

Writing Tips

Many students find writing is a difficult task with many burdensome rules to follow, but it can be a manageable undertaking and even enjoyable. Adopting and adhering to effective practices can even make the act of writing a pleasurable process of self-expression.

Creating a writing product has three stages: planning, rough drafts, and finally editing and revision. Each stage is important in any piece of formal writing and requires time and attention to detail. The planning stage can begin with a piece of paper to capture the writer's ideas or to think of questions which will need to be answered in their research for the essay. Young writers should be encouraged to think of researching and answering the following questions about most topics: where, when, how, and why. Each of these four queries will most likely have multiple aspects surrounding them. This provides a framework to systematically think about the topic and a way of capturing ideas in note form rather than in actual sentences.

The planning stage continues with the organization of the information captured. Students should be encouraged to organize their notes and even number them in a sequence which best fits the type of essay they are constructing. For instance, a plan for an informational essay may begin with notes about where and when and then subsequently the how and why surrounding a given topic. Once the writer has organized her notes, she can begin to brainstorm a controlling idea around the topic. The topic and the controlling idea will work as the rough thesis or topic sentence. It's often helpful to think of the topic sentence as a statement the writer intends to prove. Each successive paragraph in the essay can be planned and organized this way to make the writing task quicker, more focused, and informative.

After the organization stage, it's time to compose a topic sentence. A quick review of a rubric for the composition (if provided by the instructor) is a good practice. Many rubrics call for sentence diversity and provide expectations for language usage and regard for the audience. The rough draft or first draft should follow the completed plan but can be added to as new ideas surface. If the plan is well thought out and the rubric consulted, the composition will most likely be quick to compose.

Revision and editing are the next step. An essay will need both editing for grammar and mechanics as well as revision for expression. This is best completed in two separate passes through the composition. Editing is a technical practice requiring knowledge of the rules that govern the written language. As a writer's knowledge of mechanics and grammar grows, this task becomes quicker and less of a burden. Revision is often more creative and requires rethinking how sentences flow, hierarchy of information, logical thinking, as well as a focus on clarity and concision. Student writers often need to be reminded that this step is not only necessary, it is often the step which requires the most time. At this point consulting a rubric, if provided, and meeting its requirements is important to how well the essay will be received and graded.

Following a consistent set of steps will make the writing process less burdensome and more efficient. As young writers become more familiar with a process for composition, they will be more confident and thorough in their written expression. Instead of apprehension about an essay, they will feel in control and ready to tackle each new writing project.