

Prewriting

Prewriting should be the initial stage of your writing process. This process includes brainstorming, critical reading, research, and organization. During this stage, you should not be even writing your draft yet but should be organizing your thoughts and ideas as they relate to your assignment's guidelines. As you go through this phase, always remember that writing is a process! If you find yourself experiencing writers' block, don't panic! Every writer experiences writers' block at some point; however, following these steps may help you overcome the initial fear that comes with getting started.

1. Understanding Assignment Guidelines

- Make sure you read the assignment guidelines and understand them before starting.
- If you are unsure about assignment requirements, contact your professor and ask for clarification.
- Read some example papers from previous semesters if available.

2. Choosing Your Topic

- In some cases, your professor will have already assigned you a topic. However, most students are allowed to choose their own topics.
- If you have the freedom to choose your own topic, make sure you choose something that you are passionate about or enjoy researching.
- Make sure your topic is relevant. This allows you to find plenty of sources to back your ideas up, and you will be able to relate the topic to modern examples.
- Make sure your topic is not too broad but not too specific. It can be very difficult to find scholarship on niche topics, but a topic that is too broad does not allow for deep analysis.
- As you are contemplating topics, identify your audience (hint: it's most likely not your professor) and your purpose in choosing a particular topic.

3. Developing Your Thesis Statement

- A strong thesis statement should clearly state the main point of your essay in one to two sentences.
- Make sure it answers the "what" and "why" of your topic.
- Your thesis should be specific. Your thesis should not be "Social media is bad." Instead, your thesis should be something like: "Social media causes mental health issues in America's teenagers."
- Make sure your thesis matches the content of your paper. If your argument changes, be sure to adjust your thesis to these changes.
- Your thesis should cause readers to want to continue reading your paper.

4. Locating Sources

- When looking for academic, peer reviewed sources, be sure to go through the Kares Library databases.
- As you begin to find sources that relate to your topic and thesis, be sure to add them to a reference page so you don't lose them. If you decide not to use a source, you can always delete it later.
- As you read through your sources, take note of relevant information and add in-text citations as you go.

5. Developing Your Analysis

- Think about specific ways you can expand on your topic and thesis using the sources you have located.
- As you take notes on your sources, think about the major opinions and claims that already exist on your topic and thesis.
- As you read through these claims, start developing your own thoughts on the subject. These will be your main ideas.
- Next, you will begin expanding on these main ideas. This expansion will be your supporting ideas.
- Don't be afraid to jot things down as they come to you, even if there seems to be no organization or flow. You can better organize your thoughts once you start outlining.

6. Outlining

- Place your thesis statement at the beginning of your outline.
- Break off your main ideas into sections (these sections will be your paragraphs), labeling them with Roman numerals (I, II, III, etc.).
- Below these sections, list your supporting ideas, labeling them with bullets or lowercase letters (a, b, c, etc.).
- Repeat this process until you have the correct number of paragraphs.

Prewriting Strategies:

- **Listing** – List as many ideas associated with your topic as possible. This process allows you to focus your topic while guiding the writing process for future development.
- **Looping** – Builds off of previous freewriting sessions. After freewriting, identify a significant idea from your session and free write on that particular idea. With each freewriting session, you begin to focus on specific ideas that support your topic. After a few looping sessions, you should be able to develop a draft or thesis.

- Journalistic Questioning – Helps you identify your purpose and audience. This process allows you to answer six questions regarding your topic and thesis: Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?
- Outlining – Allows you to organize the ideas you will be discussing in your paper. You can create sections (introduction, conclusion, body, etc.) each with a main idea (topic sentence), evidence, and/or analyses. This allows writers to get a sense of the ideas of their paper.
- Talking – Simply discussing your ideas with someone allows you to get a better understanding of your ideas. Take note of any suggestions or questions asked by your audience to determine specific things to address in your paper.

The Writing Center at Athens State University supports writers! We assist with any kind of writing and assist writers at any stage of their writing process; whether you just need help getting started, you're on the final draft, or somewhere in between, writing consultants will work with you one-on-one offering guidance, feedback and a listening ear. We do not criticize, evaluate, or "fix" writing, grammar and punctuation, but instead provide feedback, revision suggestions and resources to help you accomplish your purpose and goals. You can meet with a peer consultant or professional tutor in person or online including some nights and weekends.

