

05 The Writing Process

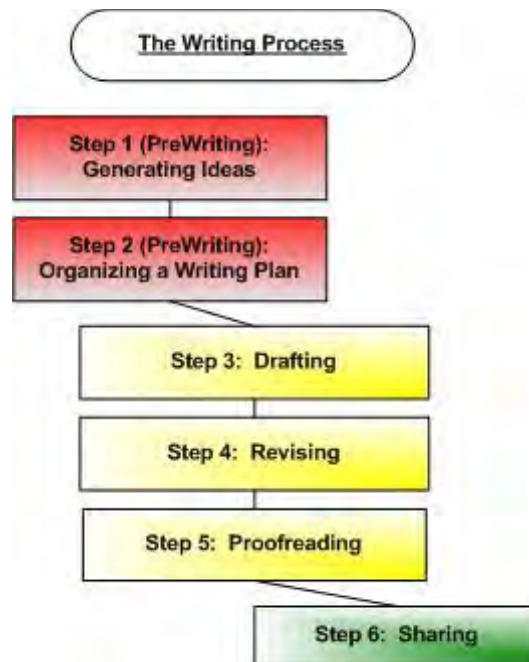
Overview

Many people see writing as something only a few people can do well—people that have some mystical talent for picking the right words for the right purpose. What we often do not understand is that people who are good at writing are good because they have spent many hours learning *the process of good writing*, using what we call **The Writing Process**.

The idea of writing as a *process* is a key to your success as a writer. Writing is a difficult, complex task that can be broken down into smaller, more manageable steps.

Think here about how a complicated piece of technology, like an iPod or Smartphone, is created. Engineers, designers, and computer programmers followed many complicated steps to make the device do exactly what they wanted it do. Perhaps the engineers started with a vague concept, building on existing technology, and asking such questions as, “What if we made a phone that could get on the Internet at high speed while the user was talking? How would we do that?” They would then try to outline the technological issues involved in creating such a device. Then they would design a prototype, build it, and test it. After many rounds of testing, they would test it again, looking for bugs and functions to improve. After testing, they would change things, making the device work better, and working out the problems. After hundreds or thousands of prototypes and tests, the device would be finished and rolled out to consumers. Then the designers would start planning the *next* version of the device.

Producing good writing is really not that different from producing a good product. Effective practitioners of writing use a process of coming up with ideas, composing, and revising to make their writing as strong as it can be. This is the **Writing Process**. Many, many textbooks have been devoted to the Writing Process, but most agree that it has several steps. These are outlined in the diagram below. Study them carefully and commit the process to memory. You should not only understand but start applying the concepts.



Each of the six steps of The Writing Process is crucial to producing a high quality piece of writing. Below is a chart explaining the basics of each step. Throughout the next chapters, we will discuss each step in more depth.

1. Generating Ideas

Writers use various techniques to come up with raw material for writing: they come up with facts, questions, problems, impressions, opinions, and other information related to their writing task.

2. Organizing a Writing Plan

In this step, writers try to organize in some logical way the information they have gathered: they try to see connections and put together a *writing plan* or *outline* for their writing. Are the ideas best communicated through narrative? Compare and contrast? Cause and effect? Usually they generate a *thesis statement* that sums up the point they wish to make, and select details and evidence to develop and support that statement.

3. Drafting

Here is where writers start to put their plan into words. They generate *topic sentences* that support their thesis statement, and create coherent

paragraphs to support and develop the ideas in those topic sentences. Writers use appropriate details and evidence—according to their writing plan—in each paragraph so that their overall point is clear.

4. **Revising**

Revising means “re-seeing.” Writers look at their drafts over and over again, examining them for clarity, logic, and appropriateness. They ask questions like “Is this point clear?” “Does this paragraph develop logically from the one that came before it?” “Have I provided enough information to support this claim?” “Does this paragraph describe this scene adequately?” By revising, writers make big changes that affect the overall meaning and effectiveness of their writing. Many times, writers will get help with revising from peers, colleagues, teachers, and other readers.

5. **Proofreading**

The proofreading stage is often overlooked, but is a crucial part of good writing. Here the writer checks that the details of his language—spelling, punctuation, mechanics, and grammar—are acceptable to his or her audience and situation. In academic writing, for example, the writer must take care to follow the conventions of Standard English.

6. **Sharing**

The final stage of the Writing Process is *sharing* finished writing with others. This may mean turning it in to a professor, submitting it to a publication, posting it to the internet, or sending it to someone. Remembering that someone—a real person—will *read* a piece of writing and want to hear the writer’s thoughts, opinions, and research results often provides a writer with a larger sense of purpose for their writing.

In the following chapters, we will break down each of the six steps and examine each of them in detail.