



The Purdue University Writing Lab

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Planning (Invention)

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For more information and suggestions for planning papers, see handouts #66 and #101.

"A writer keeps surprising himself... he doesn't know what his is saying until he sees it on the page."
-- Thomas Williams

When you sit down to write...

- Does your mind turn blank?
- Are you sure you have nothing to say?

If so, you're not alone! Everyone experiences this at some time or other, but some people have strategies or techniques to get them started. When you are planning to write something, try some of the following suggestions.

EXPLORE the problem -- not the topic

1. Who is your reader?
2. What is your purpose?
3. Who are you, the writer? (What image or persona do you want to project?)

MAKE your goals operational

1. How can you achieve your purpose?
2. Can you make a plan?

GENERATE some ideas

1. Brainstorm
 - keep writing
 - don't censor or evaluate
 - keep returning to the problem
2. Talk to your reader

- What questions would they ask?
- What different kinds of readers might you have?

3. Ask yourself questions

A. Journalistic questions

Who? What? Where? When? Why? How? So What?

B. Classical topics (patterns of argument)

Definition

- How does the dictionary define ____?
- What do I mean by ____?
- What group of things does ____ belong to?
- How is ____ different from other things?
- What parts can ____ be divided into?
- Does ____ mean something now that it didn't years ago? If so, what?
- What other words mean about the same as ____?
- What are some concrete examples of ____?
- When is the meaning of ____ misunderstood?

Comparison/Contrast

- What is ____ similar to? In what ways?
- What is ____ different from? In what ways?
- ____ is superior (inferior) to what? How?
- ____ is most unlike (like) what? How?

Relationship

- What causes ____?
- What are the effects of ____?
- What is the purpose of ____? - What is the consequence of ____?
- What comes before (after) ____?

Testimony

- What have I heard people say about ____?
- What are some facts of statistics about ____?
- Can I quote any proverbs, poems, or sayings about ____?
- Are there any laws about ____?

Circumstance

- Is ____ possible or impossible?
- What qualities, conditions, or circumstances make ____ possible or impossible?

- When did ____ happen previously?
- Who can do ____?
- If ____ starts, what makes it end?
- What would it take for ____ to happen now?
- What would prevent ____ from happening?

C. Tagmemics

Contrastive features

- How is ____ different from things similar to it?
- How has ____ been different for me?

Variation

- How much can ____ change and still be itself?
- How is ____ changing?
- How much does ____ change from day to day?
- What are the different varieties of ____?

Distribution

- Where and when does ____ take place?
- What is the larger thing of which ____ is a part?
- What is the function of ____ in this larger thing?

D. Cubing (considering a subject from six points of view)

1. *Describe* it (colors, shapes, sizes, etc.)
2. *Compare* it (What is it similar to?)
3. *Associate* it (What does it make you think of?)
4. *Analyze* it (Tell how it's made)
5. *Apply* it (What can you do with it? How can it be used?)
6. *Argue* for or against it

E. Make an analogy

Choose an activity from column A to explain it by describing it in terms of an activity from column B (or vice-versa).

A	B
-----	-----
playing cards	writing essays
changing a tire	growing up
selling	growing old
walking	rising in the world
sailing	studying
skiing	meditating
plowing	swindling
launching rockets	teaching
running for office	learning

hunting
Russian roulette
brushing teeth

falling
quarreling
making peace

REST AND INCUBATE!

(Adapted from Linda Flower's *Problem-Solving Strategies for Writing*, Gregory and Elizabeth Cowan's *Writing*, and Gordon Rohman and Albert Wlecke's *Prewriting*.)

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