

## Chapter 3

# The Writing Process

### Lesson 3.1

## Pre-Writing

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You're sitting at your computer, ready to write the first essay of the semester, but the cursor blinks at you, and you don't know where to begin.

You're ready to take a final exam; you've studied hard, but you're worried you'll forget everything you know before you get to the end of the test.

You're planning a birthday party; you're excited, but you're worried you'll forget to send invitations or order the cake.

If you've ever found yourself in a similar situation, you're not alone. Taking on a big project or assignment requires learning and keeping track of a lot of information, organizing that information, and turning it into a final product.



Fortunately, you don't have to accomplish all of these tasks at one time; you can break them down into a process. In any of the previous examples, you could begin your process with the same first step: pre-writing.

Pre-writing is the first stage of the academic writing process. Pre-writing involves making decisions and planning ideas that will allow you to meet the expectations of an assignment or project.

This lesson will discuss the following concepts:

Why We Pre-Write

How We Pre-Write

How to Transition from Pre-Writing to Drafting

## Why We Pre-Write

While it might be tempting to dismiss pre-writing as "extra work," effective pre-writing often doesn't take very long, and it can make the rest of the writing process go faster and smoother.

Pre-writing is used for three main reasons:

- To generate ideas for writing
- To determine what you know and what you need to learn
- To identify connections between ideas

Let's practice so you can see how pre-writing helps you in academic, professional, and everyday life.

### On Your Own

Read the following scenarios and identify which method you think would be an effective pre-writing step.

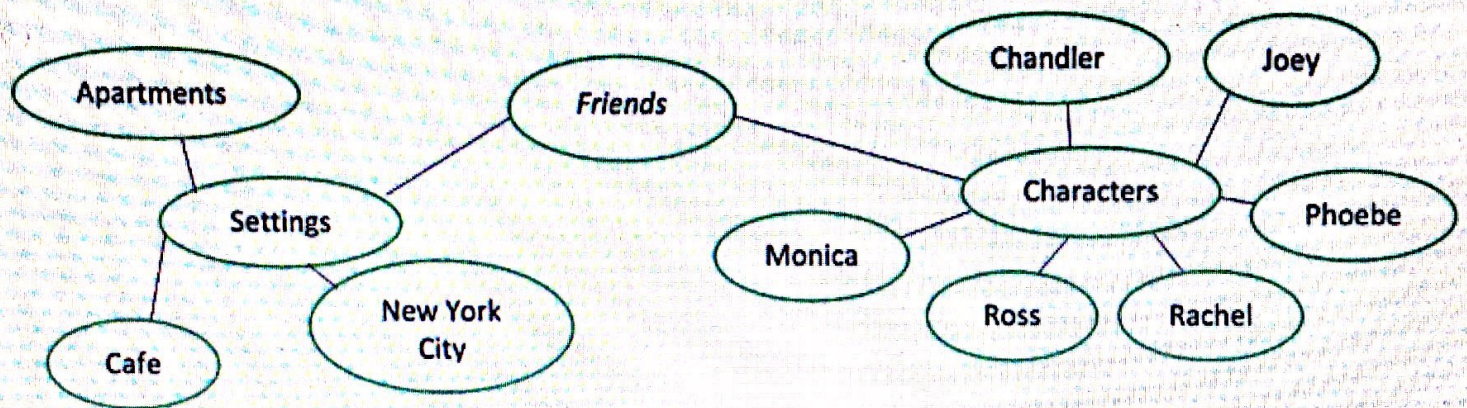
Mary has studied hard for a history exam that she knows will have two essays. She doesn't want to write the essays until she has finished the multiple-choice section of the test, but she's worried she will forget some key facts. What should Mary do?

- Write a quick list of key facts and information she can refer to later.
- Focus on the essays since they're probably worth more points than the multiple-choice questions.
- Ask her teacher for more time.



Mind mapping is a pre-writing technique that uses simple diagrams to show connections between key ideas.

Say that you've chosen to write about the show *Friends*; you can further develop your pre-writing by using mind-mapping to identify and group related ideas you might write about.



By sketching out the connections between related ideas, you can begin to identify what you know about your topic and visualize how different main ideas and supporting details relate to each other.

**Learning Style Tip**

Different types of learners might prefer different pre-writing styles or techniques.

- Visual learners might find mapping helpful because it illustrates a visible connection between ideas.
- Verbal learners might find it helpful to record themselves brainstorming out loud.
- Active learners might find it useful to handwrite, rather than type, their pre-writing exercises so that they feel more engaged in the pre-writing process.

Free-writing and focused free-writing are two closely related approaches to pre-writing that can be especially helpful if you are having a hard time getting started on a writing project.

When **free-writing**, simply write down whatever comes to mind for a set period of time. Don't try to edit your ideas as you free-write; wait until you're finished to review what you've written and see what ideas you've discovered. To **focus your free-writing**, begin by thinking about a specific topic.

Take a look at the following example of a free-write on the topic "People I Admire." The highlighted ideas might serve as a good starting point for a paper.

Who do I admire? It's hard to say. My family members: Mom, Dad, my sister but I guess she's

things. I feel like I have a lot to learn from them. Lady Gaga? Beyoncé? J.K. Rowling? I don't know much about their stories, but I admire them; maybe I'd like to learn more.

Although the writer begins this exercise uncertain of who or what to write about, he or she ultimately comes up with several ideas that could serve as good starting points for additional pre-writing (and ultimately the writing assignment).

### Group Activity

Who do you admire? Set a timer for five minutes and conduct a free-writing session on this question. When you're finished, re-read what you've written and share some of your favorite ideas with the group. Then, discuss how each person's free-write led him or her to different ways of thinking about the question.

Questioning is a style of pre-writing that helps you consider a topic from all angles so that you can determine what you need to learn about a subject. Questioning is a helpful starting point for research-driven projects because the questions you come up with can help you shape your research. Questioning also helps you make sure you are thoroughly analyzing a subject.

Here are examples of pre-writing questions for an essay analyzing William Shakespeare's play *Hamlet*:

- Who are the characters in *Hamlet*?
- What are the central themes of *Hamlet*?
- When and where does *Hamlet* take place?
- Why did Shakespeare write *Hamlet*?
- Why is *Hamlet* considered such a great play?
- How does Hamlet avenge his father?

Notice that some of these questions could be answered by carefully reading the play while others would need to be answered through outside research.

As you narrow your topic, the questions you ask will become more complex, helping you think more deeply about your subject.

### Writing Environment: Academic

Pre-writing can help you in all kinds of writing situations, not just when you're writing essays. Here are some examples:

Now that we've reviewed techniques for pre-writing, let's take a look at how outlining helps you transition from pre-writing to drafting.

## How to Transition from Pre-Writing to Drafting

Outlines help you make sure that you have done two things:

- Identified all the information you need to include in a writing project
- Organized that information in the best way possible

Depending on your reason for writing, you can use two different kinds of outlines to help you transition from pre-writing to drafting: working outlines and detailed outlines.

A working outline is relatively short, with no special formatting or structure; it typically includes the following information:

- A working thesis
- Main ideas
- An overview of your supporting ideas

Working outlines can be written quickly, so they are helpful when you have to write a lot in a short period of time.

### Writing Environment: Everyday

Feeling overwhelmed? Brainstorming a to-do list before you go to bed at night or first thing in the morning can help you feel more in control of your day. Here are some tips for creating to-do lists:

- If you have a smartphone or tablet, create your to-do list in a notes app. That way, the list is always nearby, and you can easily refer to or edit it.
- Instead of deleting finished items, put a star or special symbol next to them. When you review your completed to-do list at the end of the day, you will feel a great sense of accomplishment.
- Prioritize by moving the most important tasks to the top of the list. Organizing your tasks makes your list a working outline for your day. Try to complete the tasks at the top of your list first.

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A detailed outline is considerably longer than a working outline. It typically includes the following parts:

- A working thesis
- Main ideas
- All of your supporting ideas
- Research you plan to include in your writing

## Lesson 3.2

# Drafting

Drafting is the second step of the academic writing process. It involves figuring out how to communicate the ideas you came up with in the pre-writing stage.

*"I hate first drafts, and it never gets easier. People always wonder what kind of superhero power they'd like to have. I wanted the ability for someone to just open up my brain and take out the entire first draft and lay it down in front of me so I can just focus on the second, third and fourth drafts." -Judy Blume*

Although staring at a blank page can be intimidating, this lesson will help you think about drafting as a set of small steps. During the drafting phase, you will start adding some structure to your thoughts by crafting a **thesis statement**, or a sentence that expresses the **main idea** of a longer work (if you didn't already during pre-writing). You will also work with **supporting details**, which are important pieces of information or evidence that support your thesis.

In this lesson, you will learn the following aspects of drafting:

Key Elements of Drafting

Getting Started

What to Consider While Drafting

Drafting tends to be more important in academic writing and professional writing than everyday writing. When was the last time you used the writing process to write a text message? Probably never, right? But drafting in business and academic writing is important. In those environments, you want to make sure your message comes across in a coherent, intelligent way. For most of us, that requires writing one or more drafts.

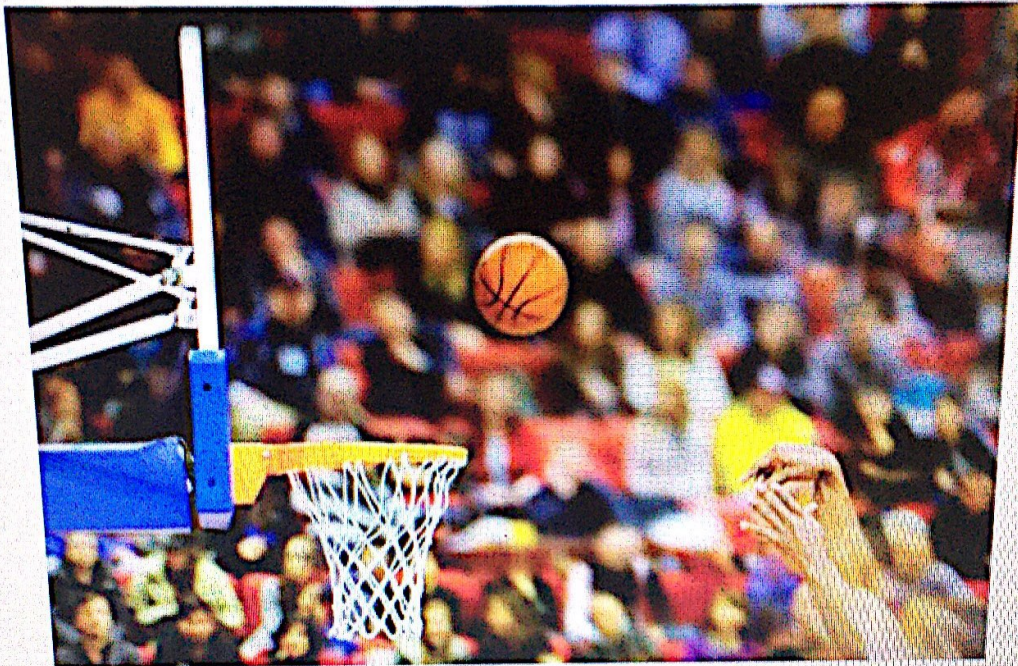
## Key Elements of Drafting

While drafting may look different from person to person, and even from assignment to assignment, there are some key things to know about the process.

### Drafting Relies Heavily on Pre-writing

Know that you're not done with the work you did during pre-writing. While you were researching and taking notes during pre-writing, you probably weren't too focused on one main idea for your writing. As a

Like referees watching an instant replay during a basketball game, reviewing your writing in "slow motion" can help you clearly understand the choices you make while writing and the effects your writing choices have on readers. After seeing your work from a variety of angles, you can determine if you've made the right call.



*Reviewing your writing helps you become a better writer and a better reader.*

This process is called revision. Revision is a stage of writing that involves reconsidering and rewriting content and organization. During the revision process, writers consider broad concerns such as their overall claim or organization. Revision is an ongoing process, and effective revision will result in stronger writing that's more accurate, thorough, and cohesive.

In this lesson, you will learn about the following topics:

- The Difference Between Revision and Editing
- Key Elements of Revision
- Important Areas to Revise
- Methods of Revising

## The Difference Between Revision and Editing

Before we look too far into what revising is, let's make sure we understand what it is *not*. Revising and editing may seem like the same process, but they're actually very different. Revision is about strengthening your big ideas and supporting them with strong content whereas editing is about fixing errors.

Revision generally works at a broader level and considers a paper's overall strengths and weaknesses as well as how it accomplishes this.

Editing, on the other hand, is a stage of writing that comes *after* revision. It involves more specific elements like grammar, style, and spelling. Consider the following comparison of revising and editing.

### Revision assesses ...

Overall strengths and weaknesses  
Focus  
Organization  
Tone  
Evidence

### Editing assesses...

Specific elements  
Transitions  
Punctuation  
Word choice  
Grammar

Generally, it's better to revise thoroughly before editing because revision can lead you to reconsider major sections of an essay or even your overall thesis. It would be a waste of time to edit a sentence or paragraph that you might end up changing or deleting during revision.

#### Helpful Hint

If the guidelines of an assignment allow it, be flexible with the message of your writing. Often, the revision process can help you refine your thesis or main idea, but this can also mean you end up writing a very different essay than you originally expected.

## Key Elements of Revision

*"I'm not a very good writer, but I'm an excellent re-writer." James Michener*

A good revision process does not assume that your first draft is the best version. Instead, it enables you to see your writing with fresh eyes. Revision is conducted at a general level that will probably lead you to do any of the following things:

- Move, delete, or add entire paragraphs
- Expand or contract (narrow) points

## Methods of Revising

During the revision process, there are several steps you can take to make it worthwhile.

### Place

Sometimes, it helps to write in a quiet space. On other days, you might find that a public space enables you to write, think, and feel differently about a draft. Try changing your writing location to see what works best. You may find yourself writing and seeing your work in new ways.

### Medium

Similar to place, vary the way you write. Some people type everything on a laptop. Others write in a notebook and then revise their essay while typing on a computer. Some people type a paper but print out a hard copy to revise with a pen or pencil. Try a few different mediums and see what works best for you.

### Writing Environment: Professional

Editors and other communications professionals often develop their own marks for revision and editing. Some companies even have their own style guides for how they wish to format reports and other company publications. Be sure you understand your job's expectations for any revision that happens among colleagues.

### Peer Review

In a peer review, a partner reads your work and makes note of what is working in your essay and what could use improvement. Ask a friend or classmate to peer review your draft and tell you the effects of the writing choices you've made. Ask them to point out anything they find confusing or incomplete.

To learn more about the peer review process, see Lesson 3.4.

### Reading Aloud

You can also revise your essay by treating it like an audible text. Reading your work aloud, or asking someone else to read it to you, can help you spot awkward wording or undeveloped ideas. As you listen to your essay, jot down ideas or possible changes; then, go back and work those ideas into the next draft.