

SOME TIPS FOR WRITING

1. Getting Started

- Brainstorm. Don't try to write full sentences. Write words and phrases; make lists; use symbols, arrows, graphic representations of ideas. Don't worry about spelling, punctuation, grammar, structure, or even logic (yet).
- Talk about your writing. Explain your topic to a friend, colleague, partner.
- Start with an easy section of the paper. There's no rule that says you have to begin at the beginning.
- Write without pausing or editing. Recognize that good writing requires revision and that no draft will be perfect. Get ideas on to the page, and do the elaborating, correcting, rejecting, and polishing later. Get it written, and then get it right.
- Keep a writer's notebook in which you jot down ideas, sketch possible outlines, define writing problems that will need solving, and otherwise write about writing.

2. Setting Goals

- Decide what your goals or objectives are. What do you want your text to *do*? What effect do you want it to have? How do you want to affect/influence readers?
- Set sub-goals for sections of a longer paper. What should an introductory section do? A methodology section? A literature review?
- Periodically test your paper against your goals. Have your goals changed? We never write the papers we started out to write; ideas and goals change as we write.
- Use active verbs to set goals: propose, argue, describe, convince, explain, explore, persuade, demonstrate.
- Test a draft by asking yourself how each section of a paper helps advance your goal. What does each section do? This will help guide revision.

3. Considering Readers

- Explain (in writing) what it is that you think your readers want/need from your paper. How will they judge its quality?
- Are there variations in expectation or standards among your eventual readers? How will you deal with that?
- If you can, ask your readers to be as explicit as possible about their expectations.

4. Organizing Ideas

- Don't organize too early; structure can inhibit exploration and discovery. Begin to organize only after you've done some writing.
- Use some form of graphic representation to help you organize: outline, chart, map, tree, graph, or otherwise display your ideas/topics and the relationships among them.
- Create hierarchies and equivalencies; some ideas are "bigger" (more abstract, more encompassing) than others. Consider the superordinate, coordinate, and subordinate relations among and between ideas.
- While writing, use headings and subheadings. This will force you to be explicit about your sub-topics and your structure. You can remove the headings later, if you wish.
- After you've written a draft, pull an outline out of your paper. Revise the outline as a first step toward revising the paper.

5. Drafting, etc.

- At any time, to get back to your main message, write a synopsis or abstract of part or all of your paper. Such summaries force you to focus on main ideas.
- Leave introductions until the end, or return to them when you've finished a draft. We often introduce the paper we *thought* we were going to write, not the one we *did* write.
- Some sections will flow, others won't. Mid-draft, you may need to go back to the tips under "Getting Started" and "Setting Goals."
- Get a draft done well in advance of the deadline; let it sit for a while before revising.
- Read your paper out loud; read it to others. We sometimes hear problems we can't see.
- Get feedback from others, and develop a thick skin. Give readers a sense of the feedback you need (e.g., "read for meaning or coherence"; "identify errors").
- Form a writing support group; set a regular schedule and stick to it. Learn to give and receive feedback.
- Don't accept feedback you don't understand; ask for elaboration, alternate explanations.