

How to Get Started on Your Essay

Create Meaningful and Meetable Deadlines

Ask yourself:

- When is my assignment due?
- How much time will I need to spend?
- How much time do I have?

A physical or virtual calendar (e.g., Microsoft Outlook or Google Calendar) can be a great place to start, or you can use an online assignment-planner tool like this [one](#). If you stick to your plan, you can move forward with confidence knowing that your progress is on track.

Pre-Write

If you have a plan but still find yourself getting stuck with the actual writing, you may be drafting too soon. Pre-writing is an essential but often-overlooked aspect of the writing process. Having some kind of visual to refer to as you draft will make the writing process more fluid, more focused, and more enjoyable! There are various strategies you can use during the prewriting stages, so take your pick from the list below!

Make an outline

Full-sentence outlines are most helpful if you have a good sense of your topic and need a way to organize your ideas. You can use these outlines to organize your paper into sections and be as detailed with them as you like. On the other hand, if you are less certain about the direction you want to take your essay, you might prefer to use a less-structured bullet-by-bullet outline in which you more broadly organize your ideas. Bullet outlines are still a great place to start, and you can make them more detailed/specific as you go along.

Free-write

Free-writing can be a great tool at any stage of the writing process, but it is especially helpful if you have the dreaded “writer’s block” or think that you have nothing to say. More than likely, you have tons to say but are having difficulty putting your ideas into words.

As its name suggests, free-writing is completely free, meaning that you can say anything you like. The only “rules” of free-writing are that you should time yourself and keep writing during the entire free-write. If you aren’t sure where to start, begin with five minutes. During that time, do not check for errors, and do not stop. If you get stuck, write that (“I’m stuck”) until the clock runs out. Once you’ve finished, look back at what you’ve written and comb through it for ideas. Likely, you’ll find several ideas or starting points you can use as a basis for your draft.

Brainstorm

If sketching out a full outline or free-writing seems daunting, you might prefer brainstorming. Like free-writing, brainstorming involves a “dumping out” of your ideas, with the goal of uncovering your main points. There are no hard and fast rules for how you brainstorm, but you make sure to include a way to record your ideas. You might use visual cues such as a whiteboard or index cards, make a mind map that incorporates diagrams or drawings, or voice record your thoughts on your phone and play them back to yourself. As with free-writing, the goal is to generate ideas that you can use when you begin to draft.



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Mon. - Thur. 9am - 7pm | Fri. 9am - 2pm
Sat. 2pm - 4pm | Sun. 2pm - 4pm*

Schedule an appointment through the Unify portal

*All Writing Center appointments are virtual for Spring 2021

