What is the writing process?

Many people think that professional writers can sit down at their computers, think of ideas, and magically produce a finished draft, word by perfect word. Experienced writers know better. They know that writing is a process, a series of activities that starts the moment they begin thinking about a subject and ends with proofreading the final draft. Experienced writers also know that good writing is rewriting, again and yet again. Their drafts are filled with additions, deletions, rewordings, and rearrangements.

For example, see below how Lynn revised the paragraph you just read. She didn’t make all the changes at the same time, even though it looks that way...
Chapter One discusses what writing is. This chapter explains how writing happens. Many people think that professional writers can sit down at their computers, think of ideas, and produce a finished draft, word by perfect word. Experienced writers know better. They know that writing is a process. The writing magically begins. They begin proofreading and revision of Lynn Troyka’s first paragraph in Chapter 2 on the example. She went through the paragraph four times before she was satisfied with it. Notice that she deleted one sentence, combined two sentences, added a sentence at the end, and changed wording throughout.

Writing is an ongoing process of considering alternatives and making choices. The better you understand the writing process, the better you’ll write; and the more you feel in control of your writing, the more you’ll enjoy it.

In this chapter, we discuss each part of the writing process separately. In real life, the steps overlap. They loop back and forth, which is why writing is called a recursive process. Box 2-1 lists the steps.

**Steps in the writing process**

- **Planning** means discovering and compiling ideas for your writing.
- **Shaping** means organizing your material.
- **Drafting** means writing your material into sentences and paragraphs.
- **Revising** means evaluating your draft and then rewriting it by adding, deleting, rewording, and rearranging.
- **Editing** means checking for correct grammar, spelling, punctuation, and mechanics.
- **Proofreading** means reading your final copy to eliminate typing or handwriting errors.
What is a “writing situation”? 

Do you like, as we do, to visualize a process? If so, see the drawing here. The arrows show movement. You might move back before going ahead (perhaps as you revise, you realize you need to plan some more); or you might skip a step and come back to it later (perhaps in the middle of revising, you jump into editing for a few minutes because a punctuation or grammar rule affects how you express your point); and so on.

As you work with the writing process, allow yourself to move freely through each step to see what’s involved. Notice what works best for you. As you develop a sense of your preferred writing methods, adapt the process to fit each writing situation. No single way exists for applying the writing process.

Our personal advice is this: Most writers struggle some of the time with ideas that are difficult to express, sentences that won’t take shape, and words that aren’t precise. Be patient with yourself. Don’t get discouraged. Writing takes time. The more you write, the easier it will become—though writing never happens magically.

2b What is a “writing situation”? 

The writing situation of each assignment is the place to start with thinking about your writing. Its four elements are topic, purpose, audience, and special requirements. The questions in Box 2-2 on page 12 cover each aspect.

A topic is the foundation of every writing situation. As you think through a topic, you want to remain within the constraints of academic writing. Whatever your topic, stick to it, and resist any temptation to bend it in another direction.

The purpose of most college writing is to inform or persuade (1b.2 and 1b.3). Some assignments state the writing purpose, while some only imply it. For example, if you were asked to “Describe government restrictions on cigarette advertising,” your purpose would be informative. In contrast, if you were asked to respond to the statement “Smoking should (or should not) be banned in all public places,” your purpose would be persuasive.

But suppose your assignment doesn’t indicate a writing purpose: for example, “Write an essay on smoking.” Here, you’re expected to choose a
purpose and think about what you intend to write on the topic. As you plan how to develop the topic, you’ll begin to see whether your purpose is informative or persuasive. It’s normal to find yourself deciding to switch purposes midstream to better suit what you are saying.

Your reading AUDIENCE (1c) consists of everyone who will read what you write. According to your assignment and the procedures in your class, your audience includes your PEER-RESPONSE GROUP (1c.1), friends, readers who have specialized knowledge (1c.3) about your topic, and, of course, your instructor. Think through the characteristics and expectations of your audience so that your writing will successfully deliver its intended meaning.

**Special requirements** are practical matters such as how much time you’re given to complete the assignment and how long your writing should be. For example, for an assignment due in one week, your reading audience expects more than one day’s work. However, if an assignment is due overnight, your reading audience realizes you had to write in relative haste, though they never expect sloppy or careless work. Perhaps the highest expectations in a reading audience are applied to an assignment that calls for reading or other research, so be sure to build time for that early in your schedule.

Some instructors put each assignment in writing, either on the board or in a handout. But other instructors give assignments orally during class, expecting you to write them down. Try to record every word. Don’t hesitate to ask questions if you don’t catch all the words or if something isn’t clear—and be sure to write down the answers because they often tend to slip from memory. Listen, too, to questions other students ask, and write down the answers. Such notes can serve as useful springboards when you start writing.

In the rest of this chapter, we present the writing processes of two college students, Carol Moreno and Lacie Juris, as they plan and shape their material. Then, in Chapter 3, you’ll see Moreno’s essay evolving through three separate, complete drafts. Later, in Chapter 6, you’ll see how Juris’s essay developed. To start, here are the written assignments each student received.

Moreno’s first step was to analyze her writing situation (Box 2-2). She looked at the **topic**—a challenge she faced and tried to meet—and she saw
What is a “writing situation”?

Carol Moreno received this assignment:
Write an essay of 700 to 800 words discussing a challenge you faced and tried to meet. Your writing purpose can be informative or persuasive. Expect to write three drafts. (1) Your first draft, typed double-spaced, is due two classes from today. (2) Your clean second draft, typed double-spaced, without notes or comments, is due two classes later. Clip to it your first draft showing all notes you made to yourself or from comments your peer-response group made; you can handwrite notes and comments. I’ll read your second draft as an “essay in progress” and will make comments to help you toward a third (and final) draft. (3) The third draft, typed double-spaced, is due one week after I return your second draft with my comments.

Lacie Juris was given this assignment:
Write an essay of 900 to 1,000 words that argues for a particular action on an issue that interests you. Your final draft is due in two weeks.

that she needed to narrow it. She tentatively decided her purpose would be informative, though she thought she might have to switch to a persuasive purpose as she went along. She knew that she would share her first draft with her peer-response group to help her toward her second draft. She also understood that her instructor would be her final audience. She was aware of the requirements for time and length.

Juris also read her assignment and analyzed her writing situation. Because the topic was very broad, she knew she would have to spend a good deal of time deciding what she wanted to write about. On the other hand, she understood that her assigned purpose was persuasive. The audience was not specified; she knew that her instructor would be the main audience, but she also decided to write in such a way that would address a broader public audience. She kept in mind the requirements for time and length.

EXERCISE 2-1 For each assignment below, work individually or with a peer-response group to list the elements in the writing situation. Consult section 2b for help.

1. **Family and Consumer Science**: Write a 500- to 700-word essay that explains important safety procedures to daycare providers. This assignment is due in one week.

2. **Journalism**: Write a 300-word editorial for the student newspaper (to be published next week) supporting or attacking your college’s plan to replace the food court with bookstore space for selling software and CDs. Draw on your personal experience or that of students you know.

3. **Art**: You have twenty minutes in class to discuss the differences between a photograph and painting of the same scene, using a specific example from the textbook or class discussions.
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4. **Politics:** Write a one-paragraph description of what is meant by “freedom of the press.”

5. **Computer Science:** Write a 1,000-word paper that argues that computers will/will not simulate most aspects of human intelligence in the next ten years. Read and draw on sources to support your argument. Be sure to document your sources. This assignment is due in two weeks.

**How can I think through a writing topic?**

Situations vary. Some assignments are very specific. For example, here’s an assignment that leaves no room for choice: “Explain how oxygen is absorbed in the lungs.” Students need to do precisely what’s asked, taking care not to wander off the topic. Only rarely, however, are writing-class assignments as specific as that one. Often, you’ll be expected to select your own topic (2c.1), broaden a narrow topic (2c.2), or narrow a broad topic (2c.3). Regardless of the situation, keep in mind that what separates most good writing from bad is the writer’s ability to move back and forth between general statements and specific details.

**Selecting your own topic**

If you have to choose a topic, don’t rush. Take time to think through your ideas. Avoid getting so deeply involved in one topic that you cannot change to a more suitable topic in the time allotted.

Not all topics are suitable for **academic writing**. Your topic needs to have inherent intellectual interest: ideas and issues meaty enough to demonstrate your thinking and writing abilities. Think through potential topics by breaking each into its logical subsections. Then, make sure you can supply sufficiently specific details to back up each general statement. Conversely, make sure you aren’t bogged down in so many details you can’t figure out what generalizations they support.

Work toward balance by finding a middle ground. Beware of topics so broad they lead to well-meaning but vague generalizations (for example, “Education is necessary for success”). Also, beware of topics so narrow that they lead nowhere after a few sentences (for example, “Jessica Max attends Tower College”).

**Broadening a narrow topic**

You know a topic is too narrow when you realize there’s little to say after a few sentences. When faced with a too-narrow topic, think about underlying concepts. For example, suppose you want to write about Oprah Winfrey. If you chose “Oprah Winfrey’s television show debuted in 1986,” you’d be working with a single fact rather than a topic. To expand beyond such a narrow thought, you could think about the general area that your fact fits into—say, the impact
How can I think through a writing topic?

of television shows on American culture. Although that is too broad to be a useful topic, you’re headed in the right direction. Next, you might think of a topic that relates to Oprah’s influence, such as “What impact has Oprah Winfrey’s television show had on American culture since she began broadcasting in 1986?” Depending on your writing situation (2b), you might need to narrow your idea further by focusing on Oprah’s impact in a single area, such as how her book club influenced publishing and reading habits, how her guests and topics brought certain issues to national visibility, or how the style of her show affected other talk shows.

2c.3 Narrowing a broad topic

Narrowing a broad topic calls for you to break the topic down into subtopics. Most broad subjects can be broken down in hundreds of ways, but you need not think of all of them. Settle on a topic that interests you, one narrowed enough—but not too much—from a broad topic. For example, if you’re assigned “marriage” as the topic for a 1,000-word essay, you’d be too broad if you chose “What makes a successful marriage?” You’d be too narrow if you came up with “Alexandra and Gavin were married by a justice of the peace.” You’d likely be on target with a subtopic such as “In successful marriages, husbands and wives learn to accept each other’s faults.” You could use 1,000 words to explain and give concrete examples of typical faults and discuss why accepting them is important. Here are two more examples:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUBJECT</th>
<th>music</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WRITING SITUATION</td>
<td>freshman composition class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>informative purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>instructor as audience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>500 words; one week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POSSIBLE TOPICS</td>
<td>“How music affects moods”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“The main characteristics of country music”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“The relationships between plots of Puccini’s operas”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUBJECT</th>
<th>cities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WRITING SITUATION</td>
<td>sociology course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>persuasive purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>peers and then instructor as audience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>950 to 1,000 words; ten days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POSSIBLE TOPICS</td>
<td>“Comforts of city living”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Discomforts of city living”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Importance of city planning for open spaces”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Carol Moreno knew her assigned topic—“a challenge you faced and tried to meet” (2b)—was too broad. To narrow it, she used the following structured techniques for discovering and compiling ideas: browsing her journal (2e), freewriting (2f), and mapping (2h). They helped her decide to write about the challenge of increasing her strength.
Lacie Juris also needed to narrow her topic. To explore several possible topics, she used BRAINSTORMING (2g). Once she had chosen a topic (whether wild animals should be kept as pets), she used a SUBJECT TREE (2l) to check whether she was ready to begin drafting.

**2d What can I do if no ideas occur to me?**

If you’ve ever felt you’ll never think of anything to write about, don’t despair. Instead, use structured techniques, sometimes called prewriting strategies or invention techniques, for discovering and compiling ideas. Professional writers use them to uncover hidden resources in their minds. For a list of the techniques, see Box 2-3 (the parentheses after each technique tell you where to find more explanation and an example).

**BOX 2-3 SUMMARY**

Ways to discover and compile ideas for writing

- Keep an idea log and a journal (2e).
- Freewrite (2f).
- Brainstorm (2g).
- Map (2h).
- Do an Internet search (2i).

Try out each one. Experiment to find out which techniques suit your style of thinking. Even if one technique produces good ideas, try another to see what additional possibilities might turn up.

Save all of the ideas you generate as you explore possible topics. You never know when something you have initially rejected might become useful from another point of view. Computers make it easy to keep a folder labeled, for example, “explorations,” in which you can store your ideas.

**ESL NOTE:** The structured techniques discussed here aim to let your ideas flow out of you without judging them right away. If such ways of using language are unfamiliar to you or seem difficult to implement, consider doing them first in your native language and then translating them into English when one idea seems to have potential for your writing.

**2e How do I use an idea log and a journal?**

As you develop the habits of mind and behavior of a writer, your ease with writing will grow. One such habit is keeping an idea log. Professional writers are always on the lookout for ideas to write about and details to develop their
What is freewriting?

Freewriting is writing nonstop. You write down whatever comes into your mind without stopping to wonder whether the ideas are good or the spelling is correct. When you freewrite, don’t do anything to interrupt the flow. Don’t censor any thoughts or flashes of insight. Don’t go back and review. Don’t delete.

Freewriting helps get you used to the “feel” of your fingers rapidly hitting computer keys or your pen moving across paper. Freewriting works best if you set a goal—perhaps writing for fifteen minutes or filling one or two pages. Keep going until you reach that goal, even if you have to write one word repeatedly until a new word comes to mind. Some days when you read over your freewriting, it might seem mindless, but other days your interesting ideas may startle you.

In focused freewriting, you write from a specific starting point—a sentence from your general freewriting, an idea, a quotation, or anything else you choose. Except for this initial focal point, focused freewriting is the same as regular freewriting. Write until you meet your time or page limit, and
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don’t censor yourself. If you go off the topic, that’s fine: See where your thoughts take you. Just keep moving forward.
Like a journal, freewriting is a good source of ideas and details.

What is brainstorming?

**Brainstorming** means listing everything you can think of about a topic. Let your mind range freely, generating quantities of ideas; ask yourself the “journalist’s questions” *Who? What? When? Where? Why? and How?* Write words, phrases, or sentence fragments—whatever comes to you. If you run out of ideas, consider more exploratory questions, such as *What is it the same as? How is it different? Why or how does it happen? How is it done? What causes it or results from it? What does it look, smell, sound, feel, or taste like?*

After you’ve compiled a list, go to step two: Look for patterns, ways to group the ideas into categories. You’ll probably find several categories. Set aside any items that don’t fit into a group. If a category interests you but has only a few items, brainstorm that category alone.

You can brainstorm in one concentrated session or over several days, depending on how much time you have for an assignment. Brainstorming in a peer-response group can be especially fruitful: One person’s ideas bounce off the next person’s, and collectively more ideas come to mind.

Brainstorming was a technique Lacie Juris used to find her topic about keeping wild animals as pets (6b). Brainstorming helped her think through several topics and generate some ideas about the one that most appealed to her.

Here’s a list brainstormed for a writing assignment. The topic was “Ways to promote a new movie.” Working individually or in a peer-
response group, look over the list and group the ideas. You’ll find that some ideas don’t fit into a group. Then, add any other ideas you have to the list.

coming attractions       suspense
TV ads                   book the movie was based on
provocative              locations
movie reviews            rating
how movie was made       adventure
sneak previews           newspaper ads
word of mouth            stars
director                 dialogue
topical subject          excitement
special effects          photography

2h What is mapping?

Mapping, also called clustering, is a visual form of brainstorming. When some writers actually see ways that their ideas connect, they begin to think more creatively. Other writers like mapping to help them check the logical relationships between ideas.

To map, write your topic in the middle of a sheet of paper, and draw a circle around it. Now, moving out from the center, use lines and circles to show ideas that are subtopics of the topic in the center circle. Continue to subdivide and add details, as the example on page 20 shows. At any time, you can move to a blank space on your map and start a new subtopic. Try to keep going without censoring yourself.

Carol Moreno used mapping to prompt herself to discover ideas about women and weight training. When she finished, she was satisfied that she’d have enough to say in her essay.

2i How can an Internet search help?

Internet searches help you find topics to write about; understand your subject’s categories from the most general to the most specific; and locate specific information. Internet searches scan the WORLD WIDE WEB using search engines, which are software programs that rapidly search and find online information sources. Some instructors want students to think of ideas on their own, without searching the Web. If that’s the case, don’t.

Chapter 32 provides extensive guidelines for searching the Internet. Briefly, however, try <http://www.google.com>. When you get there, click the “Directory” button to see a screen that lists broad subject areas. (See page 21.)

Next, click on “Society” to see a number of slightly more specific topics. Note that each of them would be much too broad to write about. However, if you keep clicking on topic headings, you’ll move to more and more specific
subjects. Browsing through the layers of topics can help you think of several ideas for your writing. If you know a general topic area, you can type it in the search window of the program, then click on more specific subcategories.

**EXERCISE 2-3** Explore some of the following topics by typing them into the search window of a search engine. You can use Google, or you can try a different search engine. Be ready to explain the sequence of topics you discover.

1. Global warming
2. Intelligence
3. Plagiarism
4. Memory
5. Disability
EXERCISE 2-4  Try each structured technique for discovering and compiling ideas discussed in 2d through 2i. Use your own topics or select from the suggestions below.

1. A dream trip
2. An important personal decision
3. Professional sports
4. Advertisements on television
5. What you want in a life partner

How can shaping help me?

Shaping writing means organizing your material. Like a story, an essay needs a beginning, a middle, and an end. The essay's introduction sets the stage; the essay's body paragraphs provide the substance of your message in a
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BOX 2-4 SUMMARY

Elements in an informative essay

1. **Introductory paragraph**: Leads into the topic of the essay and tries to capture the reader's interest.
2. **Thesis statement**: States the central message of the writing. The thesis statement (2m) usually appears at the end of the introductory paragraph.
3. **Background information**: Provides a context for understanding the points a writer wants to make. You can integrate background information into the introductory paragraph. More complex information may require a separate paragraph of information (as in the second paragraph in Carol Moreno's essay, in section 3f).
4. **Points of discussion**: Support the essay's thesis statement. They're the essential content of the body paragraphs in an essay. Each point of discussion consists of a general statement backed up by specific details.
5. **Concluding paragraph**: Ends the essay smoothly, flowing logically from the rest of the essay (4k).

sequence that makes sense; the conclusion ends the essay logically. The major elements in an informative essay are listed in Box 2-4. (For the major elements in a persuasive essay using classical argument, see Box 6-1 in 6e.)

Each paragraph’s length in an informative essay needs to be in proportion to its function. Introductory and concluding paragraphs are usually shorter than body paragraphs. Body paragraphs need to be somewhat approximate to each other in length. If one body paragraph becomes overly long in relation to the others, consider breaking it into two paragraphs. (We discuss paragraph writing extensively in Chapter 4.)

How can looking for “levels of generality” help me?

*Generality* is a relative term. Concepts exist in the context of—in relationship with—other concepts. More general concepts belong together (can be grouped), while less general concepts belong grouped. When you look for **levels of generality**, you’re figuring out which ideas or concepts can be grouped. Levels of generality start with the most general and work down to the most specific. Conversely, **levels of specificity** start with the most specific and work up to the most general. Being aware of levels, particularly when writing body paragraphs, gives you a sensible sequence for presenting your material. Use whichever pattern works for you because each sequence is merely the reverse of the other. Here's an example.
How can a subject tree help me?

**LEVELS OF GENERALITY (BIG TO SMALL)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEVEL</th>
<th>MOST GENERAL</th>
<th>LESS GENERAL</th>
<th>LESS GENERAL</th>
<th>LESS GENERAL</th>
<th>LEAST GENERAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>a bank</td>
<td>money in the bank</td>
<td>bank account</td>
<td>checking account</td>
<td>account #123456 at Bank EZCome, EZGo</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**LEVELS OF SPECIFICITY (SMALL TO BIG)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEVEL</th>
<th>MOST SPECIFIC</th>
<th>LESS SPECIFIC</th>
<th>LESS SPECIFIC</th>
<th>LESS SPECIFIC</th>
<th>LEAST SPECIFIC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>account #123456 at Bank EZCome, EZGo</td>
<td>checking account</td>
<td>bank account</td>
<td>money in the bank</td>
<td>a bank</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How can a subject tree help me?

A **subject tree** shows you visually whether you have sufficient content, at varying levels of generality or specificity, to start a first draft of your writing. A subject tree also visually demonstrates whether you have a good balance of general ideas and specific details. If what you have are mostly general ideas—or, the other way around, mostly specific details—go back to techniques for discovering and compiling ideas (2d through 2i) so that you can come up with the sorts of materials that are missing.

Lacie Juris used a subject tree, created using tools available in Microsoft Word, to help her shape the fifth paragraph in her essay (61).
2m  What is a thesis statement?

A thesis statement is the central message of an essay. It’s the essay’s main idea. As a writer, you want to write a thesis statement with great care so that it prepares your readers for what follows in the essay. This means your thesis statement has to reflect with some accuracy the content of your essay. Box 2-5 lists the basic requirements for a thesis statement.

BOX 2-5 SUMMARY

Basic requirements for a thesis statement

- It states the essay’s subject—the topic that you discuss.
- It conveys the essay’s purpose—either informative or persuasive.
- It indicates your focus—the assertion that presents your point of view.
- It uses specific language, not vague words.
- It may briefly state the major subdivisions of the essay’s topic.

Some instructors add to these basic requirements for a thesis statement. You might, for example, be asked to put your thesis statement at the end of your introductory paragraph (as in the final draft of Carol Moreno’s essay, in section 3f.3). Some instructors require that the thesis statement be contained in one sentence; other instructors permit two sentences if the topic is complex. All requirements, basic and additional, are designed to help you develop a thesis statement that will guide the writing of your essay and help you communicate clearly with your reader. By the way, never confuse the role of a thesis statement with the role of an essay’s title (3c.2).

Most writers find that their thesis statement changes somewhat with each successive draft of an essay. Still, when you revise its language, be sure to stick to the essential idea you want to communicate. A thesis statement is a guide; it helps you stay on the topic and develop your ideas in an essay. To start, make an assertion—a sentence stating your topic and the point you want to make about it. This assertion focuses your thinking as you develop a preliminary thesis statement. Next, move toward a final thesis statement that most accurately reflects the content of your essay.

Following is the evolution of Carol Moreno’s thesis statement as she moved from a simple assertion to her final version for her essay on weight training. The final version fulfills all the requirements described in Box 2-5.

- I think women can pump iron like men. [This assertion is a start.]
- If she is trained well, any woman can “pump iron” well, just like a man. [This can be considered a preliminary thesis because
What is a thesis statement?

it’s more specific (it mentions training), but the word any is vague and inaccurate, and the word well appears twice.]

NO  In spite of most people thinking only men can “pump iron,” women can also do it successfully with the right training.
[This draft is better because it’s more specific, but “most people thinking only men” goes off Moreno’s intended topic. Also, this draft doesn’t mention Moreno’s central concept of building strength.]

YES  With the right training, women can also “pump iron” to build strength. [This is a good thesis statement.]

Thesis statements for information essays

For essays with an informative purpose (1b.2), here are more examples of thesis statements for 500- to 700-word essays. The NO versions are assertions or preliminary thesis statements. The YES versions are good because they fulfill the requirements in Box 2-5.

TOPIC  suing for malpractice

NO  There are many kinds of malpractice suits.

YES  Many people know about medical malpractice suits, and increasingly people are becoming aware of suits against lawyers, teachers, and even parents.

TOPIC  discomforts of city living

NO  The discomforts of living in a modern city are many.

YES  Rising crime rates, increasingly overcrowded conditions, and rising taxes make living comfortably in a modern city difficult.

EXERCISE 2-5  Here are writing assignments, narrowed topics, and tentative thesis statements. Alone or with a peer-response group, evaluate each thesis statement according to the basic requirements in Box 2-5.

1. Marketing assignment:  700- to 800-word persuasive report on the cafeteria.
   Audience: the instructor and the cafeteria’s manager.  Topic: cafeteria conditions.  Thesis: The college cafeteria could attract more students if it improved the quality of its food, its appearance, and the friendliness of its staff.

2. Theater assignment:  300- to 500-word review of a performance.  Audience: the instructor and other students in the class.  Topic: a touring production of the musical Rent.  Thesis: The recent performance of Rent was very interesting.

3. Chemistry assignment:  800- to 1,000-word informative report about the ozone layer.  Audience: the instructor and visiting students and instructors attending a seminar at the state college.  Topic: recent research on the ozone layer.  Thesis: The United States should increase efforts to slow the destruction of the ozone layer.
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4. Journalism assignment: 200- to 300-word article about campus crime. 
   Audience: the instructor, the student body, and the college administration. 
   Topic: recent robberies. Thesis: During the fall term, campus robberies at 
   the college equaled the number of robberies that took place in the prior 
   five years combined.

5. Nursing assignment: 400- to 500-word persuasive report about technology 
   changes in nursing. Audience: nursing students and professionals. Topic: 
   using hand-held computers to track patient information. Thesis: More hos-
   pitals are requiring nurses to use hand-held computers to enter patient 
   data instead of using traditional charts.

What is outlining?

An outline lays out the relationships among ideas in a piece of writing. Outlines can lead writers to see how well their writing is organized. Many instructors require that outlines be handed in either before or with an essay.

Some writers like to outline; others don’t. If you don’t, but you’re 
required to write one, tackle the job with an open mind. You may be pleasantly surprised at what the rigor of outline writing does to your perception 
of your essay.

An outline can be informal or formal. Try outlining at various steps of the 
WRITING PROCESS: before drafting, to arrange ideas; while you draft, to keep 
track of your material; while you revise, to check the logical flow of thought 
or to reveal what information is missing, repeated, or off the topic; or in 
whatever other ways you find helpful.

Informal outlines

An informal outline is a working plan that lays out the major points of 
an essay. Because it’s informal, it doesn’t need to use the numbering and 
lettering conventions of a formal outline. Complete sentences aren’t 
required; words and phrases are acceptable. Carol Moreno used an informal 
outline for planning her essay (3f). Here’s how she roughed out her third 
paragraph.

Carol Moreno’s informal outline  Thesis statement: With the right 
training, women can also “pump iron” to build strength.
   how to use weights
   safety is vital
   free weights
     don’t bend at waist
     align neck and back
     look straight ahead
   weight machines—safety
What is outlining?

**Formal outlines**

A traditional formal outline follows long-established conventions for using numbers and letters to show relationships among ideas. Although MLA style doesn’t officially endorse one outline style, most instructors who assign outlines prefer the traditional format. Other instructors prefer a formal outline that shows the content of both the introductory paragraph and the concluding paragraph. Either type of formal outline can be a sentence outline, composed entirely of complete sentences, or it can be a topic outline, composed only of words and phrases. In this section, we show a traditional sentence outline as well as a formal topic outline. Never mix the two styles in one outline.

Here are some tips to help you write successful outlines. Most important, formal outlines always need at least two subdivisions at each level—there must be no I without a II, no A without a B, and so on. If a level has only one subdivision, either integrate it into the higher level or expand it to at least two subdivisions. Second, keep all subdivisions at the same level of generality (that is, don’t pair a main idea with a subordinate idea, and don’t pair a subordinating idea with a supporting detail). Third, keep your word forms parallel at each level of generality. For a full discussion of parallelism, see Chapter 18.

Here’s part of a topic outline of the final draft of Carol Moreno’s essay on weight lifting for women (3f.3). A sample from a sentence outline follows it so that you can compare the two types of outlines.

**TOPIC OUTLINE**  *Thesis statement:* With the right training, women can also “pump iron” to build strength.

I. Avoidance of massive muscle development  
   A. Role of women’s biology  
      1. Not much muscle-bulking hormone  
      2. Muscles longer, not bulkier  
   B. Role of combining exercise types  
      1. Anaerobic (weight lifting)  
      2. Aerobic (swimming)

**SENTENCE OUTLINE**  *Thesis statement:* With the right training, women can also “pump iron” to build strength.

I. The right training lets women who lift weights avoid developing massive muscles.  
   A. Women’s biology plays a role.  
      1. Women don’t produce much of a specific muscle-bulking hormone.  
      2. Women’s muscles tend to grow longer rather than bulkier.  
   B. Combining different kinds of exercise also plays a role.  
      1. Anaerobic exercise, like weight lifting, builds muscle.  
      2. Aerobic exercise, like swimming, builds endurance and stamina.
CHAPTER 3

Drafting and Revising

In the writing process, drafting and revising come after planning and shaping (Chapter 2). Drafting means you get ideas onto paper or into a computer file in sentences and paragraphs. In everyday conversation, people use the word writing to talk about drafting, but writing is too broad a term here. The word drafting more accurately describes what you do when you write your first attempt—your first draft—to generate words. Revising means you look over your first draft, analyze and evaluate it for yourself, and then rewrite it by composing a number of subsequent versions, or drafts, to get closer to what you want to say. Revising involves adding, cutting, moving material, and after that, editing and proofreading.

What can help me write a first draft?

A first draft is the initial version of a piece of writing. Before you begin a first draft, seek out places and times of the day that encourage you to write.

EXERCISE 2-6 Here is part of a sentence outline. Individually or with your peer-response group, revise it into a topic outline. Then, be ready to explain why you prefer using a topic outline or a sentence outline as a guide to writing. For help, consult 2n.

Thesis statement: Common noise pollution, although it causes many problems in our society, can be reduced.

I. Noise pollution comes from many sources.
   A. Noise pollution occurs in many large cities.
      1. Traffic rumbles and screeches.
      2. Construction work blasts.
      3. Airplanes roar overhead.
   B. Noise pollution occurs in the workplace.
      1. Machines in factories boom.
      2. Machines used for outdoor construction thunder.
   C. Noise pollution occurs during leisure-time activities.
      1. Stereo headphones blare directly into eardrums.
      2. Film soundtracks bombard the ears.
      3. Music in discos assaults the ears.

II. Noise pollution causes many problems.
   A. Excessive noise damages hearing.
   B. Excessive noise alters moods.
   C. Constant exposure to noise limits learning ability.