

## Getting Started



You can use this Writing Process OneNote notebook as a starting point when creating your own research papers, essays, or poetry. The notebook contains a collection of pages that you can open from the right sidebar.

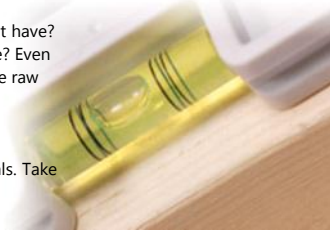
Click [Building an essay](#) to read an analogy introducing the stages of the writing process. Click [The Writing Stages](#) to see a diagram of the writing process. When you're ready to start writing, click [Prewriting](#) and then continue through each step in the writing process.



## Building an Essay

Close your eyes for a moment and think of a house you know well. How many floors does it have? How many rooms? What do you like best about the house? What would you like to change? Even if you've never built a house yourself, you have some idea about what it takes. What are the raw materials that go into a house? What are the components of a house? What holds a house together?

If building a house is like writing an essay, then [ideas](#) are the lumber and other raw materials. Take time to prewrite and gather enough quality ideas to work with before crafting your essay.



Now that you have the raw materials (an abundance of ideas), what do you do with them? [Organization](#) is the architectural design and structural framework that holds both houses and essays together. Without a solid structure, an argument won't stand up. You can craft your sentences with care and select your words with skill, but you'll still fail to communicate if your writing does not adhere to a logical organizational structure.

Once you have your plan, you can start to make choices about your vocabulary. [Word choice](#) is a process of selection. The words a writer chooses impacts tone of [voice](#) and sentence fluency. Use a [dictionary](#) to verify meaning and [connotation](#).

Fluency is craftsmanship. How well is your house put together? Are the corners flush? Is the floor level? Well crafted sentences and good transitions enhance fluency. Read your writing aloud to help identify awkward sentence construction and holes in your logic.


[Conventions](#) are rules that your readers expect you to follow. In the United States, we expect that doors will swing inward and that faucets will turn on with a twist to the left and off with a twist to the right. These conventions help us to move through our everyday tasks easily - without having to think about how doors or faucets work. This is true for writing as well. If you follow standard conventions of [spelling](#), punctuation and format, readers will think deeply about your ideas (instead of working at deciphering them).

## *The Writing Stages*



## Prewriting

- What will you write about?
- Will you write about the "big picture" or explore some smaller aspect of a topic in detail?
- What do you want your writing to accomplish?
- Will your writing inform, persuade or entertain?
- How should your ideas be organized?
- Who will read what you write?



*Most of us have experience with one method of prewriting: the traditional outline. An outline can be a very useful tool, but if it is not your favorite activity, **don't despair**.*

Prewriting can be a lot of fun. Mix it up. Try several of the ideas under **Prewriting**. If you are a primarily visual thinker, you may prefer drawing images or mapping related ideas in a web. A writing partner can be invaluable if you can work together.

## Try This

### Brainstorm

Start by listing as many questions about your topic as you can. Ask "Who, When, Where, How and Why?" If you have a writing partner, brainstorming is a great activity to do together. Once you have lots of questions, answer them.

### Draw

If you are a highly visual or tactile learner, drawing can help fuel your thinking. Stick to quick sketches though, so you can spend your time generating and organizing your ideas.

### Cluster

Clustering or mind mapping is related to brainstorming. Write down single words or short phrases and then use bubbles and directional lines to show the relationships between the ideas. If the ideas are hierarchal, use a tree structure with big ideas on the trunk and large branches. Use twigs and leaves to represent the smaller ideas.

### Browse the Web

An internet search of your topic can give you a better idea of the breadth and depth of your topic. Be careful though, because it can also be limiting. It is best to put some of your own ideas down before turning to outside sources for more information. Cut and paste information into a OneNote notebook as you go. Again, be sure to include source information for your bibliography.

### Define & List examples

List several related ideas. Now look them up and write down the definitions. Are they just as you expected? Can you provide specific examples to illustrate each definition?

### Free writing

With your topic in mind, sit down and type up everything that comes to mind. The key is not to evaluate what you are writing - just get words down on paper. If you find this difficult, set a timer and force yourself to write for 2-5 minutes. After you have exhausted your flow, read what you have written and circle ideas that you feel can be developed further. Begin again focusing on those kernel ideas, or use them to ignite a brainstorm or fuel a cluster.

### Outline

Outlining after brainstorming or clustering can help you organize your newly generated ideas.

### Read

If you have time after you have generated some ideas, read about your topic. Even if you're writing non-fiction, reading a related fictional story or novel can help you understand the big picture surrounding your topic.

### Research

Find pictures, videos, and articles relating to your topic and take notes. Be sure to include source information in your notes. You'll need it for your bibliography!

## *Resources*

### Creating an outline

- [University of New York at Albany](#)
- [Purdue University](#)
- [University of Washington](#)
- Video: [Using outline features in Microsoft Word](#)

### Organization

- [The 5 Features of Effective Writing](#)
- [Formatting bibliographies in Microsoft Word](#)

### Tools

- [Dictionary and Thesaurus](#)
- [Quote generator](#)
- [Citing sources](#)
- [Identify your voice](#)
- [Using active verbs](#)
- [General grammar](#)
- [Punctuation](#)



## Writing

If you've done a good job with the prewriting stage, the writing stage can be easy! If you find that you are struggling, stop and return to prewriting before you become frustrated.

### **Trying to evaluate your writing as you are writing can cause . . . writer's block.**

Just write out your ideas - without being overly critical. Nothing is permanent at this point, it's just words on paper or blips on the screen. Plan on writing two or three drafts. It takes the pressure off your initial writing effort and improves your final product.

### **If you like to write your first draft with pen on paper:**

Find a comfortable spot and use your favorite pen.

(Do not use pencil at this stage. No pencil = no correcting!)

### **If you prefer to start at the computer:**

Check your posture. Try to avoid making corrections - if you are a skilled typist, turn off your monitor and type blind.



## **Resources:**

### Creating an outline

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### Organization

- [The 5 Features of Effective Writing](#)
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### Tools

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## Drafting

### **If you have time, sleep on it.**

Allowing some time to pass between drafts will help you evaluate your writing more effectively.

### **FIRST DRAFT - Don't be critical!**

**Write.** You have been thinking deeply about your topic, now let your ideas flow. Write or type as much as you can as quickly as you can.

### **SECOND DRAFT**

**Organize** your ideas. Print a draft and put pen on paper. Use circles, numbers and arrows to indicate how you will improve your structure.

### **THIRD DRAFT**

Add **support** to your ideas with facts, definitions and quotes. Improve your sentences and word choice with a variety of interesting adjectives and exciting verbs.





## Organizing Ideas

When you organize your ideas in writing you provide your readers with a framework that simplifies the communication process. Have you ever read something that just didn't make any sense? It is a frustrating experience. Help your readers to understand your ideas by organizing them logically.

### Common patterns for organizing writing:

- ▶ General to specific
- ▶ Most important to least important
- ▶ Whole to part
- ▶ Cause/effect
- ▶ Chronological order
- ▶ Comparison
- ▶ Compare/contrast
- ▶ Strength of argument
- ▶ Specific to general
- ▶ Step by step
- ▶ Positive to negative

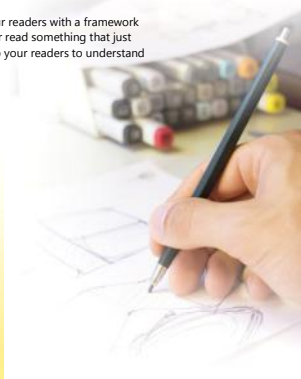
Many of these patterns can be used in reverse.

### How should you decide which pattern to use?

Often, your prewriting will naturally lead you to one pattern or another, but the type of essay you are writing can also help determine the most effective structure.

Argumentative essays are often arranged emphatically - starting with a strong argument, moving to your weakest argument, and then finishing with your best. General to specific, positive to negative, cause and effect and others can also work well.

A narrative essay is easily organized chronologically, but choosing another pattern can add zest to your writing and force you to be more creative.

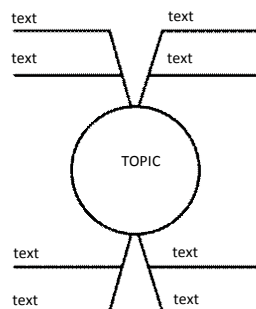


<http://www.gc.maricopa.edu/English/essay/>

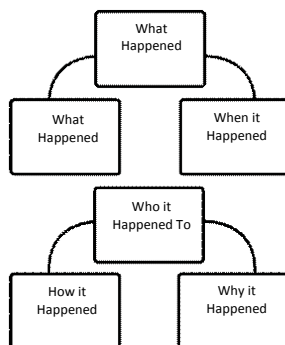
Watch a video on how to use the Outline features in Word:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dU0Bs6eYHSg>

## Graphic Organizers

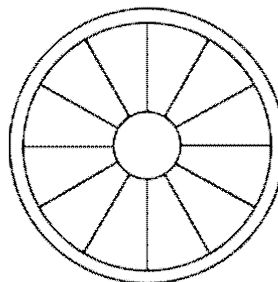
Spider Graph



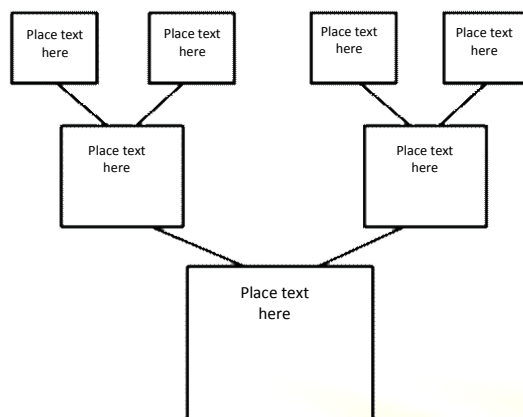
Event Map



Umbrella Chart



Tree Graph



## *Voice*

An accomplished writer's written voice is as unique as her spoken one. If you are an avid reader, you may even be able to recognize your favorite author's writing in an unfamiliar passage. In fact, over time our writing can become as distinctly unique as our finger prints. Experts are now able to use Stylometry (the study of an individual's style) to determine the authorship of disputed works of literature, art and music.

Different levels of voice, personality and formality are expected in different types of writing. In an autobiography, the reader expects to form a mental picture of the individual behind the writing. In a scholarly essay or research paper, the writer strives for a serious, unbiased, authoritative voice that can seem nearly anonymous. Topic, purpose and audience determine the appropriate voice for each writing project.

Types of writing that require a strong, unique, personal voice include autobiographies, first person narratives and narrative fiction. This type of writing is written from the first person point of view, and uses the pronoun "I" when referring to the narrator.

Applications, contests and test essays often allow for a first person point of view, but may also require a scholarly, unbiased voice.

Writing that requires a scholarly, authoritative and unbiased voice includes expository essays and research papers.

## Word Choice

### Word Choice in Brief:

1. Clarity is crucial
2. Vary your verbs
3. Use precise nouns and modifiers
4. Be specific
5. Get rid of get (and any other overused, general words or clichéd sayings)
6. Sound natural
7. Less is more - eliminate wordiness
8. Select words with intention
9. Keep your audience in mind

Good word choice does not mean using more words. In fact, a common mistake novice writers make is to use too many words and repeat themselves unnecessarily. Avoid the temptation to add unnecessary words when an assignment requires a certain number of pages.

### Connotation and Denotation: They both matter!

#### connotation

**con-no-ta-tion** [kŏnnə táysh'n]

(plural **con-no-tations**)

noun

1.	<b>implied additional meaning:</b> an additional sense or senses associated with or suggested by a word or phrase. Connotations are sometimes, but not always, fixed, and are often subjective. • <i>Patriotism can have some negative connotations for people.</i>
2.	<b>suggesting of additional meaning for word:</b> the implying or suggesting of an additional meaning for a word or phrase apart from the literal or main meaning
3.	<b>defining characteristic:</b> in logic, the characteristic or set of characteristics that makes up the meaning of a term and thus defines the objects to which a term can be applied

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#### denotation

**de-no-ta-tion** [d · nŏ táysh'n]

(plural **de-no-tations**)

noun

1.	<b>basic meaning:</b> the most specific or literal meaning of a word, as opposed to its figurative senses or connotations
2.	<b>indicator of something:</b> a sign, symbol, or indication of something
3.	<b>reference of term:</b> in logic, the reference of a term

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## Cut the Clutter

**Lazy qualifiers** are extra words that add little meaning.

- Kind of
- Very
- Pretty
- Sort of
- A little
- A few (instead use "some")
- A lot (instead use "most")
- More or less
- In today's society
- Just about
- Like
- Basically
- In general
- by and large
- For the most part

**Egocentricities** are fillers that in addition to unnecessarily using up time and space also show that you are not confident about your message.

- I think
- I believe
- In my opinion
- Personally

### **Be Specific.**

Remove vague language that means everything or nothing.

Use "teenagers" instead of "people" if that's what you mean

### **Be Concise.**

If you can say it in one word if you can.

- In the near future = soon
- Most of the time = frequently
- Some of the time = occasionally

### **Avoid wordiness.**

Omit the following from your writing:

- In order to
- The fact that
- As a matter of fact
- With the possible exception of
- In many respects
- One of the most interesting things

## Revising

Revision focuses on major changes and improvement in ideas and style. Revision makes good writing better.

**Start with the big picture** and evaluate your ideas as a whole. Read your paper aloud first to yourself (or to your dog) and then to a writing partner. Have your partner ask you questions about your writing. You might find that one of your ideas needs more support or additional description.

**Second, look at the overall structure of your writing.** Does your essay or story have a strong introduction to capture your reader's attention? Does it have a logical progression and good transitions between ideas? Does your conclusion pack a punch?

**Now, look at your word choice and tone.** Is your subject serious or light-hearted? Do you want to inform, persuade or entertain your audience? Your word choice should support your goal. A thesaurus can be a wonderful tool or it can hold you back. Be extra careful with unfamiliar words. It's easy to use them incorrectly without realizing it.

**Read your work aloud one more time.** Better yet, have your writing partner read your writing aloud to you. Your ears may catch things that your eyes missed.

## Editing

Sharpen your red pencil, pull out your dictionary and grammar reference and get critical.

### **Start with the format:**

Have you followed the assignment directions?

Have you included your name and the date?

Be sure to name your creation!

Do you need a title page, a table of contents or a bibliography?

### **Now is the time to cross your t's and dot your i's.**

Read your composition backwards aloud.

Look at each word for spelling and correct usage.

Check the punctuation for each sentence.

### **Editing is an area where most writers can use some help.**

An objective, smart and kind writing partner is best, but what if you don't have one?

Be your own best writing partner. Put your reference books and [resources](#) to use.

#### *Check out these websites for assistance:*

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/>

Answers for most grammar and writing questions

<http://www.bartleby.com/reference/>

Check your facts, amp up your word choice with a thesaurus or find a quote



## *Proofing vs. Spell Check*



Spell checking software is a powerful tool, but you still need to double check:

- ✓ Homonyms - words that sound the same but are spelled differently and have different meanings
- ✓ Mistakes that result in word confusion (*form* instead of *from* or *county* instead of *country*)
- ✓ Incorrect verb forms
- ✓ Proper names, dates and other figures
- ✓ Omissions
- ✓ Capitalization and punctuation

## *Publishing*

Within the writing process, publishing is simply the formal or official sharing of your work. Publication can include:

- Turning in an assignment to your teacher or professor
- Reading your work aloud to the class
- Sharing your work at a poetry slam
- Posting your work on a social media web site
- Posting your work as a blog
- Submitting your work to a commercial publisher

Submit your work to [Teen Ink](#), an online magazine devoted to publishing articles, poems and essays written by teens.

[Teen Voices](#) publishes content written by young women ages 13-19.

