



Starting to Write

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For more information about general writing concerns, see our [workshop](#) page on that subject.

Starting to Write

You can try the text book formula:

- I. State your thesis.
- II. Write an outline.
- III. Write the first draft.
- IV. 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 U.?

Ask Yourself How You are Going to Achieve This Purpose

How, for example, would you achieve your purpose if you want to describe some movie as the best you've ever seen? Have you defined for yourself a specific means of doing so if you tell the reader that you really liked the movie?

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? Try, instead, to teach the subject to a group or a 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 really is getting hurt)?

Take a Rest And Let it All Percolate

Nutshell 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 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 between these various strategies...

You may find that one strategy works better than another...

You may find yourself trying several strategies at once...

If so, then you are probably doing something right!

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