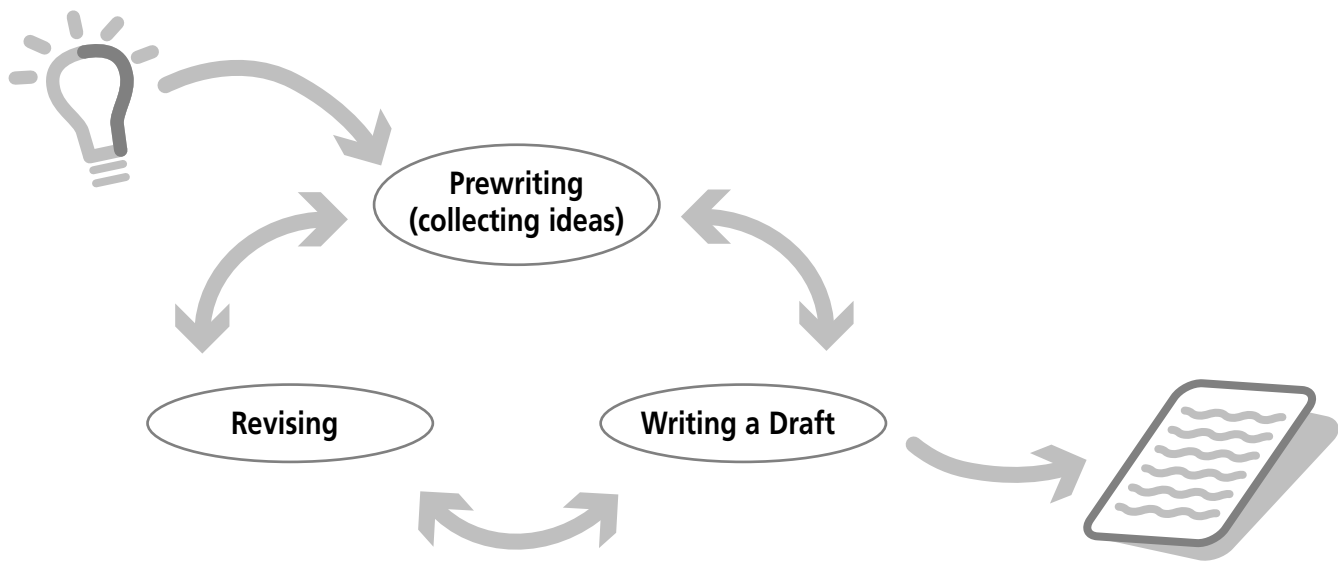


The Writing Process

No one can just sit down and, in one step, compose a polished piece of writing. Instead, writers go through a number of steps as they write. These steps or stages make up the writing process. The steps in the writing process are somewhat like dance steps. Instead of moving forward in a straight line, writers go forward a little and then back and then forward again. In other words, they think and collect ideas and then write and then go back and think again. As you can see in the diagram below, writing is a recursive, or nonlinear process.



Prewriting

"I don't know what I think until I see what I've said."

E.M. Forster

"I write to find out what I'm talking about."

Edward Albee

Prewriting is the first stage in the writing process. It's also the most important and the most interesting part. The purpose of the prewriting stage is to find a topic for writing, to collect ideas and information, and to do research if necessary. By the time you have finished prewriting, a lot of the hard work has already been done. It's not unusual for a writer to spend more time in the prewriting stage than in the writing stage. It's also common to return to the prewriting stage at various times during the writing process when you need to collect more ideas. On the following pages are some common strategies that writers use to collect and organize their ideas.

Prewriting Strategies

Quickwriting

Quickwriting is a good way to collect ideas for writing. Follow these instructions when you quickwrite.

- Write fast—as fast as you can.
- Don't worry about grammar or spelling.
- If your mind goes blank, write: *I can't think of anything to write. I can't think of anything to write.*
- Re-read your quickwriting and circle the ideas you might want to use in your writing.

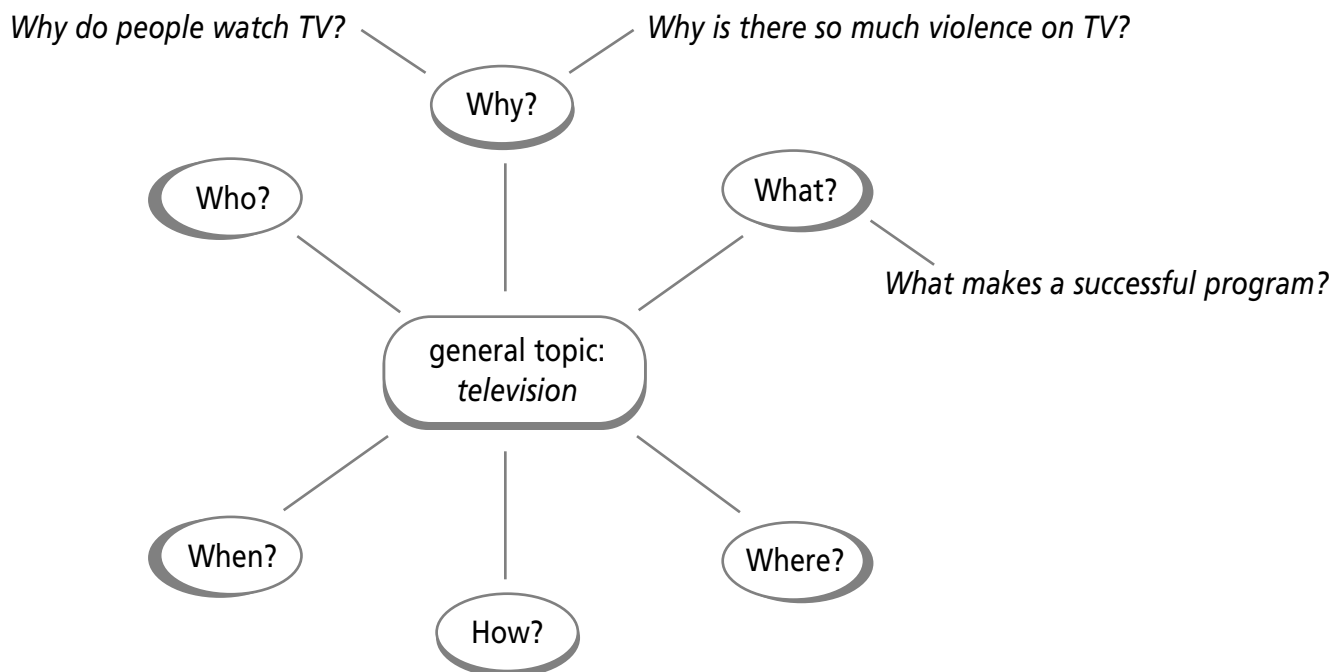
Example: We asked one person to quickwrite about television. Here's a small part of what he wrote.

I don't know what my opinions about television are. I watch a little TV but I don't like to watch TV a lot. I really hate it when I go to someone's house and they leave the TV on. I don't know what to write. I don't know what to write. It makes me feel like they don't want to talk. I think a lot of the TV programs are pretty dumb. They are really a waste of time. It's one thing if a program is really funny. I mean, I'm not against watching TV just for the laughs, but most of the programs aren't even funny. There are some...

Questioning

Forming questions can help you come up with ideas for writing. Just think about your topic and write down any questions that come to mind. Afterward you can go back and underline the questions that you would like to explore further.

Example:



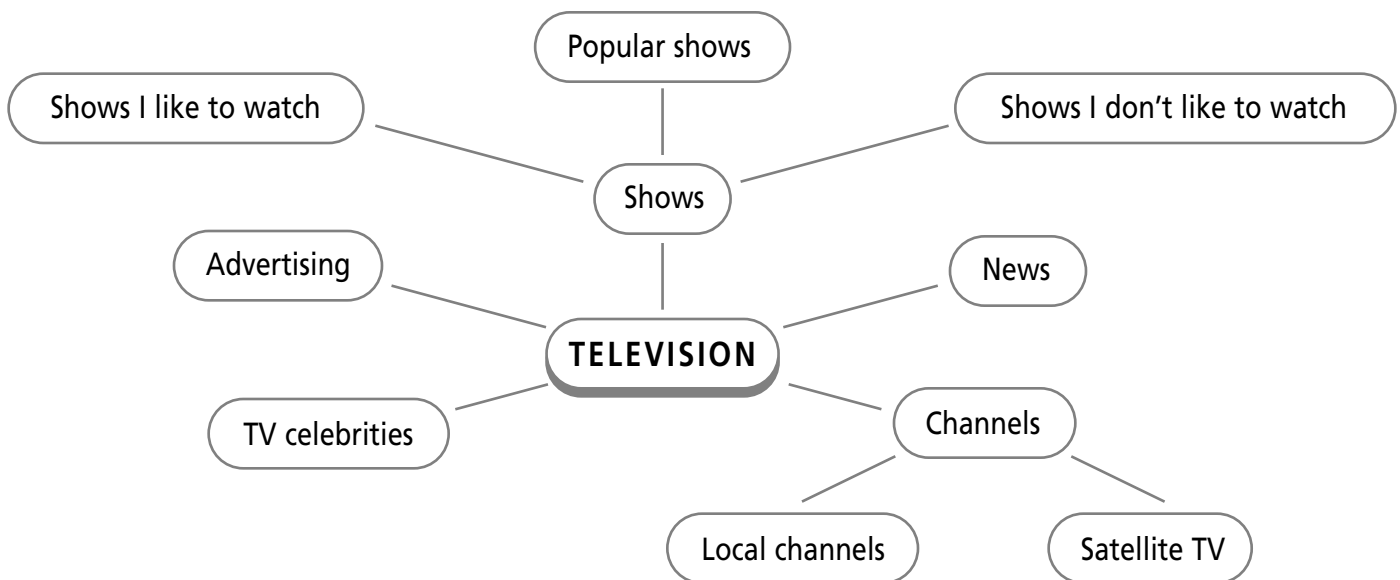
Making a Cluster Diagram

Making a cluster diagram is a useful way to collect ideas and details to use in your writing. You can also use a cluster diagram to explore different ways to organize your ideas. Follow these steps to make a cluster diagram.

Step 1: Write your topic in the center of your paper and circle it.

television

Step 2: Think about your topic and write down any words that come to mind. Circle each word and connect it to the closest related word in your cluster diagram.



Step 3: Study your cluster diagram to find ideas to use in your writing.

Brainstorming

Brainstorming is a good way to collect ideas for writing. To brainstorm, think about your topic and write down every idea that comes to mind. Don't evaluate your ideas. Just write.

Example: We spent a minute brainstorming a list of things to do when you feel sad or depressed. You can see that some of our ideas were pretty silly, but we wrote them down anyway. When we finished brainstorming, we went back and put a check mark next to the ideas we liked best.

Things to do when you feel sad or depressed

- | | |
|----------------------------------|---------------------|
| ✓ go visit a friend | ✓ get some exercise |
| eat | sleep |
| ✓ do something for somebody else | read a book |
| ✓ watch a funny movie | buy some flowers |
| buy some new clothes | ✓ go for a walk |

Writing a Draft

draft /dræft/ *noun* 1 [C] a piece of writing, etc., which will probably be changed and improved; not the final copy: *the first draft of a speech; a rough draft of an essay...*

As the dictionary definition above shows, a draft is a preliminary piece of writing. Writing more than one draft allows you to develop your ideas and to find the best way to present your ideas to your reader. Here are some things you can think about as you write a draft:

Think about your audience.

The way you write and the information you provide depends on your audience—the people who will read your writing. As you write, keep these questions in mind:

- Who is going to read my writing?
- What does my reader already know about the topic?
- What will be interesting to my reader?
- What questions will my reader have?

Think about your purpose for writing.

It helps to have a purpose for writing other than simply completing a class assignment. As you write, keep in mind that you are also trying to accomplish one or more of these goals:

⇒ to inform ⇒ to entertain ⇒ to persuade

Think about how to organize your ideas.

Ask yourself questions as you experiment with different ways to organize your ideas.

- How can I group my ideas in paragraphs?
- What is the focus and purpose of each paragraph?
- In what order should I present my ideas?

Think of an interesting way to begin your piece of writing.

It helps to start with an idea or some information that gets your reader's attention:

- Begin with a question. (*Do you know...?*)
- Begin with a personal story. (*When I was...*)
- Begin with an interesting quote.
- Start with a description.
- Start with an interesting fact.

Think about how to end your piece of writing.

Look back at your purpose for writing and decide what you want your readers to be thinking about and how you want them to feel when they finish reading:

- Do I want to repeat my main idea at the end?
- Do I want to end with a recommendation?
- Would a quote work at the end?

Revising Your Writing

Revising Your Writing

What does it mean to “revise your writing”?

The word revise means “see again.” When you revise a piece of writing, you evaluate its strengths and weaknesses and think of ways to make your writing clearer or more interesting or more convincing. Here are some questions you can ask as you think about how to revise your writing:

- Is there a better way to organize my ideas?
- Do I need to add more details and examples?
- How can I make my writing more interesting?
- Will my reader understand what I am trying to say?

How do you revise your writing?

There are lots of different things you can do to revise your writing. Here are a few suggestions:

- Read your writing out loud several times and underline the parts you like best. You can also ask different classmates to read your writing and to identify the parts they find interesting. You can then use these comments when you revise your writing. You may, for example, want to expand on the ideas you found interesting or add more details and examples to make your ideas clear.
- Pretend to be your reader. Think of questions your reader might ask. Then try to answer the questions.
- Does each paragraph in your writing have a purpose? In the margin, identify the main idea of each paragraph. If you can't do this, rewrite the paragraph so you can.
- Experiment with different ways to get your reader's attention in the first part of your writing. Then choose the way you like best.
- Use the checklist below to evaluate your writing. Keep revising your writing until you can check (✓) yes to each item on the list.

Revising Checklist



- | | YES |
|--|--------------------------|
| ⇒ Are my ideas clear and easy to follow? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ⇒ Will my reader be able to find and understand my main idea? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ⇒ Did I provide enough details and examples? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ⇒ Did I take out all unnecessary information? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ⇒ Will the first part of my writing catch my reader's attention? | <input type="checkbox"/> |