

# The Writing Process

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Step 1: Prewriting

# What Is an Academic Essay?

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- The **purpose** of the academic essay is to **communicate** your researched and **objective** views of a topic **to a specific audience**. It has the following features:
  - A group of **paragraphs** organized into **three sections**: the introduction, the body, and the conclusion
  - A **thesis statement** that communicates the writer's message to a specified audience
  - Formal, academic **style**
  - Third-Person, Objective **Point-of-View** (POV)
  - Sound **Critical thinking and logic**
  - **Polished final draft** reflecting revision, editing, and proofreading
  - A **balance** of rhetoric using the Rhetorical Triangle to conceptualize the relationship of the text, the author, and the audience.

## What Is the Writing Process?

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Though the steps below are linear, **writing is recursive**, so you can revisit any of the stages in the process of completing the assignment.

- **Prewriting:** Finding and exploring ideas (can occur at any stage)
- **Drafting:** Putting the essay together
- **Revision:** Reconsidering content of essay draft
- **Editing:** Checking draft for grammar, mechanics, and documentation errors; making sure you have completed all of the assignment requirements
- **Proofreading:** Polish the essay and look for minor/stray errors before submitting the paper by the deadline

## Definition and Purpose

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- Prewriting, also called **invention or discovery**, generates and explores ideas and **fleshes out topics** and thoughts without filters.
- This step helps **clear the author's brain**; allows the author to **get down on paper** everything he knows about a subject; and enables the author to **begin organizing** information
- **Choosing** a particular prewriting technique **depends** on the author and the purpose. Some techniques lend themselves to more detailed information.
- Prewriting is **helpful at several points** in the writing process. For example, you can use it to respond to an assignment, find and then narrow a topic, and identify supporting ideas for a narrowed topic.

# Prewriting Types

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- The **most common prewriting techniques** are:
  - Brainstorming
  - Freewriting
  - Clustering
  - 6 Journalism Questions
- During prewriting, **writers must not worry** about grammar, mechanics, spelling, or coherence.
- The **purpose** is to get down as many ideas as possible.

# Brainstorming

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- Brainstorming is also called **listing**.
- Brainstorming involves listing as many ideas as one can in **five minutes**.
- These ideas should be **one word or short phrases**. You are not paragraphing yet.
- The list should provide **general and specific ideas**. Example:
  - General idea: teacher
  - Specific ideas: kindergarten teacher; special needs teacher; college professor to undergraduates; teaching a general education required course; teaching at a community college; teaching Sunday school
- Brainstorming is best suited to **finding ideas** rather than discovering what you know about those ideas.

# Freewriting

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- Freewriting is usually done in **sentence or paragraph length**. Though we are still not worried about presenting revised or edited work, we are wanting to **avoid** short words or phrases (brainstorming).
- It requires **non-stop writing for 10-15 minutes**. To avoid pausing, if you cannot think of anything to say, you simply write a nonsense phrase, like blah, blah, blah, until your mind resets and thinks of something else on topic.
- Though this is hard to do, the reason we write non-stop for at least 10 minutes is to **get to the deeper ideas we have on a topic**. The first ideas that we write down are usually the common ones that most people would already know. Since an essay is to tell the reader something they don't know or show what they do know in a different perspective, we want to dig deep into our knowledge.

# Freewriting Example

## Work for Family

Patience  
Respect  
Love  
Acceptance

Work for my family was both fun & painful. I love my parents to bits. We have always been close & working at the same business extended that closeness. My dad's business & since I started working in the 70s at my dad's asphalt company. I didn't feel really well. I was a teen in the 80s. I first remember working at the rental company my dad bought. I really hated it bc I'm an introvert who can be an extrovert when I want

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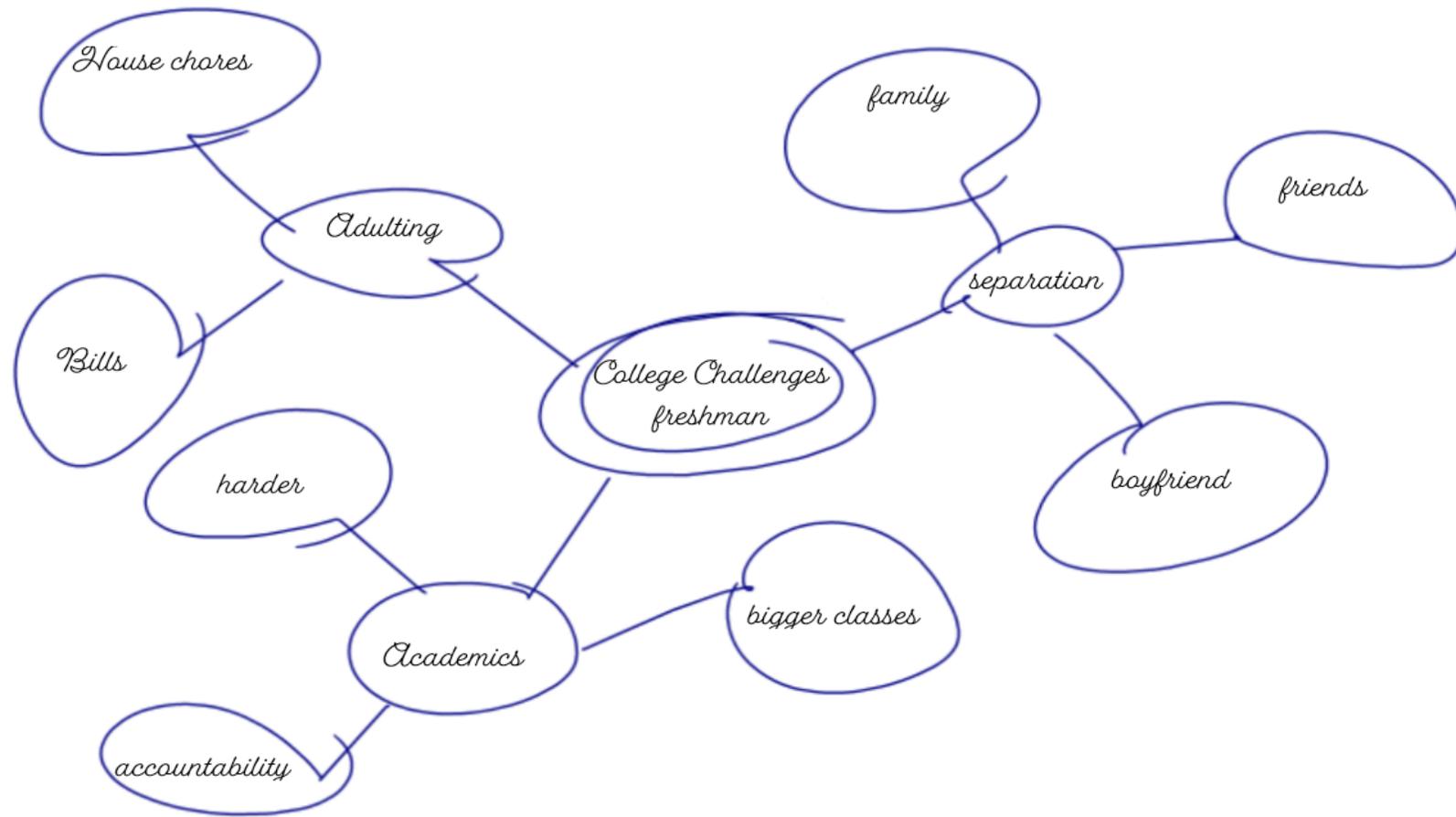
My family are all expected to the max. I always had to go along. ~~Phone~~ calls & pitches a politician like J. I hope. A rule in parallel says at events. She won't say my name would do at the business. We ask me to say open on the spot for strangers. I remember when we had a BBQ restaurant she expected me to belt out the Habanera from Carnet while customers ate pulled pork & ribs. Another time, I arrived at the law/guide + pet store. I was coming in after college where I'd been busy or practicing most of the day, and the

# Clustering

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- Also called **mapping**, clustering is a more **spatial form** of freewriting.
- It establishes a **hierarchy of levels** to a topic.
  - Level 1: Start in the center of a page with the idea or topic you want to prewrite on.
  - Level 2: List ideas about the topic.
  - Level 3: From each level 2 idea, write ideas about each and arrange them around the specific level 2 idea.
- **Each level can correspond** to a part of the essay:
  - Level 1: main idea in the thesis
  - Level 2: primary support points (topic sentences)
  - Level 3: secondary support points (explanations, examples, data)

# Clustering Example



## 6 Journalism Questions

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- **Who, What, Where, When, Why, How:** We can use these questions to interview a topic.
- Helps identify what you do and don't know and **determine possible audiences and purposes.**
- For each of the 6 questions, think of different ways to ask them:
  - Who is responsible? Who benefits? Who would be interested? Who would have more information?
  - What is my purpose? What caused this to start? What ended the issue?
  - Where did the problem start? Where can I find more information? Where did the money end up?
  - When did this start? When did authorities find out? When will this need to finish?
  - Why should people care? Why did those in power not stop this? Why did people go along?
  - How can this problem be solved? How could people have changed their behavior.

## Final Thoughts

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- Prewriting may seem inconsequential, but it is an important step in helping writers craft their essay.
- Skipping this step of the writing process can lead to problems down the line, such as:
  - Running out of ideas to write about and realizing that your topic isn't suited for the assignment.
  - Inconsistent focus because you are not sure what you are writing about and have too many ideas floating around.
  - Trite or boring ideas because you chose the easiest that came to mind instead of delving deeper into the idea.