A PROCESS APPROACH TO WRITING

Because writing involves so many complex mental operations, many writers have learned that breaking it down into its component parts can reduce their stress and frustration and also enable them to achieve better results. A process approach is helpful whether your paper is long or short, whether it involves outside sources or not. Here is a description of the writing process. For each writing assignment, you might want to modify it to fit your needs and abilities.

Stage 1: Understanding Your Task/Gathering Information

Read the assignment carefully. Be sure you understand all the key terms.

Start to gather ideas and information. Depending on the course and the assignment, gathering information might involve reviewing your text or your class notes or it might necessitate research in the library or on-line.

Stage 2: Thinking/Learning More

Try to explore your subject from many angles. Mapping, charting, listing are all ways to promote brainstorming. Consult our Critical Thinking webpage for more hints about brainstorming. If you realize that you don't have all the information you need, do additional research and reading.

Stage 3: Planning and Organizing

Generate a trial thesis. Then try to organize your knowledge about the subject. Make a list or outline of main supporting points (topic sentences) that will persuade readers to agree with your thesis. Or—jot down main ideas first. Then generalize about them to produce a trial thesis.

Stage 4: Drafting and Redrafting (as needed)

Using your list or outline (from Stage 3) as a guide, write a draft of your paper. If you struggle to get started, begin to write the body and conclusion, and write the introduction last.

Make sure the body of your paper supports your thesis. Make changes to one or the other as needed.

Compare your final draft to the assignment. Make sure your draft fulfills all aspects of the assignment.

Stage 5: Editing and Proofreading

Check that every main point is well developed. If not, expand what you have written, as needed. Eliminate information that is irrelevant or off-topic.

Be sure your main points are organized in a clear and logical manner.

Improve the style and tone of your paper. Be sure you are using appropriate vocabulary for your subject.

Proofread carefully. This involves several separate "reads": for grammar, spelling, punctuation, and style. If using sources, double-check the accuracy of all documentation. Proofread from hard copy, not on screen.