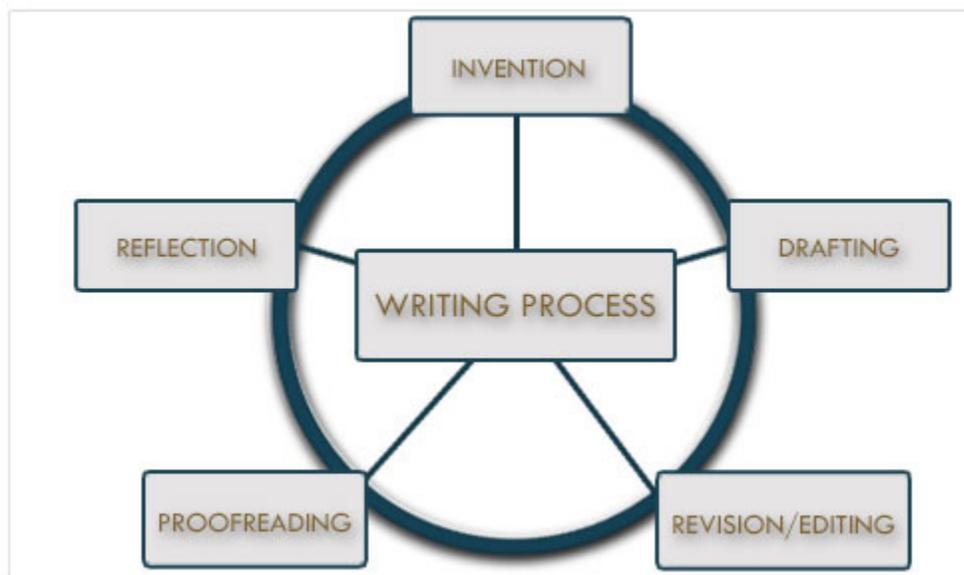


Notes on the Writing Process

Writing is a process or cycle: writers figure out what to write (invention), write or type it out (drafting), review what they have written, make any changes they deem necessary (revision, copyediting, proofreading), and evaluate the ultimate success of the writing task (reflection). This stage of the process involves evaluation of both the strengths and weaknesses of what's been written as well as use of the writing process.



Researchers have learned some critical points about the process of writing:

- *The process is recursive, not linear.* People don't do all their thinking first and then simply capture that thinking in well-formed sentences that are organized into a logical sequence of paragraphs. The procedure varies as the writer moves back and forth among parts of the process. For example, the writer may think through what she wants to say, and then compose a couple of paragraphs; but upon review, she may find them inadequate. She'll return to invention as she revises those paragraphs before moving on to the next step in the process. Good writers revise—that is, they assess the strengths and weaknesses of their drafts and visualize a more effective version of the text. They size up how well the draft supports their point, and then rework it: sharpening the focus of paragraphs, and deleting or adding sentences, paragraphs, or even entire sections.

- *A writer's process differs according to the particulars of the task.* The process of composing a quick response to a friend's funny text message probably takes a matter of seconds; the words seem to come out spontaneously. Contrast that with the process of composing a text message to your best friend explaining why she saw you with another group of friends at the mall last night—the same night you had cancelled a movie date with her because you were “sick.” Writing that text takes more forethought.
- *Writers can be taught strategies to facilitate each part of the process.* In this course, you'll find a variety of strategies or tools for making the writing process easier and more effective. Some strategies will always prove useful (taking account of the rhetorical situation, for example); others will only be useful in certain situations. None are magic; all require thought and imagination.

Let's take a quick look at the types of activities that occur during the writing process:

Invention

Think about what's entailed when you're assigned a writing task. You read through the **assignment sheet**, highlighting or underlining key points that indicate the instructor's expectations: “analyze the editorial's rhetorical situation,” “situate the editorial,” “characterize the editorialist's thesis,” etc. In addition, you place a question mark next to anything you need to clarify with your instructor. You make a plan – you sketch out the sorts of things that should be in your paper and, when relevant, devise a research strategy for finding sources. You then review and evaluate those sources, taking careful notes on significant points, noting surprising observations, marking data, and highlighting poignant phrases and passages.

Here is where you'll begin developing your argument, which will continue during the drafting stage. For longer assignments, you will generally produce a paper proposal during this stage of the writing cycle. You may also want to devise a working outline to help you track the “big picture” of your writing task. All of these activities are part of invention.

Drafting

Next, you'll want to get your ideas down in draft form. At this stage, the important thing is to get the words down on paper. Don't expect to write a perfect first draft. Even great writers compose crummy first drafts. It's only through the iterative process of writing that a lousy first draft becomes a decent second or third draft and a brilliant fourth or fifth draft.

Revision

Ask a some to critique your draft. The feedback you receive can help you get a handle on what works – and what doesn't work – in your draft.

If you composed a working outline during the invention process, you'll want to revisit it now that you've written a draft. Did you lose sight of the "big picture" during the drafting process, or did you refine your thesis and support? If you didn't draft a working outline during your initial invention process, you may want to compose one now based on one of your initial drafts.

Revision may entail additional research or a return to your assignment sheet, notes, or readings to help you flesh out ideas or to remind you of specific concepts you wish to include.

Copyediting and Proofreading

When you have the structure of your piece in place, you'll copyedit it. You'll look for opportunities to choose more precise and poignant words, adjust punctuation, and rework sentences for clarity and effectiveness.

Proofreading is a separate step following copyediting. When you believe your paper is error-free, and ready to print and hand in, proofread it to catch any previously-missed typos.

Reflection

It's important to think critically about your process in completing a writing task. Identify which writing strategies worked for you, and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of your paper and your use of the writing process.