



## Writing Process

### Table of Contents

[The Writing Process](#)

[The Assignment](#)

[Prewriting](#)

[Drafting](#)

[Revising](#)

[Editing](#)

[The Recursive Writing Process](#)

The writing process typically is not a neatly ordered process where you advance from one step to the next without looking back. Instead, strong writers take advantage of phases according to the development and refinement of ideas. These phases include prewriting (also known as invention or discovery) drafting, revising, and editing.



**Figure 1:** This graphic includes the word *assignment* surrounded by the words *prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing*, demonstrating that the assignment is central to these parts of the writing process.

### The Assignment

Before delving into the writing process, it is important to understand the assignment. What is the purpose of the assignment – to inform or persuade your reader? Are there other parameters? For

instance, does the assignment provide you with a field of study or discipline, a topic, or a specific approach to the topic to consider? Are you required to use outside sources to support your points? Are you required to do primary research in the form of surveys, interviews, or observations? All of these questions lead you think about the goals of the assignment.

The assignment may also help you realize the particular audience you are aiming for. Will you write to a generic academic audience including your peers and instructors? Will you write technical instructions to end users of a new software product? Or will you appeal to your management team trying to convince them to change a policy that is inefficient? Read your assignment through several times, taking notes, highlighting areas of interest or confusion. You might consider contacting your instructor with any questions about the assignment.



## Prewriting

Once you have looked through the assignment thoroughly, you can decide on a topic (if one hasn't been chosen for you) by practicing some prewriting techniques. Prewriting techniques help you discover and explore a topic by writing without censoring yourself. Prewriting – including activities such as freewriting, brainstorming, mapping, outlining, and cubing – allows you to search your memory and experiences to realize what you know or do not know about a topic, what interests you about the topic, and what you want to explore further about the topic.

## Drafting

Once you have a significant amount of prewriting, enough to get inspired, thinking, and focused on your topic, then drafting can occur. Drafting happens when you begin creating the text that will eventually become your paper. There are many techniques to drafting. Some authors write chunks of information at a time, following a rough outline form. Other writers may sit down for a marathon session and type out an entire, fluid draft in one extremely long sitting.

Donald Murray, who was an English professor and Pulitzer Prize winning journalist, introduced a



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drafting technique called layering in *Write to Learn* (2002). The concept is simple. Write and rewrite a small section of your document until rich, intricate layers begin forming, like the layers of an oil painting. You might sit down and write a paragraph for your essay. Then put that paragraph away and write it again. Then write it again and again. This technique seems to appeal to writers who have a preference for the “big picture,” discovering relationships between ideas, and pondering to figure things out.

Other tips to getting a draft out include pretending you are in an essay exam situation, timing yourself for a couple of hours to get the draft out, ignoring the introduction and just going for the body of the draft first, or making a speech about your topic in front of a few friends or a tape recorder. Regardless of your technique for drafting, keep in mind that the first draft isn't supposed to be perfect. In this phase of the writing process, you are creating content – ideas and structure. A rough draft can still look quite messy since you will have an opportunity to revise and edit later.



Some of your assignments will require research. In these cases, you will need to prepare a plan to find, evaluate, and use information from sources other than your textbook or those you reviewed in class before drafting the essay. This may require library and Internet research.



## Revising

Revising is the remodeling phase of the writing process. At this point in the process, you have a solid piece of text, the first draft, which needs a fresh look. So it is important to leave some time between the drafting and revising phases of your writing. Taking a day or two away from the draft (no peeking!) will give you a new perspective, a fresh approach, to the discussion.

As you revise, try not to be too attached to your writing. Revision can be difficult for writers who want to hold on to specific wording or phrasing. But keep in mind that as the writer, you are not the eventual audience. Put yourself in your reader's place when trying to decide what content should stay and what should go.

Structure is one area of the draft that you will consider as you revise. Is the order of information logical? Do the supporting ideas and examples flow well? What is the strongest supporting point you have? Where should it be placed? Depending on your topic, you might choose to structure your essay emphatically (building in emphasis to the strongest point of the paper), sequentially (ordering chronologically or by steps of a process), or spatially (ordering by physical location of items).

## Editing

Editing your work should ideally occur after a significant draft has been created. A typical problem that some writers have is they try to edit as they create text during the prewriting or drafting phases, which can cause writer's block. Instead, save the editing phase for the final stages of the writing process.

Editing involves looking for clear complete sentences in your draft. Once you do have a significant draft that has been through the revision stage, you can begin to look for sentence-level and wording errors in your paper. You will pay attention to grammatical structures, punctuation, word use, and sentence variety.

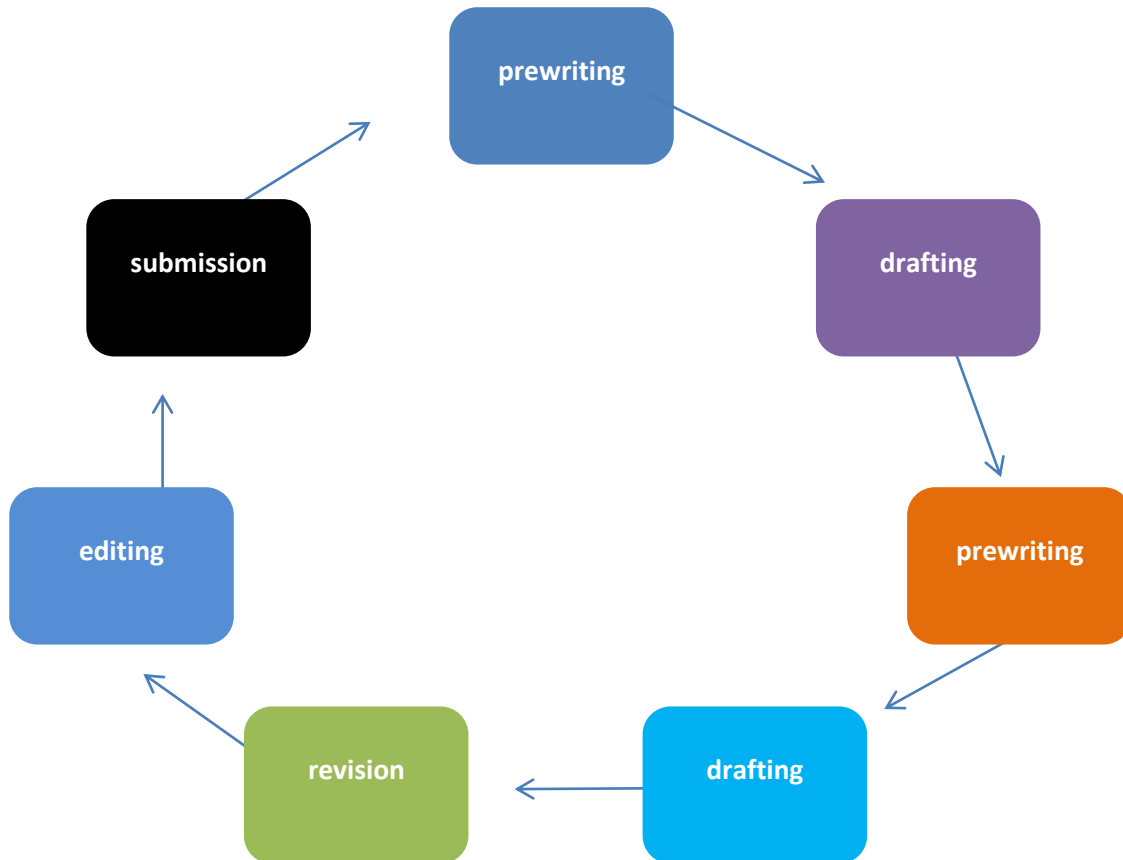
There are many editing tricks and techniques. One simple way to begin the editing process is to read your paper out loud. Many times writers will hear and recognize mistakes in sentence structure, clarity, grammar, and mechanics simply by reading their work out loud. You might notice a misspelled word, a period in the wrong place or many other issues this way.

Other writers begin reading their papers from the end to the beginning when editing. That way, instead of focusing on the content and structure (which is crafted during the revision stage), the writer can concentrate on each sentence, the words, phrases, and clauses used to create complete ideas.



## The Recursive Writing Process

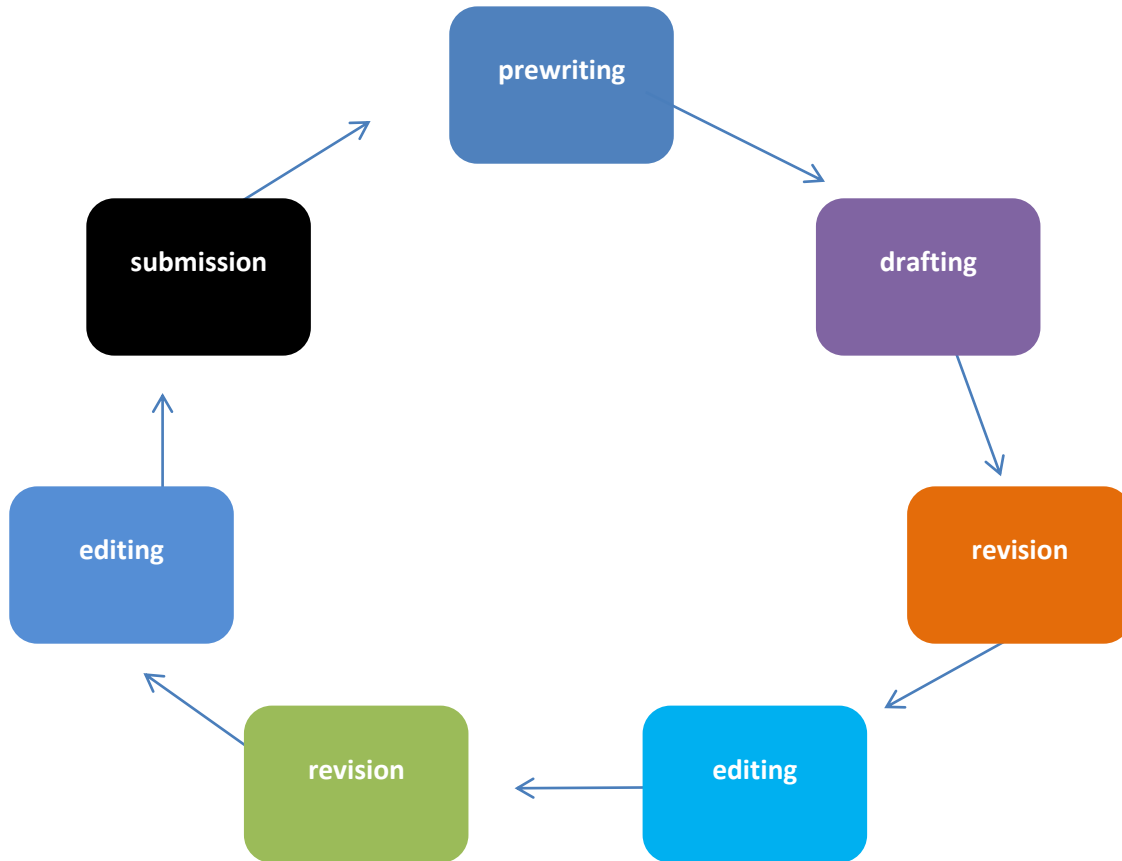
Think of the writing process as recursive, meaning that you could revisit any phase of the process at any time. For instance, you might begin prewriting, then drafting. Once you read over the rough draft, you might realize that you are missing tons of information in one section and find it helpful to return to the development stage to brainstorm or freewrite.



**Figure 3:** This graphic includes a continuous circle of the following words: *prewriting, drafting, prewriting, drafting, revisions, editing, and submission*. The circle demonstrates that the writing process is recursive and that writers often revisit stages of the process as they draft.



Or you might get all the way to the editing phase of your writing process, reading the paper carefully for sentence level errors, and realize that part of the paper seems out of order. That may take you back to the revision process, where you rewrite and reorder information to create a more logical flow of ideas.



**Figure 4:** This graphic includes a continuous circle of the following words: prewriting, drafting, revision, editing, revisions, editing, and submission. The circle demonstrates that the writing process is recursive and that writers often revisit stages of the process as they draft.

### **Revisit the relevant stages whenever necessary to create your best draft possible.**

There are always ways to make writing more interesting and effective, but eventually, you will need to submit your assignments to your instructor. By allowing yourself time in each of the phases of the writing process and taking advantage of the many resources offered by the Writing Center, you can gain confidence in your ability to create clear and thoughtful projects that appeal to the academic audience.