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Why Write?

Writing is important (1) because it helps you derive meaning from your experiences, (2) because it helps you think more clearly, which in turn helps you learn more effectively, and (3) because it helps you form new understandings or make new connections.

All three of these points are important reasons to write, and will, most assuredly, be seconded by your writing instructors. Rather than have us (or your instructors) tell you why writing is so valuable, read what the following writers have to say about the power of putting pen to paper or fingers to the keyboard. Their thoughts eloquently echo these reasons.

Deriving Meaning from Experiences

"Writing is a long process of self-understanding."

—Edwidge Danticat

"To write is to sit in judgment on oneself."

—Henrik Ibsen

Thinking More Clearly

"I see only one rule: to be clear. If I am not clear, then my entire world crumbles into nothing."

—Stendhal

"Writing and rewriting is a constant search for what one is trying to say."

—John Updike

Forming New Understandings

"I learn by going where I have to go."

—Theodore Roethke

"I have never written a book that was not born out of a question that I needed to answer for myself."

—May Sarton

"In search of my mother's garden I found my own."

—Alice Walker



Selecting a Topic

The following strategies will help you find a worthy topic for your writing, or a compelling angle for a topic already assigned to you. Read through the entire list before you choose a strategy to begin your search.

Journal Writing

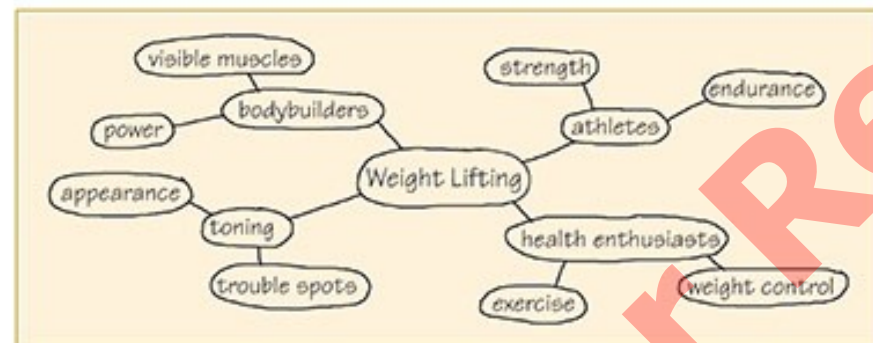
Write in a journal (notebook) on a regular basis. Explore your personal feelings, develop your innermost thoughts, and record the happenings of each day. Periodically go back and highlight or underline ideas that you would like to explore in writing assignments.

Freewriting

Write nonstop for 10 minutes or more to discover possible writing ideas or angles. Begin writing with or without a particular focus in mind; either way, you'll soon be discovering and exploring ideas that may otherwise not have occurred to you. (See pages 24–25 for more information about freewriting.)

Clustering

Begin a cluster with a nucleus word or phrase (like *weight lifting*) that is related to your writing topic or assignment. Then record or cluster ideas around it. Circle each idea as you write it, and draw a line connecting it to the closest related idea.



NOTE: After a few minutes of clustering, scan your notes for a word or an idea to explore in a freewriting. A specific subject may begin to emerge during this writing.

Listing

Freely list ideas as they come to mind. Begin with a concept or a key word related to your assignment and simply start listing additional words or ideas. (Brainstorming, listing ideas with members of a group, is another effective way to search for writing subjects.)

Dialoguing

Create a dialogue between yourself and the intended reader of your piece. The topic of this conversation **should** be related to your writing assignment. Continue the “conversation” until a possible writing idea begins to unfold.

Listening, Participating, Reflecting

Think about possible writing ideas as you read, as you ride or drive to school, as you relax in the evening, and so on. Watch for unusual events, persons, objects, or conversations. Participate in group activities related to your writing assignment. Interview someone who is knowledgeable or experienced about a writing idea. Also talk with friends and family members about possible topics.

Using the “Basics of Life” List

Below you will find a list of the major categories into which most essential things in our lives are divided. The list provides an endless variety of topic possibilities. Consider the fifth category, education. It could lead to the following writing ideas:

- online education
- funding public education
- a new approach in education
- an influential educator

BASICS OF LIFE

clothing	communication	exercise	health/medicine
housing	purpose/goals	community	entertainment
food	measurement	arts/music	literature/books
exercise	machines	faith/religion	recreation/hobby
education	intelligence	trade/money	personality/identity
family	agriculture	heat/fuel	natural resources
friends	environment	rules/laws	tools/utensils
love	science	freedom/rights	plants/vegetation
senses	energy	land/property	work/occupation



BOTTOM LINE

Before implementing any prewriting strategy, be sure you thoroughly understand the assignment you've been given. Some assignments allow a lot of freedom in topic choice and approach; others are more directed and specific. Take these differences into account and use prewriting strategies accordingly.

Thinking Through an Argument

A convincing argument requires a substantial claim, thoughtful qualifiers, varied kinds of solid evidence, and perceptive concessions.

Making and Supporting a Point

MAKING CLAIMS: A claim, or proposition, is the main point in argument writing. Three categories of claims are *fact*, *value*, and *policy*.

Claims of fact state that something is true or not true.

Smoking is the most easily prevented cause of death.

Claims of value state that something has or does not have worth.

The new on-campus housing plan lacks vision.

Claims of policy assert that something ought to be done or not done.

A semester of community service ought to be a graduation requirement.

USING QUALIFIERS: Qualifiers are terms that make a claim more flexible. Note the difference between the two claims below.

All immigration laws need reform.

Some immigration laws need reform.

"Some" makes a qualified claim, rather than an all-or-nothing claim. Here are some useful qualifiers:

almost	if . . . then . . .	maybe	probably
often	in most cases	might	usually

ADDING SUPPORT: Your claim or proposition needs evidence for support; the more kinds of evidence you offer and the stronger the evidence, the more solid your argument will be. Here are some types of evidence:

Statistics: Washington is going to cut \$30 million in research in the next budget.

Analysis: This situation is the result of . . .

Comparison: The stature of science has declined since the '60s.

Testimony: Placement Director Juarez reported, "Physics majors find . . ."

Observation: I see more and more unemployed chemists.

Prediction: Opportunities in science will continue to decline.

Demonstration: At a recent seminar, the regional job market in the sciences was a leading topic of discussion.

MAKING CONCESSIONS: Concessions are "points" that you let the other side score. Making a concession often adds believability to your overall claim. Here are some expressions for making concessions:

admittedly	I cannot argue with	granted
even though	while it is true that	I agree that

Using Evidence and Logic

To develop a convincing argument, you must draw reasonable conclusions from solid evidence. You must also avoid logical fallacies —fuzzy thinking that crops up in your writing if you are not careful. (Logical fallacies also occur in advertisements, political appeals, and such.) Learn about common fallacies by reading the descriptions below. Then make sure to avoid them in your own thinking and writing.



NOTE: When you develop an argument, appeal to your readers' good sense and reason, and not to their emotions.

AD HOMINEM ATTACK

Ad hominem is Latin for "to the man," referring to an attack on the person rather than on the position. Stick to facts instead of personalities.

If he wants anyone to consider his position, he should stop whining and try brushing his teeth occasionally.

APPEAL TO IGNORANCE

This logical fallacy suggests that something is true until it has been disproven. Appeals to ignorance unfairly shift the burden of proof.

No one has studied how aspartame relates to the modern epidemic of autism, which demonstrates what a dangerous substance it is.

APPEAL TO PITY

This fallacy tries to evoke sympathy for someone rather than taking a hard look at an issue based on its own merits.

Students who have to work after school and then stay up late studying should never be marked tardy the next day.

BANDWAGON

Bandwagoning supports a position by saying that everyone else agrees with it. This fallacy avoids the real question: "Is this position good or not?"

Many top-level officials have walked out of this administration, so those who remain are obviously in the wrong.

BROAD GENERALIZATION

A broad generalization takes in everything and everyone at once, allowing no exceptions. It ignores complexity.

Millennials are lazy and self-absorbed.

CIRCULAR REASONING

This fallacy consists of assuming the very point you are trying to prove. Note how circular this sort of reasoning is:

Racism is bad because it is racist.

(Racism is bad because it unjustly disadvantages people based on their race.)

Guidelines

Response to an Argument Prompt

Some tests might present you with an argument prompt, with a limited amount of time to respond. Here is an example prompt:

At school, home, and work, we are surrounded by problems. If you could solve one problem, what would it be, and how would you solve it? Write an essay that explains the problem and convinces classmates about your solution.

PREWRITING

Analyze the prompt. Use the **PAST** strategy.

- **Purpose** Why am I writing? (*argue, defend, prove, solve?*)
- **Audience** Who is my reader? (*teacher, students, citizens?*)
- **Subject** What is my topic? (*problem, controversy, policy?*)
- **Type** What form should I write? (*editorial, position, argument?*)

Write a thesis statement. Under it, list main supporting points.

The only way to overcome prejudice is to be around different people.

- Problems of anonymous society
- Desegregation in schools
- Need for diverse neighborhoods
- Need for community activities

WRITING

Write a beginning. Catch the reader's interest, introduce your topic, and lead up to your position statement.

Develop middle paragraphs. Create a body paragraph for each supporting reason. Write a topic sentence and body sentences with details.

Write an ending. Wrap up your essay with a final paragraph. Restate your position and give your reader a final thought to take away.

REVISING

Review your prompt response. Revise for the traits.

- **Ideas** Do I answer the prompt? (Review the **PAST** questions.)
- **Organization** Do my beginning, middle, and ending work well? Are my paragraphs well structured and in the best order?
- **Voice, Words, and Sentences** Does my voice achieve my purpose? Does my essay read smoothly?

EDITING

Check correctness. Edit your response.

- **Conventions** Have I checked punctuation, capitalization, spelling, and grammar?

Prompt Response

One student wrote the following problem-solution essay in response to the argument prompt on the facing page.

RESPONSE

True Diversity

The essay begins with a strong opinion and gives the position statement.

The first middle paragraph explains the problem.

The other middle paragraphs discuss ways to solve the problem.

The ending revisits the problem and solution.

Prejudice poses one of the biggest threats to our melting-pot society. Racial prejudice heads the list, but we also have male/female, gay/straight, old/young, urban/rural, and rich/poor prejudice. The word *prejudice* means “pre-judging,” so the best way to counteract it is to actually meet, live beside, and work with many different types of people.

We can't count on our anonymous society to overcome prejudice by itself. At the grocery store and park, we see people of all ages, colors, races, and religions, but do we actually interact with them? Do we get to know them? No. We are taught to mind our own business, and our prejudices grow deeper.

Desegregation in schools was one noble but doomed attempt to connect people from many different backgrounds. The “separate but equal” approach to education was anything but equal, so students from poorer places were bussed to richer schools. The first group of students endured great prejudice and had to be guarded by soldiers. The forced integration did break down many barriers, but eventually, schools re-segregated based on segregated neighborhoods.

We can't effectively combat prejudice in schools without addressing it in our neighborhoods. When inner-city neighborhoods became more diverse, a “white flight” occurred to the suburbs. Then when inner-city neighborhoods were “gentrified,” long-time residents got priced out of their homes. Until we can get people to live together in the same neighborhoods, prejudice will only deepen.

And once we desegregate neighborhoods, we must also foster events to get neighbors working together. Block parties can help. Community beautification projects get diverse people working together. Community theater, community gardens, community sports teams—these overcome prejudice.

Prejudice only deepens when people keep to their own kind. Prejudice melts away when people have friends from different backgrounds. To solve the problem, we need to create diversity in our neighborhoods and communities.

General Exam Preparation

The AP English exams use objective questions and free-response writing. To prepare for the exams, do the following:

1. Practice critical reading. Use these questions.

- IDEAS
What is the topic?
What is the purpose (informational, persuasive, literary)?
■ For informational writing, what sorts of details are used, and how do they support the thesis?
■ For argument writing, what combination of reasons and logic support the position? (See pages 190–192.)
■ For literature, how do the plot, settings, characters, and conflicts affect the theme?
What is the context?
- ORGANIZATION
What is the overall structure of the work?
How does each paragraph function?
Where does the work shift in meaning?
- VOICE
What is the tone (the author's attitude toward the topic)?
What is the formality (the author's relationship to the reader)?
- WORD CHOICE
What are the key words in the text?
- SENTENCE FLUENCY
What is remarkable about the sentence style?
What literary or rhetorical devices does the writer use?

2. **Understand literary analysis.** Study literary terms and approaches to literary analysis (pages 421–430).
3. **Understand argumentation.** Study “Thinking Through an Argument” (pages 190–192).
4. **Practice responding to prompts.** Write essays in response to the prompts in this handbook (pages 184 and 208).
5. **Study exemplary models.** Review the essays in this handbook and seek out your own exemplary models of writing.

AP English Language and Composition

The AP English Language and Composition exam focuses on your ability to read and respond to essays, letters, speeches, and other nonfiction prose. It has two sections: multiple-choice and free-response questions.

Multiple Choice

This section counts as 45 percent of the exam grade. It includes five or six passages, each of which is followed by multiple-choice questions. You have 60 minutes to complete this section (about 10 minutes per passage).

Guidelines

- **Read questions first.** Then you know what to watch for.
- **Note question order.** Often the first question asks about the first line. Usually questions follow the order of the passage.
- **Treat each passage separately.** The passages are not connected.
- **Be patient with short passages.** They may take as long or longer to analyze than long passages.
- **Pay attention to footnotes.** If there is a footnote, often there will be a question about it.
- **Analyze ideas and organization.** Questions often focus on specific ideas and how they contribute to the whole passage. Think of what each idea accomplishes—summing, supporting, contrasting, questioning, and so on.
- **Analyze voice.** Questions may ask about the writer's tone (feeling about the topic) or formality (relationship with the audience).
- **Analyze word choice and sentence fluency.** Questions may focus on the writer's sentence style or on figures of speech.
- **Answer easy questions first.** Eliminate obviously wrong answers.

SAMPLE ARGUMENT PROMPT AND EXCERPT

Read the following passage from Ralph Waldo Emerson's essay “The American Scholar.” Then answer the questions that follow.

The theory of books is noble. The scholar of the first age received into him the world around; brooded thereon; gave it the new arrangement of his own mind, and uttered it again. It came into him, life; it went out from him, truth. It came to him, short-lived actions; it went out from him, immortal thoughts. It came to him, business; it went from him, poetry. It was dead fact; now, it is quick thought. It can stand, and it can go. It now endures, it now flies, it now inspires. Precisely in proportion to the depth of mind from which it issued, so high does it soar, so long does it sing.

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"Cut out all those exclamation marks. An exclamation mark is like laughing at your own joke."

—F. Scott Fitzgerald

Marking Punctuation

Period

523.1 At the End of a Sentence

Use a **period** at the end of a sentence that makes a statement, requests something, or gives a mild command.

(Statement) **The man who does not read good books has no advantage over the man who can't read them.** —Mark Twain

(Request) **Please bring your folders and notebooks to class.**

(Mild command) **If your topic sentence isn't clear, rewrite it.**

NOTE: It is not necessary to place a period after a statement that has parentheses around it and is part of another sentence.

My dog Bobot (I don't quite remember how he acquired this name) is a Chesapeake Bay retriever—a hunting dog—who is afraid of loud noises.



523.2 After an Initial or an Abbreviation

Place a period after an initial or an abbreviation.

Ms. Sen. D.D.S. M.F.A. M.D. Jr. U.S. p.m. a.m.
Edna St. Vincent Millay Booker T. Washington D. H. Lawrence

NOTE: When an abbreviation is the last word in a sentence, use only one period at the end of the sentence.

Jaleesa eyed each door until she found the name Fletcher B. Gale, M.D.

523.3 As a Decimal Point

A period is used as a decimal point.

New York City has a budget of \$85.2 billion to serve its 8.6 million people.