

The Writing Process: Prewriting and Creating a Thesis

LEARNING OUTCOMES

After reading this chapter and working through its activities, you will

- deepen your understanding of the writing process;
- be ready to use prewriting strategies to generate ideas;
- review the steps for creating an effective essay;
- narrow a subject into a topic appropriate for an essay;
- use forms of questioning to develop a thesis statement;
- write more effective thesis statements.

The stages you will go through in structured writing situations such as those you find in this book comprise your writing process. Beginning with this chapter, you will find a guide, a method for helping you to work through each stage of this process.

THINKING AND WRITING—STARTING THE PROCESS

Writing is not creating a perfectly formed essay on your first try—no one does that. You work your way through a series of stages as you write an essay. As you work, you will discover what you think. You find new avenues of thought, change direction, or even go backwards for a while.

While everyone's writing process is a bit different, following the sequence on the next page teaches you to separate the tasks involved and allows you to benefit

from using the appropriate type of thinking for each task. Do not see this as a rigid pattern, but as a guideline to make your work easier. There are specific strategies to assist you with each stage.

The Stages of the Writing Process

1. The Discovery Stage: Prewriting

Generate raw material, finding out what you have to say, using the creative, spontaneous parts of your mind as you explore your thoughts. Working on the ideas you generate with your prewriting will help you find a focus, a point to which your ideas relate.

2. The Analyzing and Ordering Stage: Creating a Thesis and an Outline

Test the focus you have discovered, the point you would like to make, as you develop it into a trial thesis. Now analyze your purpose, what you want your essay to mean to your audience, and finalize your thesis. As you do so, you clarify your supporting points as well. With your thesis prepared, you are ready to use the ordering parts of your mind. Give the ideas from your prewriting a structured shape by creating an outline based on your thesis. When you outline, you form your essay's skeleton, and begin to see its full shape.

3. The Writing Stage: Drafting

When you write your first draft, you develop your outline into full sentence form. You concentrate on your content, on expressing your ideas and support as clearly as possible. Do not yet worry about sentence structure or grammar; focus on your content. Be prepared to write at least two drafts.

4. The Revising Stage: Polishing Ideas and Sentences

In the final stage, you have two tasks: revising your content and proofreading your writing. This stage is crucial to writing effectively for your purpose and audience; leave yourself enough time to do your ideas justice.

Explore and practise various forms of prewriting as you work through the following pages and through your semester. Find starting points for your writing process that work for you.

Later in this chapter, you will begin stage two of your writing process as you consider your purpose, your audience, and analyze how to state your thesis or point. The chapters of Part One will guide you through the rest of the writing process. In Chapter 3, you return to stage two, and begin, thesis in hand, to create an outline, a structure for your essay. You will also learn methods for developing effective support for your thesis. Once you have done so, you are prepared for stage three, drafting and refining your essay. Chapter 4 helps you to craft your essay so that it is coherent and well structured. Finally, Chapter 5 brings you to revising and proofreading your essay, preparing it for your reader.

STAGE 1: PREWRITING—EXPLORING YOUR IDEAS

When you use any prewriting strategy, you generate raw material and notes to lead you toward a topic-focus and a direction for your first draft. Make a conscious decision to work only on this idea-generating stage for the time being. Turn off

your internal censor, the voice telling you that you might do something wrong. There are no mistakes at this stage, except not prewriting at all.

As you begin, here are three common-sense tips. Neglecting any of these can undo even your best efforts.

1. Leave enough time to do a good job. You need a minimum of three days to work through the four stages of the writing process.
2. If you are unclear about any part of your assignment, speak to or email your instructor. Writing instructors appreciate your concern and are willing to help.
3. If you are concerned about language or sentence-structure problems, and you delay starting writing assignments because of this concern, ask your instructor about language or writing-skills assistance available from your college or university. As you begin working on these issues, you will find expressing yourself less intimidating.

Start Here: Narrow and Specify Your Topic

To generate ideas, you need a topic, a single idea you can explore in your essay. Even if you have been assigned a topic, you will still need to find a specific aspect that interests you. More often, you will be assigned a general subject; for example, “food banks.” You could write a book (or several books) on that subject. For an essay, you could have real trouble developing a viewpoint on an idea as broad and as general as “food banks.”

Even if you narrow it to “food banks in Canada,” you would still have enough material for a book or lengthy report. What you need is a specific aspect, a well-defined subsection of that narrowed topic. “Faith-supported food banks in Calgary,” for example, represents a third and fourth division of the subject: *food banks*>*food banks in Canada*>*food banks in Calgary*>*faith-supported food banks in Calgary*. College and university essays do not deal in vague generalities about large subjects; they look deeply into a single specific topic.

● ● ● ● ● ACTIVITY

Here are typical lists reflecting stages you might go through in moving from a general subject to a specific topic. Number the stages in each list from 1 to 4, with 1 indicating the most general stage or subject, and 4 marking the specific topic.

LIST A

- _____ Class sizes
- _____ Education
- _____ Lectures and tutorials
- _____ Small-group learning

LIST C

- _____ Retail companies
- _____ Supermarkets
- _____ Dealing with customers
- _____ Working in a supermarket

LIST B

- _____ Bicycles
- _____ Dangers of bike riding
- _____ Transportation
- _____ Personal vehicles

LIST D

- _____ Genetic studies
- _____ Genetically modified vegetables
- _____ Science
- _____ Biology

PREWRITING: FOUR TECHNIQUES

Here are four techniques that will encourage you to think about and develop a topic and get words on paper: (1) freewriting, (2) questioning, (3) making a list, and (4) diagramming. General prewriting can help you generate ideas and focused prewriting can help you to organize and refine your thoughts. Any of these techniques can be used in combination with another, as you will see in the following sections.

Technique 1: Freewriting

Freewriting is jotting down, in rough sentences or phrases, everything you can think of about a possible topic. Write non-stop for three to five minutes. Explore any idea and put down whatever pops into your head. If you get stuck for words, repeat yourself until more words come.

When you freewrite, your only goal is to get your mind running. You will find any writing task easier when you have something other than a blank page or screen to work from. Ideas and impressions become clearer after you put them on paper. These ideas, in turn, usually lead to other ideas and connections, and unexpected thoughts may even lead you to another possible focus. That's fine. Through continued practice, you will develop the habit of thinking as you write.

Now, put away the eraser or liquid paper, resist the urge to hit “delete,” and start freewriting. Forget about spelling, grammar, and punctuation; let the inventive part of your mind run free.

Freewriting: A Student Model

During general freewriting, you discover that your specific topic emerges as the thing you are writing most about. Or, like Jed, the student writer below, you consciously decide on one idea that sparks a connection. Typically you use freewriting to generate ideas about a broad topic, then you use it in a more goal-directed way to explore your specific topic. You may also, after doing some reading about your topic, go directly to writing a rough draft of your essay: this is **directed freewriting**, about which you will read more below.

General Freewriting to Generate Ideas

Jed Gawrys, a General Arts and Sciences student, was assigned the general topic of values in society. Here is his freewriting, complete with errors:

Values are moral values? Whos supposed to show these values, celebrities? They don't have values that i can understand but socieity watches every move they make. Tiger Woods? What are values? How we treat other people or do unto others or something. Individual people can have values, can groups have values? What we put value on—that's it—turns into what media says is right***. Right now—street racing is like a crime but movies glamorize it like Fast & Furious. What's right here? Im stuck here no I've been watching Stanley Cup playoffs

and everybody says hockey is violent. But teams have to win to succeed just like any business. So society says winning is good and it doesn't matter what it costs—that's a value but a wrong one. Stuck again and again and we don't want to think about poor people either. Like with sports we don't care about the losers and what will happen if we don't have health care in Canada anymore? We only care about success and what the media tells us is good like being wealthy and being a winner. Look at what hockey and basketball players earn, it doesn't make any sense.

Jed completed his first freewriting in class and showed it to his instructor: “I have some possibilities for topics here, but they seem kind of weak. The idea about media and society telling us something is good when it's not is interesting. And I keep coming up with connections to professional sports. But those aren't topics yet, are they?” Still trying to clarify his ideas about social values, he Googled the phrase. One of his notes appears below:

- values of groups of people shape what we accept—hockey players & violence
- set of values doesn't necessarily last forever—racism used to be accepted
- examples of moral values: equality, no discrimination, treating the poor and sick people—are these values society and media have?

URL: http://www.cencomfut.com/social_values.htm

If you feel, after trying any prewriting strategy, that you do not know enough about your topic, or would just like to try a different way to stimulate your thinking, do some reading. Try words related to your topic as keywords on a search engine, then make notes of any relevant ideas. Every time you make a note, write down the URL of the site where you found your information. If you have time, check the print resources in your school's library, and note the title of the book or article and the author's name. If you wish to add some research information to your essay, read Chapter 18 on quoting, paraphrasing, and citing your sources. Doing a little research is an excellent preparation for future academic and career writing.

Directed Freewriting: Discovery Drafts

Many writers, like Jed, prefer to write a very rough draft of their essay once they have a sense of their topic. They write this rough or discovery draft after doing some prewriting, and perhaps a little research. Directed freewriting does not mean that you skip a step in the writing process by not making an outline. You will make your outline after this draft. Writing a discovery draft is simply another, more structured type of freewriting, in which you are working toward turning your topic into a trial thesis.

Here is Jed's discovery draft, with spelling and sentence-structure errors corrected, based on his freewriting and his reading:

Professional sports show us how bad society's values can be. Competition has always been the core at the pro level—it's all based on winning because that's what brings in the money. What's the difference between hockey players trying to disable each other and corporations destroying their competition? Society says winning makes it all okay, no matter whom you hurt. Was it always

this way—some values do change—racism isn’t accepted anymore. People who were racists thought they were winning out over people they insulted. They were stronger because they could hurt other people. In North America the rich seem to discriminate against the poor now, but racial issues still cause a lot of violence in some places, and society and the media condemn this violence. They only accept violence when it makes them more powerful. Look at sports again—I read an article that said that in 2008 there were 664 fights in 1230 NHL games. Violence is okay if it sells tickets and makes the sports industry powerful. It’s the same with movies. Who has any morals in this—powerful people?

Jed thought about this draft and decided that he had some kind of point. He liked the idea of how similar the negative values in professional sports were to those reflected in everyday society.

His instructor asked him who he thought his audience was: Jed felt it was adults like his instructor and probably his fellow students as well. “Everyone knows that pro sports has a twisted value system,” he said. “And even people my age know that you don’t always get paid for hard work and being a good person. Movies and the music industry show us that all the time. Who has any values now?”

Later in this chapter you will see how Jed developed this idea into thesis-planning sentences that defined his purpose and method of development for his essay.

Technique 2: Questioning

If you are a methodical individual who likes order and structure, questioning may offer you a comfortable method to work with. Freewriting gets around the ordering parts of your mind; questioning gives you a framework for inquiry. Its structure gives you a sense of direction and clarity, especially if you find unstructured approaches too “loose.” Questioning can also help you through a temporary blank period, and show you different angles on your topic. This technique is particularly effective in writing situations where you have some knowledge of your subject, whether you have gained it through experience or research. Ask yourself as many questions as you can think of about your subject; your answers will be a series of different “takes” or focuses on it. Such questions include *Why? When? Where? Who?* and *How?*

Begin by dividing your page or screen into two columns: *Questions* and *Answers*, as you see on the following page. Leave enough space in the *Answers* column so that you can return to a particular response if more details come to you later. Next, ask yourself these preliminary questions: *What is my topic? What is my purpose? Who is my audience?* For the moment, just put down rough answers to the *purpose* and *audience* questions; you may adjust these as you work on your questioning. Then, write your answers for the rest of your question-and-answer series. If one question stops you, just go on to another.

Here are some questions that Tina, a student writer, might ask while developing an essay on the disadvantages of seeing movies in theatres:

Questioning: A Student Model

Questions

What is my topic and viewpoint?

What is my purpose?

Who is my audience?

Why don't I like to go to the theatre?

When is going to the movies a problem?

Where are problems with movie-going?

Who creates the problems?

How can I deal with the problem?

Answers

I do not like seeing movies in theatres.

To explain why I dislike going to movie theatres—to justify myself?

People my age? Other movie fans who like or dislike going to the theatre?

Just too many problems involved.

Could be any time—when movie is popular the theatre is too crowded, when traffic is bad the trip is a drag.

On the highway, in the parking lot, at the concession stand, in the theatre itself.

I do by wanting to eat too much.

The patrons do by creating disturbances.

The theatre owners do by not having enough parking space and showing too many commercials.

I can stay home, download movies, or watch them on DVD or cable TV.

Questioning as Second-Stage Prewriting

If you have done some general freewriting, but are still not sure about a focused topic for your paper, try questioning, using your freewriting as a reference. Look for key words or phrases in your freewriting, words you have returned to or that seem particularly connected to your topic. Use that word or phrase in your series of questions.

Questioning can give you a surer sense of purpose, or help you revise your purpose. For example, if you find more details accumulating under a *why* question than under a *how* question, your overall purpose could be to show causes of something (*Why* did something happen? *Why is something a good/bad idea?*) or to persuade readers, rather than to explain something to them. (*This is how something happens. This is how something became good or bad.*) As well, questioning may reveal more about audience-focus. If your points explain too much or too little for the audience you have in mind, or if information in your answers does not match your audience's needs, this is the ideal time to change your audience-focus or to work further on your prewriting if your audience is set out in your assignment.

- Questioning may reveal your main supporting points clearly as answers to one or more questions.
- Questioning can yield answers that may be rich sources of connected ideas—making some of your organizing and outlining a little easier.
- Questioning can show you directions for paragraphs within an essay; if you have many answers to *Why*, you may want to explore the causes of a subject.

● ● ● ● ● ACTIVITY

Practise questioning by writing down a series of questions about good or bad experiences. How many details can you accumulate in your answers in ten minutes? Don't waste time worrying about "mistakes"; the important thing here is your ideas.

Now, examine your answers. You are looking for a potential direction or focus, based on the questions that yielded the most responses.

Choose the question that generated the most answers and answer these questions: *What is my topic? Do I have a particular viewpoint on it? What would be my purpose in writing about my subject? Who would be my audience?*

For example, assume you asked yourself questions about the good experience of learning to ride horses, and the most fruitful question was *Why?* Your topic-focus is learning to ride; your viewpoint is that it is a valuable and/or healthful experience. Your purposes could be to inform and persuade in general, and more specifically, to explain to readers why riding is such an excellent activity. Your audiences would likely be your peers and instructor, and people who do not already ride horses.

Technique 3: List Making

List making is simply making point-form notes of ideas that relate to your subject. List as separate points as many ideas as you can about your topic. Avoid making sentences out of your points, and never worry about repeating yourself; your mind may be trying out a variation on some idea. Lists have more structure than free-writing, but less than questioning, so list making appeals to a variety of writers.

One risk you may find when you list ideas for the first time is this: because listing ideas is an ordering activity, you could be tempted to organize your ideas prematurely. If this happens, stop ordering and keep adding new items. Use listing for its value as an informal, clean-looking way of recording ideas on the page or screen.

After writing his directed draft, Jed wanted to see his ideas set out more clearly. He made the following list of his ideas:

List Making: A Student Model

- pro sports show how bad our values are
- people seem to approve of violence in sports—hockey
- winning sells tickets, so it's good (?)
- what about corporations "killing off" competing companies and firing people when they want to close factories somewhere?

- in business, you're in to win—the same as sports—all those motivational speakers!
- does the idea about racism or discrimination go next?
- racism is against the law here, but it's not gone in other places
- social values do change sometimes—that website
- there are all kinds of discrimination
- rich people are the winners and the celebrities and no matter what they do, they're "right"
- should I put *a* beside sports ideas and *b* beside society or business side?
- violence is bad—everybody knows that—people associate fighting with power though
- find out the number of fights in the NHL in 2010—from that site

One detail led to another and then another. By the time he had finished his list, he was ready to think about his thesis and group his points under trial topic headings.

List making works as a first or second stage of prewriting.

- List making after freewriting can stimulate you to think of more points and details.
- List making after freewriting or questioning displays your thoughts in a simple, uncluttered form, so you can evaluate them.
- List making is useful for writers who like to connect ideas graphically with lines and circles.

List Making as Second-Stage Prewriting

Second-stage list making is an excellent method for organizing ideas and creating a hierarchy or order of importance for your ideas. Number your points and ideas before outlining, or sort out points and related supporting details from your list.

If you work on the computer, you can move items around easily and copy, cut, and paste phrases into different positions. You can keep your document clean and tidy as you work, making the ordering process less confusing. Number your points in order of importance, or try bolding the main points and grouping related ideas beneath them in plain text. You can save any ideas about which you are uncertain at the bottom of the screen or in a separate document.

● ● ● ● ● ACTIVITY

List a series of realistic goals, major or minor, that you would like to accomplish within the next year. Your goals can involve personal, academic, and career matters.

- Now, imagine you are listing your goals for your best friend to read—revise your list to reflect any changes.
- Next, revise your list to suit your instructor as your reading audience.
- Finally, adjust your list for a complete stranger, someone sitting next to you on a bus, to read.
- What changes did you make, and why, in each case?

Technique 4: Clustering

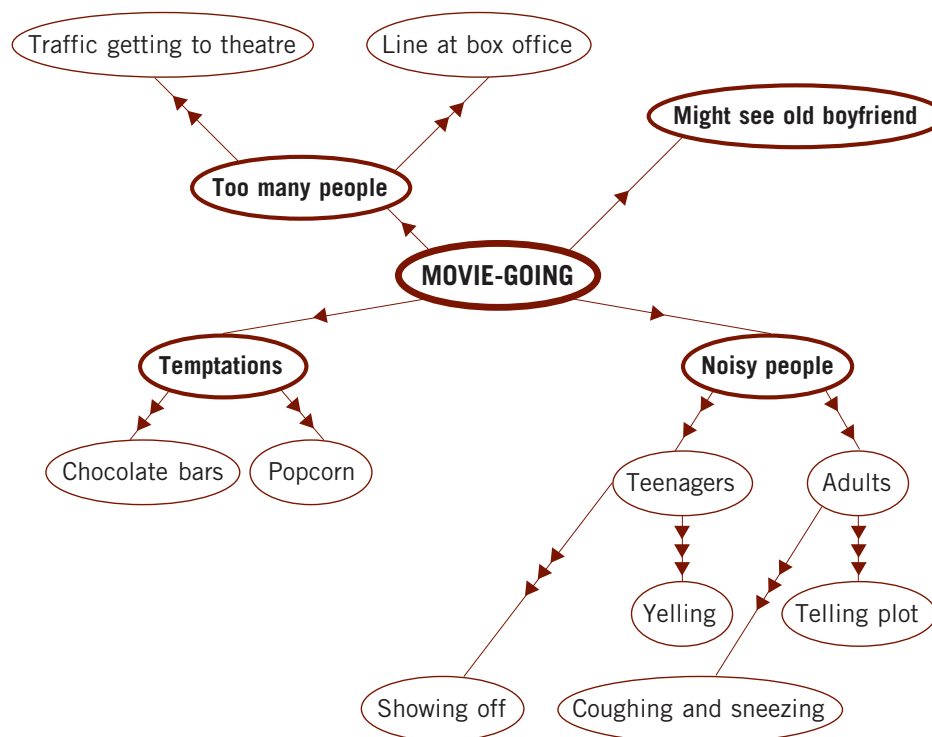
Clustering, or *diagramming* or *mapping*, is another strategy for generating ideas. People who enjoy thinking visually can use lines, boxes, arrows, and circles to show relationships among the ideas and details that occur to them. Clustering also prevents “sentence block” because you note points and details only in words and phrases.

State your subject in a few words in the centre of a blank sheet of paper. Then, as ideas and details come to you, put them in boxes or circles around the subject. As you find relationships between ideas and groups of ideas, draw lines to connect them to each other and to the subject. When you cluster to generate ideas, keep creating “word bubbles” and connecting them to each other. You will need to allow some time after completing your first stage to decide which ideas are more important than others. Clustering, like freewriting, shows relationships between ideas rather than their order of importance.

There is no right or wrong way of clustering; it is a way to think on paper about how various ideas and details relate to one another. Below is an example of clustering that Tina, the student writing about the disadvantages of movie-going, might have produced to develop her ideas *after* freewriting.

Clustering: A Student Model

When you use clustering to organize your first-stage prewriting, you will need to show the specific relationships between items in your diagram. Decide on a method for doing so. You may work vertically on the page, placing your main



idea at the top and extending your supporting-point bubbles below it, followed by detail-bubbles beneath each. You could also, as Tina has done, work from the centre of the page outward, showing your levels of structure in different colours or degrees of boldness. In this case, the main-idea and supporting-point bubbles are in bold, and the relationship of details to supporting points is clearly visible.

Clustering as Second-Stage Prewriting

The pictorial aspect of clustering makes it useful for the second stage of prewriting. When you are trying to decide between main points and details, and show how these fit together, a cluster diagram with visual ordering cues will help you to see the overall shape and content of an essay.

- Second-stage clustering can reveal a paragraph’s focus and the levels of details within, as Tina’s “noisy people” set of clusters shows.
- Second-stage clustering can prepare you for outlining and drafting if you show different levels of links between points and details.

The only limitation of clustering is that your page can sometimes become too messy to follow. Avoid this by starting a clean second page where you can distinguish between possible supporting points and details. Refer back to the diagram of clustering for techniques to help you clarify levels of support and connections.

● ● ● ● ● **ACTIVITY**

Use clustering to organize the list of year-ahead goals that you created for the previous activity (page 21).

There is only one guideline for prewriting: go with what works for you. When one technique is not working, simply stop and try another. Occasionally, you may use several techniques at once: you may cluster and sort through a list at the same time. Any technique that gets your ideas flowing is good.

Now look at the plan below. You are partway through your first step; you have a topic and some ideas in hand, and it is time to move on to creating a key part of your essay—your thesis statement.

Four Steps for Effective Essay Writing

1. **Discover your point, and advance a clear thesis statement.**
2. **Support your thesis with specific evidence.**
3. **Organize and connect your specific evidence.**
4. **Revise, edit, and proofread your essay.**

STAGE 2: CREATING A THESIS

Once your topic is focused and you have explored some related ideas, you are ready to work on the key element in your essay: your thesis statement. As you read in Chapter 1, essays are goal-driven writing formats. Your goal is to challenge your

readers to see why you make the point you do about your topic. Your thesis statement is your challenge to readers.

A thesis statement is, in its simplest form, your topic and your viewpoint on your topic. After prewriting, you have limited your topic; now you must establish what you think about your topic and why: this is your viewpoint. Your viewpoint on your topic drives your essay.

Military service should be required in Canada.

Topic

Viewpoint

What is your first response to the statement above? It is probably *Why?* You react to a statement that is not a simple fact. An effective thesis is a point that needs to be argued: that Canada should have compulsory military service. In terms of argument, the thesis statement is a conclusion you come to after considering your topic, but it is your introduction to your argument for your readers.

Without the viewpoint or controlling concept (your attitude, limiting thought, or focus) this topic alone is just a fact; it has no force:

This essay is about military service (in Canada).

What is your response to this statement? Is it *So what?* There is no force here, no challenge to you as a reader: this sentence is a label, not a thesis statement. How then do you create a thesis statement that is interesting and worthwhile to readers?

Writing an Effective Thesis Begins with Asking Questions

I: Thesis Development Questions

You can ask yourself certain types of questions based on your prewriting that will help you form a trial or working thesis. If you worked through the activities on questioning on pages 18 and 20, you have already explored this method of defining a thesis. Recall the PAT concept from Chapter 1: you decide, based on responses from questioning, what your purpose, audience, topic, and viewpoint are.

Look at your prewriting and ask yourself the following questions:

What is my topic?

What do I want to do with my topic? (In other words, what is my purpose? To explain? To persuade? To define? To analyze?)

So what then is my viewpoint?

Who is my audience, aside from my instructor?

Why will my topic interest my audience?

What ideas are there in my prewriting that will help me with what I want to get across to my audience?

Answering these questions will usually lead you to a clear statement of topic and viewpoint, a trial thesis.

The responses below are those of the student author of the thesis statement about compulsory military service.

What is my topic? Serving in the Canadian Forces

What do I want to do with my topic? (What do I want to prove? What is my purpose?)

I think I want to tell people why it's a good thing for young people to join the Canadian Forces. No, I keep looking at the stuff I wrote down and it's more than that. Young people should serve in the Canadian Forces—that's it. That's really what I think; most of us have no direction and no idea of what's going on outside of our group of friends.

So what then is my viewpoint?

Young people should be required to serve in the Canadian Forces.

Who is my audience, aside from my instructor?

Other people my age, obviously—but also adults who think we're lazy and not interested in anything but ourselves—and also people who know anyone serving overseas.

Why will my topic interest my audience(s)?

I think generally because it's so different—Canadians don't think about going into the military. Especially people I'm in school with; they have probably never met anyone who's had anything to do with the Canadian Forces. It's kind of an informative essay, I think, as well as a persuasive one.

What ideas are there in my prewriting that will help me with what I want to get across to my audience(s)?

If I'm writing to students, they should know that the Forces pays up to half their tuition in college or university. They will learn discipline and teamwork . . . and learn a lot more about people and the world . . . I don't know if discipline and teamwork will convince students though—that would appeal more to parents and adults. Taking part in important events? Both should like that. Representing your country—I'm not sure who that's important to . . .

● ● ● ● ● ACTIVITY

As you can see above, your topic and audience are interconnected. Start with broad topic #1 below. Now choose one of the audiences and develop and refine your topic into a working thesis for that audience. Repeat for audience number two, then follow the same pattern for topic #2.

For example, imagine that your broad topic is student loans. Your audiences include current students, prospective students, parents of students, college or university administrators, and bankers, among others. What are the concerns of these groups? Would current students be more concerned with lower interest rates? Would they think student loans are always a good idea? How would your answers affect your trial thesis?

1. *Topic:* body image

Audiences: peers, fitness instructors

Working Thesis:

2. *Topic:* time management

Audiences: your instructor, co-workers at your summer or part-time job

Working Thesis:

II: Thesis Try-Outs and Directional Questions: Refining Your Trial Thesis

Another way to discover your viewpoint for a working thesis is to work through a two-part process: try out various attitudes to and viewpoints on your topic, then determine the direction your essay might take.

Start by trying out a range of response-words and phrases that express your reactions to your topic. Assume your assigned topic is “money management.” You have narrowed that topic to “credit cards,” and finally focused on “credit cards for students.” Now, looking over your prewriting, the viewpoint emerging is that credit cards for students have some good points. To clarify your response to your topic, try a pattern of positive responses like this:

Credit cards for students *are a good idea*.

Credit cards for students *are a good thing sometimes*.

Credit cards for students *help students to manage their money*.

Now, try reversing your responses to your topic:

Credit cards for students *cause more problems than they are worth*.

Credit cards for students *give them a false sense of maturity*.

Which of these statements comes the closest to your thoughts during prewriting and your thoughts right now? Which one sparks the most ideas?

Once you settle on the statement that best reflects your views, you have two parts of your working thesis. Now you will refine that statement into a thesis that shows the purpose and direction of your essay more clearly.

Directional Questions: Combine your subject and your viewpoint with as many question words and phrases as you can think of:

What is good about credit cards for students?

For whom are student credit cards a good thing?

When are credit cards for students a good idea?

Why are credit cards for students a good idea?

What are the benefits of credit cards for students?

What is relevant to whom about credit cards for students?

From among these directional questions, choose the question you want to answer, the challenge you find most interesting, or the problem you want to solve. Right now your prewriting need not determine which question you choose as the basis of your thesis. In fact, if you are most interested in a question unrelated to your prewriting, just use it as the springboard for some additional prewriting; your final essay will be better for the change. Using directional questions, you develop a more specific thesis, which you will find more satisfying to support,

and which clearly indicates the direction of the argument you will pursue in your essay.

The box below reviews the stages in developing a thesis:

| General/Broad Topic | Limited/Narrowed Topic | Working Thesis (Limited Topic + Viewpoint on It) |
|---------------------|------------------------------------|--|
| Families | Single parents | Single parents face continual challenges. |
| Money | Unemployment insurance | Collecting E. I. can be humiliating. |
| Food | Cooking | Learning to cook is not as much fun as FoodTV makes it look. |
| Recycling | Recycling boxes in school hallways | Students generally ignore the recycling boxes in the halls. |

Revising Your Thesis

Types of Thesis Statements

So far, a thesis statement has been defined as a narrowed topic plus a viewpoint on it. The working thesis statements above are examples of that two-part definition. There are two main forms of thesis statement: simple and extended.

The Simple Thesis

Whether in trial or revised final form, the topic + viewpoint statement is called a simple thesis: for example, *Tornadoes are a real threat in Canada*. Depending on your instructor's preference, you may find a simple thesis suitable for some shorter essays, four to six paragraphs long. Because a simple thesis does not reveal how you will support it in your essay, you may find it useful if you wish to reveal your argument slowly to readers.

The Extended Thesis

In many cases, however, your instructor will require you to write an extended thesis statement: for example, *Tornadoes are a real threat in Canada: Canada experiences more tornadoes than any country except the U.S., and Canadians are not trained to prepare for tornadoes*. Here, you include your two supporting points in your thesis. This more detailed statement guides readers into your essay by telling them what to expect, and is essential for essays with multiple body paragraphs and for research essays.

● ● ● ● ● ACTIVITY

For each thesis statement below,

- a. Identify the topic and the viewpoint;
- b. Explain whether it is a simple or an extended thesis;
- c. Change three simple thesis statements to extended statements.
 1. The new building on our campus could be more functional if some changes were made.
 2. Celebrities make poor role models because of the way they dress, talk, and behave.
 3. Working as a security guard can be a stressful experience.
 4. Canada's health care system is still superior to the U.S. system in terms of equity and efficiency.
 5. Reality shows have changed television programming for the worse.

Writing Thesis-Planning Sentences

To make sure that you are clear about your ideas and your purpose, write a sentence or two stating exactly what you are planning for your essay as you finalize your thesis. Writing thesis-planning sentences will help to clarify your purpose, your support for your point, and even your method of developing your point. You can use these sentences as guides for outlining and drafting your essay. Use as many sentences as you like. This is excellent practice for writing longer, more complex essays and research papers. Follow the patterns below:

In this essay, I plan to (argue, defend, explain, demonstrate, analyze) that _____ because of (1) _____, (2) _____, and (3) _____.

Here is an example of the thesis-planning sentences written by Jed Gawrys, the student author of the freewriting and discovery draft earlier in this chapter:

In this essay, I plan to argue that the values that make professional sports so appealing to people are the same cruel and immoral values that rule North American society. Because of extreme competitiveness, violence, and forms of discrimination, our society has come to accept and even applaud destruction, cruelty, and harm to human life.

You can revise your thesis-planning sentences into a polished thesis, but for the moment you have statements to guide you.

● ● ● ● ● ACTIVITY

Complete the following extended thesis statements by adding a final supporting point that will parallel the others already provided. Parallel structure means that items or phrases in a list follow the same grammatical pattern. First, you might want to check the section on parallel structure in Chapter 6.

1. Being a successful vegetarian is difficult because cooking meals takes more effort, menu choices in restaurants are limited, and . . .
2. A good salesperson needs to like people, to be aggressive, to know the products, to dress appropriately, and . . .

3. Rather than blame themselves for failing courses, students blame the instructor, their course-load, and even . . .
4. Anyone who buys an old house and is planning to fix it up should be prepared to put in a lot of time, hard work, money, and . . .
5. Older cars may use too much gas and . . .

Evaluating Your Thesis for Effectiveness

As you revise your thesis, go through the following checklist to help you avoid common errors that can undermine your chances of writing an effective essay.

1. Does Your Thesis Contain a Clear Viewpoint?

The subject of this essay will be soccer fans.
Some Vancouver high schools could close as soon as this fall.
Video-gaming is the concern of this essay.

Do these sentences challenge you to think about their topics? If not, they are probably not thesis statements. They just announce their topics; they do not engage you on any level because they do not make any point about their topics. Below, each of those announcements has been revised so that it is a reasonable thesis statement:

Hooliganism, riots, and racism are extreme aspects of soccer fans' outrageous loyalty.
The possible closing of some Vancouver high schools is cause for concern.
Players develop useful skills from time spent on video-gaming.

● ● ● ● ● ACTIVITY

Revise the following announcements so that they are simple or extended thesis statements.

1. Personal electronics that are popular with students is the subject of this essay.
2. This essay's concern is near-death experiences reported by accident victims.
3. A discussion of planning errors in the downtown area forms the core of this paper.
4. The topic to be considered is loneliness.
5. This essay will concern itself with career planning strategies.

2. Is Your Thesis Statement Too Broad or General for an Essay?

Disease has shaped human history.
Insects are fascinating creatures.
Since the beginning of time, men and women have been very different.

First, could you argue and accurately support any of these statements in a three-to four-page essay? Where would you begin with vast subjects such as *disease*, *insects*, and *the differences between men and women*? These are sweeping, often

meaningless, claims that you cannot fulfill for your readers—your thesis must be a controlling concept that sets the limits of your argument. Do not promise more than you can deliver. Avoid beginning any thesis statement with phrases like, “All over the world . . .” or “People everywhere. . . .” The following sentences based on the topics above represent possible thesis statements.

Plane travel has made local diseases global problems.

Strength, organization, and communication make ants one of nature’s most successful insects.

Men and women are often treated very differently in entry-level positions.

● ● ● ● ● ACTIVITY

Revise the following vague or general thesis statements so that each makes a point that could be developed in a three- or four-page essay.

1. Life today makes everyone suspicious and unfriendly.
2. Contagious diseases are global problems.
3. The media distort every issue concerning young people.
4. Parenthood is the most important job there is.
5. Automotive exhaust fumes damage the environment everywhere.

3. Is Your Thesis Statement Too Narrow? Is It One That You Can Support In an Essay?

There are speed bumps in the north end of Winnipeg.

In March 2009, there was a moderate earthquake just outside of Leamington Ontario.

The main road into town is lined with fast-food outlets.

Are you challenged by any of these statements? Can you think of ways to support any of them? These sentences, in fact, are simple statements of fact that do not present a viewpoint or require any support. They are often called “dead-end” statements. Remember, a thesis statement must be broad enough to require support in an essay. The following sentences, based on those above, represent successful thesis statements.

Speed bumps in north Winnipeg fuel drivers’ tempers, increase noise pollution, and add to greenhouse gases in the air.

Towns in most parts of Ontario, like Leamington, are unprepared for earthquakes.

Town councils should regulate the number of fast-food operations on entrance roads.

● ● ● ● ● ACTIVITY

Revise the following narrow or dead-end statements so that each makes a point that could be developed in a three- or four-page essay.

1. Volunteer positions are available at local retirement homes.
2. Film courses are always popular with students.

3. The bicycle lanes on campus are new this year.
4. The average karate student simulates competition fighting.
5. Libraries provide access to computers and study spaces.

4. Does My Thesis Statement Present More than One Idea?

Waste prevention is the key to waste management; in developing countries, though, waste management creates jobs and community participation. Studying with others has several benefits, but it also has drawbacks and can be difficult to schedule. The “baby boom” generation has had many advantages, but it also faces many problems.

How many ideas are in each of these thesis statements? “One of the most serious problems affecting young people today is bullying . . .” is one topic and one viewpoint and “. . . it is time more kids learned the value of helping people” is another. The thesis statements above all present more than one idea; they point readers in two different directions. The point of an essay is to communicate a *single* main idea to readers. The following sentences, based on each of the examples above, represent more effective thesis statements.

Community-based approaches to waste management can lead to waste prevention and productive use of waste. Studying with others requires careful planning as well as cooperation and discipline on everyone’s part. The “baby boom” generation has enjoyed many advantages, including sheer numbers and wealth.

● ● ● ● ● ACTIVITY

Revise the following statements that contain more than one idea so that each becomes a thesis statement that advances a single main point.

1. Although infomercials are misleading, sometimes they are quite informative.
2. Movies with computer-generated backgrounds look spectacular, but they are not as appealing as those shot on location.
3. Owning a pet is a lot of work, and it can be good for reducing stress.
4. Wheelchair ramps are mandatory but they often change the appearance of entrance areas.
5. Shopping online is easy and fun, although it is not always secure.

After working through the following review activities, you will be prepared to move on to Chapter 3, completing the second and third stages of the writing process.

REVIEW ACTIVITIES

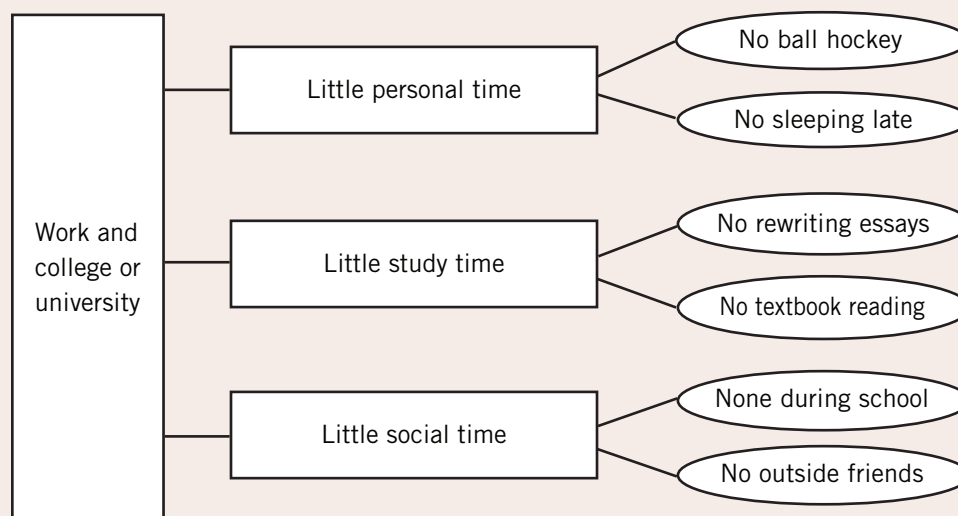
Review Activity: Prewriting

Below are examples of how the four prewriting techniques discussed in this chapter could be used to develop material for the topic “Problems of Combining Work and College or University.”

1. Identify each technique by writing F (for freewriting), Q (for questioning), L (for list making), or C (for clustering) in the answer space.
2. Some of these examples demonstrate a second stage of prewriting. Which examples do so, and why?

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| | <p>Never enough time Miss parties with people in my program Had to study (only two free hours a night) Gave up activities with friends No time to rewrite essays Can't stay at school one minute after I finish Friends don't call me to go out any more Sunday no longer relaxing day—have to study Missing sleep I need Marks aren't as good as they could be Can't just watch TV weeknights Really need the money Tired when I sit down to study at nine o'clock</p> | |
| | <p><i>What</i> are some of the problems of combining work and college?</p> | <p>Schoolwork suffers because I don't have enough time to study, rewrite essays, or do enough research. I've had to give up things I enjoy, like sleep and ball hockey. I don't have any time for RTV parties because I have to go to work as soon as my last class is over.</p> |
| | <p><i>How</i> have these problems changed my life?</p> | <p>My marks are not as good as they were when I wasn't working. Some of my friends have stopped calling me. My relationship with a girl I liked fell apart because I couldn't spend time with her. I miss TV.</p> |
| | <p><i>What</i> do I do in a typical day?</p> | <p>I get up at 7 to make an 8 a.m. class. I have classes till 1:30 two days, and those days, I drive to Sobeys where I work till 8. I drive home, shower, and by then it's around 9. So I only have a couple of hours those days to study—work on media assignments, read textbooks, write essays. The other two days, I finish classes at 5 and work till 9,</p> |

| | | |
|-------|---------------------------------|---|
| | | so schoolwork's a write-off. I work all day Friday, and I just don't do schoolwork Friday night. |
| _____ | Why do I keep up this schedule? | I can't pay tuition or buy books without working, and I need a diploma and airtime practice to try to get into radio. If I can make this work, I'll be doing what I've always wanted to do. |



| | |
|-------|---|
| _____ | It's hard working and going to school at the same time. I never realized how much I'd have to give up. I won't be quitting my job because I need every dollar just to stay in my program. And the people at Sobeys are pretty good. I've had to give up a lot more than I thought. We used to play ball hockey and touch football every Sunday. It was fun and we'd go for drinks afterwards. Sundays are now just catch-up time for assignments for my courses, and I don't know how I'll handle an internship when that comes up. I have to catch up because I don't get home until 8 some days and nearly 10 other days, and I work all day Friday and Saturday. So even two nights a week, I can't get to school work until after 9 p.m. I've been up since before 7 a.m. Sometimes I write an English essay in half an hour and don't even read it over. I feel that I'm missing out on a lot in university. The other day, people I like were sitting outside listening to music and talking after class. I would have given anything to stay and not to have to go to work. I almost called in sick. I used to get invited to parties. I don't much anymore. My friends know I never make it, so nobody bothers. I can't sleep late on weekends or watch TV during the week. |
|-------|---|

Group Review Activity: Narrowing Topics and Writing a Working Thesis

Following is a list of six general subjects. Form groups of four, and choose three of the subjects per group, then narrow each topic, and produce a working thesis statement for each. Compare your narrowed topics and thesis statements with other groups.

| General Subject | Narrowed Topic |
|-----------------|----------------|
| 1. Music | |
| 2. Inspiration | |
| 3. Work | |
| 4. Careers | |
| 5. Travel | |
| 6. Cooking | |

Review Activity: Identifying and Revising Thesis Statements

Each example below presents a weak or ineffective thesis statement. For each one,

- Use the questions found in the “Evaluating Thesis Statements” section starting on page 29 to determine what is wrong with the statement,
 - Then work through directional questions to create effective revised thesis statements.
1. Credit cards are a necessity everywhere in the world.
 2. The use of service dogs in catastrophes and emergency situations is the subject of this essay.
 3. Severe exhaustion is a chronic condition for some students.
 4. Although many dishes in Armenian cooking, such as *meza* (appetizers) and *pilaf* are similar to those in other Middle Eastern cultures, Armenian cuisine offers unique items found nowhere else.
 5. Dried sumac berries are used as a spice and a herbal medicine.

CHECKLIST OF LEARNING OUTCOMES FOR CHAPTER 2

Be sure that you have understood and met the learning outcomes for this chapter. Answer the following questions:

- ✓ Explain the stages of the writing process in your own words.
- ✓ Describe how you would modify a broad subject into a topic appropriate for an essay.
- ✓ What are the four prewriting strategies in this chapter? Which one would be most useful to you, and why?
- ✓ Explain two methods of questioning you could use in developing a working thesis.
- ✓ What steps are involved in creating an effective essay?
- ✓ What are four questions you should ask yourself as you revise your thesis?



For bonus material and additional activities please go to the OLC at www.mcgrawhill.ca/olc/langan