

Before You Start Writing: Pre-Writing or the stage of *Invention*

When you sit down to write...

- Does your mind turn blank?
- Are you sure you have nothing to say?

If so, you're not alone. Many writers experience this at some time or another, but some people have strategies or techniques to get them started. When you are planning to write something, try some of the following suggestions.

You can try the textbook formula:

1. State your thesis.
2. Write an outline.
3. Write the first draft.
4. Revise and polish.

... but that often doesn't work.

Instead, you can try one or more of these strategies:

Ask yourself what your purpose is for writing about the subject.

There are many "correct" things to write about for any subject, but you need to narrow down your choices. For example, your topic might be "dorm food." At this point, you and your potential reader are asking the same question, "So what?" Why should you write about this, and why should anyone read it?

Do you want the reader to pity you because of the intolerable food you have to eat there?

Do you want to analyze large-scale institutional cooking?

Do you want to compare Purdue's dorm food to that served at Indiana University?

Ask yourself how you are going to achieve this purpose.

How, for example, would you achieve your purpose if you wanted to describe some movie as the best you've ever seen? Would you define for yourself a specific means of doing so? Would your comments on the movie go beyond merely telling the reader that you really liked it?

Start the ideas flowing

Brainstorm. Gather as many good and bad ideas, suggestions, examples, sentences, false starts, etc. as you can. Perhaps some friends can join in. Jot down everything that comes to mind, including material you are sure you will throw out. Be ready to keep adding to the list at odd moments as ideas continue to come to mind.

Talk to your audience, or pretend that you are being interviewed by someone — or by several people, if possible (to give yourself the opportunity of considering a subject from several different points of view). What questions would the other person ask? You might also try to teach the subject to a group or class.

See if you can find a fresh analogy that opens up a new set of ideas. Build your analogy by using the word like. For example, if you are writing about violence on television, is that violence like clowns fighting in a carnival act (that is, we know that no one is really getting hurt)?

Take a rest and let it all percolate.

Summarize your whole idea.

Tell it to someone in three or four sentences.

Diagram your major points somehow.

Make a tree, outline, or whatever helps you to see a schematic representation of what you have. You may discover the need for more material in some places. Write a first draft.

Then, if possible, put it away. Later, read it aloud or to yourself as if you were someone else. Watch especially for the need to clarify or add more information.

You may find yourself jumping back and forth among these various strategies.

You may find that one works better than another. You may find yourself trying several strategies at once. If so, then you are probably doing something right.

Pre-Writing Questions

As a writer, you can begin by asking yourself questions and then answering them. Your answers will bring your subject into focus and provide you with the material to develop your topic. Here are some questions that might help you begin writing.

Explore the problem — not the topic

1. Who is your reader?
2. What is your purpose?
3. Who are you, the writer? (What image or persona do you want to project?)

Make your goals operational

1. How can you achieve your purpose?
2. Can you make a plan?

Generate some ideas

Brainstorm

- Keep writing
- Don't censor or evaluate
- Keep returning to the problem

Talk to your reader

- What questions would they ask?
- What different kinds of readers might you have?

Ask yourself questions

Journalistic questions

Who? What? Where? When? Why? How? So What?

For more questions or information on the Pre-writing stage, please go to following source:

Source: Online Writing Lab at Perdue University
<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/673/01/>