

Basic Stages of the Writing Process

The writing process is something all writers go through, but will do so in their own unique way. There is no "right way" or "wrong way" to write, which can often be a very messy and fluid process. The following is only a representation of commonly used steps and is meant as a guide, not a rigid linear prescription. Remember you can come to the Writing Center for assistance at any stage in this process.

Brainstorming

Before you begin writing, you will think about what and how to write, often called brainstorming. When you brainstorm for ideas, you will try to come up with as many ideas as you can. Don't worry about whether or not they are good or bad ideas. You can brainstorm by creating a list of ideas that you came up with, or drawing a map and diagram, or just writing down whatever you can think of. The purpose is simply to generate ideas and encourage creative thought.

Outlining

Traditionally, the next step is to outline your paper based on the ideas you came up through brainstorming. This means that you will think about the structure of your paper so that you can best deliver your ideas, and meet the requirements of writing assignments. You will usually outline your paper by beginning with its three major parts: introduction, body, and conclusion, though the specific structure of each essay may vary from assignment to assignment. Once you have the "skeleton" in place, you can start thinking about how to "flesh out" the paper by adding additional detail to it.

Rough Draft

Often, your professors or instructors will require you to submit a rough draft of your paper. This usually means that your work is still in progress. In the rough draft, readers want to see if you have a clear direction in your paper. When you are required to submit a rough draft, it doesn't need to be perfect, but it does need to be complete. That means, you shouldn't be missing any of the major parts of the paper.

Revise and Edit

Yes, there is a difference between revision and editing:

Revision deals with the paper as a whole, addressing issues and questions about your topic, ideas, audience, organization, and evidence support. You may add more paragraphs or remove paragraphs to better fit into a given genre or topic. In a word, revising means that you organize your writing better in a way that your audience can understand your writing better. Ideally, revision is dialogue-based, meaning the purpose is to ask questions, expand ideas, and challenge arguments.

Editing, on the other hand, typically means going over your writing on a sentence-by-sentence level to make sure you do not have any grammatical errors or strange phrases that make it difficult for your readers to understand what you are trying to say. Editing is focused on finding "mistakes" and "fixing" them, and placing value on the paper as an end product.

Polish

After you've revised and edited, the writing process still might not be complete (though, is it ever?). We often hear professors or instructors say that you need to "polish your writing." But what do they mean by polish?

In writing, polish often means to improve, "perfect", or refine a piece of writing by getting rid of minor errors. In other words, when your professors or instructors say, "polish your writing," it means that you should go over your writing and make sure you do not have any errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation, and to make sure that you do not have any sentences that do not make sense.