectively prewriting allows you to organize your thoughts BEFORE you write. Because of this, prewriting will ultimately help you save time and remain focused and on topic while writing.

***“Effectively prewriting allows you to organize your thoughts BEFORE you write, thus shortening the amount of time you will spend off topic while writing.”***

I will go over 4 steps to prewriting but know these are not the only steps and depending on the assignment, you may need to change up the order or add more steps to your process. However, these general 4 will keep you focused throughout your writing.

### Prewriting Guide

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## 1. Determine your topic

**Your aim is to answer these questions:**

*What is the prompt asking me? What do I want to argue? What do I have more evidence for?*

- a. In this stage be sure to read through your prompt many times. I practice reading through my prompts like this: the first two times I read it without making any highlights or marks. Then I read it out-loud and SLOWLY for the third time. The fourth time, I read it and make marks or highlights on the prompt. By the fifth read, I will take notes on the prompt and begin to think of what I will write.
- b. Do know: your topic will likely change and that is okay! Remember, writing is a process. If you find in step three you do not have enough evidence to write on your chosen topic, refer back to the prompt and brainstorm a new topic!

## 2. Consider your audience

**Your aim is to answer these questions:**

*Who will be reading my work? Can I use personal pronouns? Will my audience have an understanding of my topic?*

- a. Often this understanding will come from reading the rubric and/or from what your professor has mentioned in class.
- b. Knowing who your audience is will determine the approaches you take in writing!

## 3. Brainstorm ideas

**Your aim is to answer these questions:**

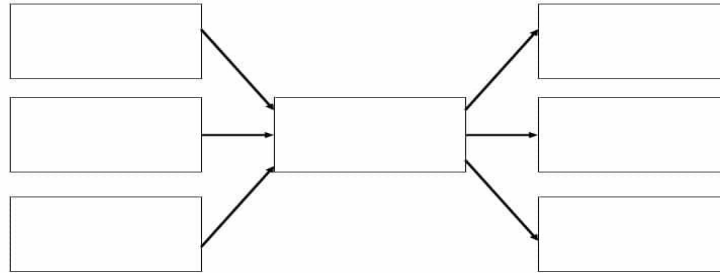
*What is the main idea of my topic? What evidence supports or refutes my argument/idea (what you established in your topic)? Where will I gather information from? Are those sources available?*

**Ways to brainstorm!**

Freewriting

If you feel trapped and like you have no ideas, try freewriting.

1. Set a timer on your phone for 5 minutes and then move your phone out of the way: do not pick it up during this time.



- For the five minutes, write down any and everything related to your topic. Your goal here is to not judge or critique what you are writing, just let your ideas flow freely. Think about the work you are writing on. For character analysis: think about the way your characters interact with each other. Consider symbolism.
  - If more of a research paper: try freewriting about the way the research impacts other research or how this particular research is different.
  - Whatever you are writing on, write freely!
2. After those 5 minutes are up, set a timer on your phone for 10 minutes. (feel free to repeat those 5 minutes if you need!)
- In these next 10 minutes, your goal is to think critically about everything you have written.
  - Consider reoccurring themes: what interests you the most, what you have the most evidence to write on, what makes the strongest claims, etc.
  - Circle and/or highlight key points you notice
  - Begin to consider how these points create a collective whole
    - If you are dissatisfied with your freewriting, consider creating a specific question for yourself regarding your prompt, and aim to answer that question in as many creative ways as you can in 5-10 minutes of freewriting. Remember, writing is a process and so is prewriting!
  - After doing this, you may feel confident to move forward to outlining!

Concept Maps:

- Here is another way to brainstorm! This is a little more structured than freewriting, it's using concept maps!



- The example provided is just one of many designs. Feel free to do a quick search to find a design that works best for your prompt!

**NOTE ON BRAINSTORMING:** Here you want to think of evidence that support or refute your argument. If you realize you do not have enough evidence or claims for your argument, consider changing your topic here or adjusting your angle for your argument. Also, consider where you will gather your information from. If you must include research, what sources will you use? Are those sources available? How do you want to use those sources? It is better to find out now that a source doesn't work rather than midway into your paper.

## LAST STEP OF PREWRITING!

### 4. Create an outline

Create an outline that you will refer to throughout your writing.

- a. Outlines generally include
  - i. Your thesis
  - ii. Claim 1 – transition
    1. Supporting evidence
    2. Supporting evidence
  - iii. Claim 2- transition
    1. Supporting evidence
    2. Supporting evidence
  - iv. Claim 3- transition
    1. Supporting evidence
    2. Supporting Evidence
  - v. Conclusion
- b. Your claims will become your different paragraphs
- c. Throughout your outlining, consider ways you will *transition* from point to point. *Consider the flow of your points – do they make logical sense?*
- d. Outline provides a way you can organize your thoughts into a coherent format so that you will be better prepared when you begin to write!

You may find that other resources provide more detailed outlines and that is okay! Remember this is just a general overview of a basic outline structure. You may add more details to your outlining such as transition words, further evidence, topic sentences, etc., however, it is not advised that you do less than the general outline as it is designed to help you in your paper. Also do not feel confined to the general 3 -point thesis nor the 3-point arguments. Many professors want you to break out of the 3-point argument!



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**Remember: Writing is a process and that means Prewriting is a special process as well.**

Your goal in the prewriting stage is to become so acquainted with your material, your sources, your ideas, etc., that you will feel confident before starting to write your paper.

It is also important to create an outline which will serve as a “check-sheet” for your paper. Without having an outline, it is difficult to create a thesis which serves the entirety of your paper and not just one section.

I encourage you to stay in the land of prewriting as long as you need to before you move on to writing your paper. If you get all the way to outlining and realize some areas are weak and need improvement (which is a natural thing to discover), then consider brainstorming for that one particular area in your outline and revising it as you see fit.

I am confident you will enjoy the fruit of outlining as you notice your paper will be stronger and less painful to write!