

# Prewriting Strategies

Sometimes when we sit down to write our mind goes blank, or maybe we're not really quite sure we have anything to say. Many writers experience these frustrations, but luckily there are strategies or techniques to get us started. When you are planning to write something, try some of the following suggestions.

## Purpose

Begin by asking what your purpose is for writing about the subject. For example, your topic might be "cafeteria 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?

- Are you trying to convince readers that a problem exists?
- Are you trying to inspire readers to take action by stressing the problems urgency or seriousness?
- Are you trying to persuade readers that the solution(s) are feasible and can be implemented?
- Do you want to compare food served elsewhere? Or analyze large-scale institutional cooking? Or have reader's pity you for having to eat intolerable food?

## How Are You Going to Achieve This Purpose?

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

## Ideas, Ideas, Ideas

- Brainstorm
  - Gather as many ideas, suggestions, examples, sentences, or false starts as you can (good or bad). Jot down everything that comes to mind, including ideas 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
  - Pretend you are being interviewed by someone else. What questions would the other person ask? Or, similarly, you might also try to teach the subject to a group or class.

- **Figurative Language & Analogy**
  - Sometimes figurative language can open up a new set of ideas. Try build your analogy by using the word like. For example, if you are writing about cafeteria food, is the food like eating Styrofoam (as in, highly processed and manufactured, or tasteless, or un-digestible)? Or is it like ambrosia from the Greek gods (mythical, divine, conferring immortality)? Or maybe, like Forrest Gump says, the food is like a box of chocolates. You never know what you're going to get (variety, mystery, selection).
- **Summarize**
  - Craft your elevator speech for your whole idea. Tell it to someone in three or four sentences.
- **Visualize**
  - Diagram your major points. Make a tree, mind map, 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.

**Final note: Feel free to jump back and forth among these strategies. You may find that one works better than another, or you may find yourself trying several strategies at once.**