



W. L. Adams Center for Writing

A COMPOSING PROCESS FOR ESSAY WRITERS

Situational Analysis: Determine the purpose (or need) for a piece of writing and the specific topic you will write about. At this stage, you will determine the target audience of your essay and the point of view, or perspective, from which to write. This information will help you choose a persona (or role), giving the piece a sense of character and style. Consider the following factors:

- The audience's level of knowledge and experience
- The audience's perspective
- Your relationship to the audience
- The audience's probable attitude toward the essay (interested? hostile? indifferent?).

Discovery: If you already know a great deal about the topic, you can brainstorm for your own information. Begin by asking what you already know or believe about the chosen topic. Then ask what information you still need (and where you can get it) in order to write about the topic with authority. Gather the material and information you need to inform and persuade your readers, consulting library or Internet sources. You may also need to interview experts in the field you're exploring. A good mix of personal knowledge, research, and interviews often leads to the most persuasive body of evidence.

Drafting and Revising: Some writers work from an outline while others uncover information and patterns of arrangement as they write. There is no single uniquely correct way to draft, though deadlines tend to accelerate the process. Use whatever approach works best for you, as long as you meet the deadlines. Be sure to support your claims and conclusions with data, specific details, and other evidence. Is the arrangement logical and effective? Have you provided all the information the reader needs or have you left out essential details or failed to answer important questions? Revision means more than correcting grammar, punctuation, and spelling; it also means asking yourself if you have presented the information in the most effective way? If not, consider restructuring the essay or developing ideas more thoroughly, cutting unnecessary details, words, paragraphs, or even sections.

Editing: Once all the pieces are in place, you can worry about errors of grammar, spelling, and punctuation, and the use of passive voice, vague pronouns, and redundant words or elements. As a writer, your central mission is to communicate clearly and concisely. Anything that impedes this may hurt the quality of the piece.