

Fundamentals of writing

[Sociology](#), [Communication](#)



Fundamentals of Writing, Part One: What to Do Before You Start Writing

Writing—just reading the word might make you cringe. There are many possible reasons why students do not like to write. Writing instructors usually hear My grammar is horrible, I had a writing teacher who marked up all my papers in red, or I just cannot think of anything. Maybe you have similar reasons for not wanting to write; maybe you are excited to write, but you do not know where to start. If you break the process of writing into segments, it may not overwhelm you. Perhaps this process may also ease some of your anxieties and inspire you not only to write but also to enjoy writing. Before you actually pick up a pen or start typing, stop and plan. Ask yourself the following questions and come up with answers before you start to write: 1. What are the instructions for this writing? 2. What is my purpose for writing? 3. Who is my audience? 4. How should the overall structure of my writing look? 5. What should my tone be? Understand the Instructions First, read the instructions. Whether it is an assignment from an instructor or a project from a boss, stop and read the instructions carefully so you know just what is expected. If you have questions, do not hesitate to ask. The following terms are frequently used in instructions for an assignment or a project. The definition will help you understand what to include in your writing. | Term | Definition | | | | Analyze | Identify the elements of a subject, and discuss how they work | | | together. | | Argue or Persuade | Take a position on a subject, and support your position with evidence. | | Compare and Contrast | Explain the similarities and differences between subjects. | | Define | Specify the meaning of a term or idea. | | Describe | Detail the events or characteristics that occurred as well as the | | | results. | | Discuss | Examine

the main points of a view regarding a topic. | | Evaluate | Judge the qualities (pro and con) of a subject. | | Interpret | Explain the meaning of a concept or consequences of an action. | | Report | Present available information on a subject. | | Summarize | State the main points in a text, argument, or other work. |

Determine Your Purpose After you know the assignment expectations, you can then determine your purpose, or reason for writing. Everything has a purpose. If you share a funny story with a friend, your purpose is to entertain. If you write a business proposal, your purpose is to persuade your manager to approve it. If a family member wonders why you are attending Axia, you may explain that your purpose is to get a college education. If you are having trouble thinking of a purpose, try writing a brief purpose statement. For example, suppose you want to write a paper on rural development. Your purpose statement might look similar to the following: My purpose is to write an argumentative paper on the effects of rural development. I intend to argue my points with evidence in order to persuade both rural and urban residents to think twice about the costs of development. Your purpose statement will help you identify your audience and determine what research you need for your essay. After you become a more experienced writer, you can formulate the purpose in your mind, rather than on paper.

Know Your Audience Next, determine your audience. You must know exactly for whom you are writing, why the reader will read your writing, and what the reader needs or expects from you. After all, writing (except for writing to yourself) is meant as a form of communication—information you want to share with others about a particular subject. Is the writing for your friends? Your boss? Your peers and instructor? Pinpoint your

audience and their characteristics as well as what you need to provide for them in your writing. Consider the following questions about your audience: - What do my readers already know about my topic? - What do my readers want or need to know about the topic? - What level of language is appropriate for this audience? Plan a Structure After you have determined your purpose and audience, determine what type of structure to use. Consider the following questions: - If the writing is for a business purpose, would an email, memo, letter, report, or proposal be most appropriate? - What type of formatting should you use to showcase your ideas? - If the writing is academic, how long does the essay or research paper need to be? - Do you need to include a title page or include in-text citations and a reference page? Again, the assignment instructions should provide guidelines for the best structure to use. Establish an Appropriate Tone Finally, you need to determine the appropriate tone for what you are writing. The way you talk to your best friend differs from the way you speak to your boss. The same is true in writing—the tone of an email you send to your friend is different from one you send to your boss, even if the content is the same. Consider the following messages. Even though the content is similar, the tone and word choices are different because on the different audiences.

Email to Friend Email to Boss The first email is informal; the second is formal. Most of the writing you will do in this class is formal. Informal writing is used to write for your friends, other acquaintances, or creative writing. Formal writing is used for academic or professional purposes, expected in most of your college courses as well as in your business writings. Consider the following differences between formal and informal communication: | | Formal

Communication | Informal Communication | | | | | Purpose | Defined by materials or previous communication | Defined by relationship or previous communication | | Audience | Audience is a manager, client, or instructor | Audience is a friend or family member | | Style | Style is structured | Style is unstructured | | Tone | Respectful | Personal or humorous | | Word Choice | Professional or academic | Slang, contractions, incorrect grammar or | | | | punctuation | Wrap-Up Before you even begin to start your writing project, it is best to first plan. You plan by asking yourself the following questions:

What are the instructions? What is my purpose? Who is my audience? What will my structure be? What should my tone be? It is very important to answer these questions before you start writing. Although it may be tempting to dive right into the assignment, the process of getting there will be smoother if you think about and answer these questions first. The best part is the end result—you will produce a more effective, higher-quality piece of writing.

----- Hey, you, how's it going? Well, you're not going to believe this, but I got the chickenpox!! Isn't that crazy?! I probably shouldn't even be up on the computer because I feel so sick, but I had to tell you because I wanted to let you know why I won't be at classes this week. (I'm going to have to talk to the teachers about making up the work. *sigh*. Anyway, TTYL. Jenna Dear Mr. Smith: I am sorry to have to send this bad news to you this morning, but I have come down with the chickenpox. I feel very sick, and the doctor said I will probably be out for 2 weeks. I will keep you informed as to my progress. I really enjoy my job and regret having to be out, so please let me know if there's anything I can do while I'm at home. Thank you for your understanding. Sincerely, Jenna