

Getting Started on Your Essay

Writing a thoughtful essay reveals that you have gained knowledge and that you can organize and use this knowledge. Most importantly, writing an essay guides you into thinking your own thoughts. For you to be successful in writing your paper you need to tap into your own creativity so that you are able to give life to your main idea.

When scheduling your time think of essay writing as a series of steps:

- Prewriting (includes thinking and research)
- Exploratory draft
- First draft
- Subsequent drafts
- Revision: re-envisioning
- Editing
- Proofreading

Often students feel they are unable to write well when they're actually time crunching all the writing stages together into one stage. A first draft should never be the final draft.

Prewriting

Consider prewriting as a free-form stage where you think through your initial ideas along with creating new ideas.

Start a reading journal:

- note what interests you and write down your thoughts
- try two columns
- write quotes or summaries in the left hand column
- write your thoughts about the quotes in the right hand column

Working thesis

You want a working thesis statement before you begin your exploratory draft so that your thoughts and your writing do not wander too far off track. However, a working thesis statement is only a rough sentence. You do not have to keep this exact sentence in your final essay. Sometimes the best time to polish a thesis statement is when you have finished your paper.

Research: Complete a working bibliography (a list of potentially useful books, articles and Web Pages).

Exploratory Draft

This may be no more than a reflection of your random thoughts. Focus on getting your ideas into words and not on figuring out exactly what you want to say or where you want the paper to go.

First Draft

Start to *organize* your ideas into a smooth flowing essay that emphasizes the clarity of your thoughts. Your *introduction* should be interesting so that your reader wants to continue reading and it should give your reader a firm idea of what you will discuss. In the essay's *body* present the necessary information to flesh out your idea. You want to provide clear connections between your thesis and the information you present. In your *conclusion* you want to capture the essence of what you have written.

Thesis

- your essay's big idea presented in a focused statement and placed in the introduction
- your idea should require explanation, support or development which is the purpose of the essay
- think of your thesis statement as the road sign to where you're heading so that you prevent your writing from meandering down interesting but irrelevant side roads
- does your thesis fit the size of your paper or could you write an entire book based on your thesis?

Examples:

Too General:

In the history of walking, men have often been the great wanderers.

Better:

In the history of walking, a few exceptional Canadian women have broken away from pacing their backyards, and have ventured forth on epic journeys equal to those of their male counterparts.

Remember: Allow time for rewriting, editing and proofreading.

