

Developing an effective **writing process** has a huge impact in the quality of your writing. Sometimes we think that improving writing means finding the perfect article or having some divine inspiration, but it's amazing how much our writing improves simply by adjusting our writing process to work better for us. A good writing process will be tailored to one's individual learning style. Do you work better in the morning or at night? Do you work better alone or with friends? Do you write some things on a computer and some on paper? Do you give yourself enough time for your ideas to properly develop? This guide is intended to offer an understanding of the writing process so you can pick and choose places to improve your own.

Understanding

For a simple (but important) first step for your writing process:

- Mark the **deadline** in your calendar.
- Next, closely read the **description of your assessment**. Does it ask you to *describe*, *discuss*, *explain*, *argue* or some other verb? Look closely at the structure you are meant to model.

If you need more information to plan your work, ask your instructors or tutors early. As you begin to understand the task, think about adding your own deadlines for specific tasks in your calendar as well. Maybe have a first draft ready one week early, or an outline ready by the end of the week. Put those in your calendar as well.

Inventing

Once you've got a good understanding of the task, it is time for ideas. The invention stage is not the time to say no. It is the time to generate ideas without judgment. The benefit of getting a bunch of ideas on the page is that you can avoid pursuing the first idea that comes to your head. Often, the better ideas are waiting behind our first thoughts. Some people prefer to make lists. Some prefer to structure lists into outlines. Others like to map out connections between ideas visually with colourful mind maps. Find a way that works for you.

Research Question(s)

Whether or not we write it in our essays, each piece of academic writing is answering a question. If we can tailor that question to our specific task, it helps us maintain our focus as we research and write. Before beginning the research portion, turn your ideas into questions. That way, you can seek specific answers. A good research question won't have a simple, single answer. A good research question will offer many opportunities to discuss different perspectives, but still stay focused on a specific purpose for the text.

Researching

- Good research is **focused**. Finding good resources demands a knowledge of online databases and library materials. Seek out a librarian to help navigate the wealth of resources the library provides.
- Good research is **organised**. Don't just amass a pile of .pdfs. As you assess their quality for your purposes, make notes, name the files, and keep track of them in subfolders. As you read through them, keep notes in a searchable

format, or refer to the resources beside this paragraph for a description of an annotated bibliography. Save your future self from wasted time and frustration by focusing your research and keeping track of your thoughts on what you find.

Planning, Refining, Reflecting

This is where things are about to get more complicated. Take a step back and think about where you are headed with your research and if it really fits the task. Are you still on topic? Have you found new, exciting material that raises better research questions? Pause and plan and revisit your ideas. Transfer your research into an outline or some other sort of plan. This is why it helps to give yourself time.

Drafting

The first draft can be a mess. This is the first translation of planning into prose. Do your best to get your ideas on the page in a structured way, but don't feel too much pressure to get it perfect on the first try. Don't over think the first draft. It is supposed to be messy.

Revising

The revision process is when all the elements start working together as you write and refine, then re-write and re-refine. You should ultimately be clarifying and supporting your main points in a recursive process. Go back to the writing prompt, revisit your notes, share your draft with someone to read, ask friends about your argument, go for a walk, question the validity of your claims, reorganise your points, do another search for articles. Do whatever it takes to turn the cloud of thoughts and ideas into a coherent piece of work.

Proofreading

Give yourself the time and space you need in order to read your finished paper with fresh eyes. As you are proofreading, be sure your points are clearly stated and not hiding behind overly academic style. This is not the stage to question all your data, or rewrite your thesis statement. This is the time to put on the final polish in spelling and phrasing before submission.

Submitting

Only you will know when your paper is completed and ready for submission. Be sure, of course, to meet your deadline. Be certain that you have named and formatted the file according to submission guidelines. Be sure the appropriate confirmation screen is shown. Be sure a copy of your final essay is saved for your future reference--preferably in the cloud somewhere.

Conclusion

This is only one version of a writing process. Each writer should work towards a healthy, effective way to use each of these steps to accomplish a successful piece of writing. Once you have this knowledge, the larger question becomes one of planning and discipline. What will it take for you to actually create the best study habits now?