

Prewriting

by Sophia Tutorial



WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial will cover the topic of prewriting, which is the second step of the writing process. You may recall that the writing process refers to the skills and practices that writers use to maximize their potential; its eight recursive steps are brainstorming, prewriting, thesis development, research, drafting, revision, editing, and proofreading. We will explore the second step of prewriting, and we will look at the way it is used for organizing thoughts, narrowing the focus of a writing project, and outlining or planning the essay-to-be.

Our discussion breaks down as follows:

1. Prewriting: The Writing Process Step Two
2. Narrowing Focus
3. Outlining
 - a. Traditional
 - b. Less Defined
 - c. Storyboard

1. Prewriting: The Writing Process Step Two

So, what exactly do we mean by prewriting? Well, there's a lot that has to happen before experienced writers actually begin the drafting process, and much of that falls into the category of prewriting. **Prewriting** is the planning and organizing that a writer does before actively beginning to write. It features several distinct phases or purposes, each of which will have to be tailored to a particular writing project.



TERM TO KNOW

Prewriting

Planning and organization that a writer does before actively beginning to write.

Prewriting includes:

- Planning, conducting, and organizing of research that needs to be done before any real writing can begin
- Narrowing down of the writing project's focus, making sure it's one that can be fully explained given the time and space constraints on the writer or the writing project

- Outlining the project; making a plan for what to write

It's important to do this kind of prewriting, because the organizing and clarifying of thoughts and plans that it provides gives writers greater control over their projects and usually saves them time in the long run.

2. Narrowing Focus

One of the most important benefits a writer can get from prewriting is a narrow, manageable focus. It's important for the goals of a writing project to be realistic.



DID YOU KNOW

The most common way writers get into trouble with writing projects is that they bite off more than they can chew given the limitations put on their time and the number of allowed pages or words involved.

It's important to keep a focus narrow because doing so makes it possible to fully explain the ideas and fully answer the questions that drive an essay. There's nothing worse than a writing project that can't take into account the relevant details involved in its claim, or one that can't support the broad argument it's trying to make.

When planning an essay during the prewriting step of the writing process, a writer should consider his or her audience and purpose, then ask whether the focus of the argument is tight enough that he or she will be able to do it justice in the time and space allowed. This will help the writer narrow in on a working thesis -- one that can be used as the basis of the outline and, eventually, of the essay itself.



BIG IDEA

A main reason writers bother with these early stages of the writing process -- brainstorming, organizing research, and outlining -- is to help narrow their focus and keep that focus during the rest of the writing process.

3. Outlining

Once you've got your focus narrow enough to be manageable, the next thing to do is create an outline for your essay. Outlines vary depending on the writer and the writing project at hand. Generally speaking, **outlines** are the prewritten plans, for an essay or other piece of writing, that generally include at least a working thesis and the primary ideas to be discussed, as well as some form of structural plan or organization. Metaphorically speaking, an outline is the blueprint, not the house!



TERM TO KNOW

Outline

The prewritten plan for an essay or other piece of writing, and generally includes at least a working thesis, the primary ideas to be discussed, and structural organization.

Outlining makes for a stronger piece of writing, as well as a faster, more focused writing process. There are multiple kinds of outlines, just as there are multiple ways of making them. In this lesson, we will cover three

different forms that an outline can take.

3a. Traditional

The first type is a traditional outline, which is highly detailed and includes headings and subheadings.

Suppose you are writing an argument about health insurance and your thesis is that universal health care is better than trusting for-profit companies to make the right decisions about their patients. You might make an outline that plans out the three main headings you'd need to cover:

1. Problems with existing care. You may include, for example, people who have been denied coverage because they're too expensive. Or, you may discuss how companies target mostly the young, healthy people on whom they'll make the most money.
2. Ways that a nonprofit system might help America. You'd likely use information about other countries, like France or Canada, that already use universal health care and how much better their health care system seems to be for the people who actually need it.
3. Reasons that the system hasn't caught on in America. This heading could encompass right-side business opposition and a general fear of government control over something so important and so vital as health care.

3b. Less Defined

Another form of outline, one a little less rigid and detail oriented, might work something like this. You might simply write out your thesis, stating that universal health care should be implemented in America, then quickly note down any reasons and presumed evidence. Again, this may include the problems you see in for-profit companies working in the industry, how much better other countries seem to be at taking care of themselves, and reasons why Americans don't seem predisposed toward universal health care.

3c. Storyboard

A third, perhaps less common form of outlining, is called storyboarding. This involves drawing a series of panels or squares with notes and images detailing a writing plan. For our working thesis on universal health care, you could break up your outline into three pieces or panels: the first about companies, the second about alternatives, and a third about why we don't institute universal health care.

As you can tell, each of these three methods of outlining would contain more or less the same information and be equally useful in writing the essay. Here, as in many other aspects of the writing process, it all comes down to personal preference.



SUMMARY

Today we learned about prewriting, the second step in the writing process. We learned about the two primary benefits its techniques can give writers: narrowing a focus down into something manageable within the constraints of the writing project's rhetorical situation, and outlining, or creating, a plan for later drafts. We also learned about three different types of outline: traditional, less defined, and storyboarding.

Source: Adapted from Sophia Instructor Gavin McCall



TERMS TO KNOW

Outline

The pre-written plan for an essay or other piece of writing and generally includes at least a working thesis, the primary ideas to be discussed, and structural organization.

Prewriting

Planning and organization that a writer does before actively beginning to write.