

PREWRITING: HOW TO GET STARTED

A WRITING CENTRE HANDOUT

The following four questions will help you get started and keep you focused on the key elements of your writing task during the entire writing process: **first draft, second draft, revision, and final edited copy.**

1. **Why** am I writing?

Know the purpose or aim of your paper: are you supposed to convey facts and information, are you meant to analyze your material, or are you specifically requested to take a stand, argue a point? The purpose of your paper should be clear from the start and help shape and organize the entire text.

2. **To whom** am I writing?

Know who your reader is. How much does the reader already know? How much does he/ she need to know to follow you analysis/argument. Anticipate the questions the reader will ask and integrate the answers.

3. **With what** am I writing?

Select the most relevant and interesting material.

Remember that you are expected to give substantial support for your ideas.

Your selection of material should be relevant to the topic, its stated purpose, and your reader.

4. **How** do I **organize** the text?

Divide the selected material into units and then sequence the units according to a logical pattern.

Typical patterns are: cause - effect, comparison - contrast, process, classification etc.

5. **How** do I **shape** the text?

Now rearrange the units of text to communicate the purpose of your text to your reader.

When you are arguing a case, state your claim/thesis at the end of the introduction, then present evidence of increasing importance, finishing with an emphatic conclusion.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT IN WHICH YOU WRITE

Before you respond to a particular writing task, try to establish the context in which you will write. This approach gives you a clear focus of the key elements of your paper:

Audience:

For whom am I writing ?

What response do I want the audience to have ?

What does my audience already know about the subject?

What do I need to tell my audience to support my idea?

Is my audience favourably disposed towards what I have to say on this subject?

Topic:

What do I know about my topic?

How do I feel about it?

Do I care enough about this topic to address it with conviction?

What research do I need to do to be able to write about this topic?

The Craft of Writing: Rhetorical / Strategic Choices

What *angle or point of view* can I take in treating the topic?

Which *form* (memo, essay, report, proposal) is required?

Which *purpose/aim* will I adopt: expository (informative) or argumentative?

Which *method of development* will I use: process description, visual description, analytical description, definition, classification, comparison - contrast, cause-effect, narration ?

Assignment:

What is my deadline?

What is the required length?

Is a particular aim (argument or exposition) required?

Is a particular form (essay, report, lab report, etc.) required?

Is a particular audience given?

Are specific requirements made for the assignment (application of theory etc.)?

Suggestions:

Write from your own experience.

Articulate it and try to understand it.

Learn to appreciate that others do not necessarily see the world the way you do.

Communicate your experience by seeing the world through other people's eyes.

Anticipate other people's assumptions and questions.

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