

Planning, Drafting, and Revising an Effective Essay

I. Planning

A. Determine your purpose and audience.

- **Determine your overall purpose:** Are you supposed to provide information or make an argument (make a claim and support it with evidence)?
- **Identify your audience:** Are you writing for the professor or someone else? What are the audience's expectations? How will that audience evaluate your writing?
- **Consider your role as the writer:** What point of view, tone, style are appropriate?
 - **Point of view (1st person—I; 2nd person—you; 3rd person—he, she, one):**
 - *I learned that you are supposed to use 3rd person in an academic essay.*
 - *Students should typically use third person point of view when writing an academic essay because it helps them sound more authoritative and confident.*
 - **Tone**—serious, humorous, professional, ironic, sarcastic?
 - **Style and formality**--academic, formal, informal, colloquial?

B. Select a topic, do necessary analysis or research, develop a thesis, and organize ideas.

- **Select a topic and narrow it, if necessary.**
- **Do necessary analysis or research:** Do you need to analyze something you have read in class or do you need to do research? If doing research, how will you keep track of the information? How will you document your sources?
- **Develop a tentative thesis:** What is the overall claim or assertion that you want to make within the essay? Evaluate the following thesis statements for an essay:
 - *In this paper, I will discuss the importance of thesis statements and their overall importance to effective essays.*
 - *The thesis is the central claim of an essay and is critically important to the effectiveness of that essay.*
 - *The thesis presents the writer's central claim and is critical to the success of the essay because it prepares readers for the content that follows and provides a framework or organization for the essay*
- **Determine the ideas you will include and organize them:** Do you prefer to use an outline, visual map, or other approach? What are the main ideas you want to present; how can you best organize them; and where will you provide the necessary evidence?
- **Remember the overall structure of an essay:**
 - **Introduction:** Introduce the topic and prepare readers for the content of the essay and for your thesis; place the thesis at the end of the introduction and follow the organization that the thesis sets up.
 - **Body:** Support and develop the thesis; connect all ideas back to the thesis. Organize ideas into paragraphs effectively with good topic sentences and be sure that all ideas relate to and support your thesis.
 - **Closing:** Reiterate your thesis and provide a sense of completeness to the essay.

II. Drafting

- A. **Draft your essay, using your plan as a guide, but making changes if needed.**
- B. **Focus on getting the ideas down;** do not slow the process down too much by being overly critical and constantly revising while drafting.

III. Revising

- A. **Allow enough time for revision,** and allow some time between the drafting and revising.
 - B. **Focus on global issues first**—those issues that are important to the overall essay:
 - Does the draft achieve its purpose and is it appropriate for the audience?
 - Does the thesis present the essay’s central claim and provide direction for the essay?
 - Is the essay unified—do all ideas relate to the thesis?
 - Is the draft organized in a logical way and does it follow the thesis?
 - Does the draft provide adequate support and evidence?
 - Where does the essay need more support or where could some support be deleted or used more effectively?
 - C. **Move to more local issues:**
 - Are ideas organized into paragraphs effectively with good topic sentences?
 - Are ideas presented in sentences effectively? Are the sentences clear and precise?
 - Have all quotations been introduced? Are all paraphrases in the writer’s own words and sentence structure?
 - Have sources been documented appropriately (in-text citations and list of sources)?
 - Does the writer provide transitions to connect the parts of the essay?
 - What mechanical and/or grammatical issues need to be worked on and corrected (punctuation, grammatical concerns, point of view, verb tense, spelling, usage)?
 - How could the draft be improved?
 - D. **Get feedback and help** from sample readers, a professor, peer advisor, or Writing Center.
 - Provide readers with detail about the assignment and expectations.
 - Ask readers for help with specific issues (not just tell me what you think).
 - Be open to suggestions and comments from others.
 - E. **Work from a hard copy.**
 - It is easier to see what needs to be revised when evaluating a draft in a printed format.
 - Make comments directly on the hard copy.
 - F. **Read your draft aloud and listen to what it sounds like (have someone read it aloud).**
 - Listen for sentences that need to be clarified.
 - Pay attention to places where better transitions are needed.
 - Identify issues with sentence variety and unnecessary repetition.
 - G. **Proofread** the finished product to ensure the essay is correct and complete.
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