

Tips on Getting Started

Starting an essay can be one of the more difficult aspects of writing, but with these helpful pointers, that difficulty can become a thing of the past!

Define the Purpose of the Assignment

Beginning a paper is much easier once you've spent time reading and understanding the assignment sheet. This will help you to know why you're writing and what your paper should achieve. As you review the assignment, pay close attention to words or phrases like:

“The purpose of the assignment is...”

“You will complete these tasks...”

“Explain” or “Analyze”

Defining the purpose for writing an assignment can highlight the direction you should take. It should narrow down potential topics by providing a road for your ideas to travel on.

Research

After understanding the assignment's expectations, research ideas that interest you.

Researching a topic accomplishes a few things:

You become informed about the nuances of your topic and understand if it fits within the assignment's requirements.

You see examples of how others talk about and format their ideas.

Research broadens your understanding of the assignment's content and structure. Having more information, either about how an argument is presented or what analysis has been done, is a useful tool when crafting your own paper. Use other's work as an example to springboard your own ideas and interests. Remember, going alone can be more difficult than asking for help.

Outlines/Bulleting

Creating outlines or bulleting your ideas can be an effective way of quickly creating a structure for your paper. Instead of worrying about complete thoughts or whole ideas, focus on summarizing **what you want to talk about** and **in what order**.

The outline or bullet points should resemble the structure you want your finished paper to have: a shorthand to keep you on track and provide a specific structure to form your paper around. You do not need to do all the thinking at this point; just focus on getting down the points you want to make and ordering them in a way you think will make sense to your readers. You can expand on the points later in the writing process.

Freewriting

Freewriting foregoes the normal constraints of grammar, structure, and quality control; its sole purpose is to generate ideas, no matter how fractured or nonsensical. To freewrite, block off 10 to 15 minutes of time where you will be able to write without distraction. Begin writing about whatever comes to mind on your topic. If nothing comes to mind, you might write “I don’t know what to write about this because…” and then go on to finish that sentence! The point of freewriting is to shed your internal critic for a while and write without judgment. Another way to think of freewriting is like warming up before a race, or at the beginning of a workout.

Once your time limit has passed, read your text again. There might be a lot of filler or otherwise unusable content at first, but freewriting is all about the insights and discoveries which appear when we least expect them too. Just remember to not be disappointed if a grand idea doesn’t show; sometimes the best thing that freewriting offers is a space to express our concerns and anxieties about writing, and that can be enough to help you push through and get started on your assignment.

Diagram

Organizing an essay can be difficult from a word perspective, especially for visual learners. To circumvent this issue, another tactic for organizing and getting started is to draw out the structure of your essay on a grid, flow chart, or graphic organizer. By separating and drawing connections between points, graphic organizers can show the link between ideas that can be lost in other organization methods like outlining.

Talk to Friends, Faculty, or a Rubber Duck

Sometimes the best resources we have are the people around us, even if they aren’t experts or quite understand why or what you are talking about. If you are having trouble beginning an assignment, the best thing you can do sometimes is talk to someone, or if there is no one around, [Rubber Duck Debug](#).

Rubber Ducking is the process of explaining a concept or a problem to another person or inanimate object to help you understand the issues and incongruities within your own argument or idea. Often, the person or object you are talking to does not need to provide input, but the action of explaining your argument in detail can illuminate issues and cause you to see a new or different perspective.

Conclusion

Hopefully these tips prove useful in your essay writing ventures. If you are experiencing writer’s block, try one of the methods listed above to get the creative juices flowing. These techniques can be used at any stage of the writing process, whether you are just starting, are blocking out your next paragraph, or are working on a revision. The purpose of these methods is to refocus your perspective when writing. Losing clarity and purpose when writing is easy, so taking some time to work and think things through in a novel way can be invaluable when writing.