

Discovering Ideas Handbook

1.5 Writing a First Draft

1.5.1 Write your first draft as rapidly as you can.

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1.5.3 When writing your first draft, bracket those sections you can't write yet and try to finish a draft of the whole essay.

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1.5.5 Write your first draft in the way that is easiest and most comfortable for you.

1.5.1 Write your first draft as rapidly as you can.

In writing the first draft of your essay, try to get as many ideas down on paper as quickly as you can. Don't worry about spelling or punctuation at all at this stage, just ideas. If you change your mind about how to say something, don't stop to cross it out, just write an improved version. You may have a lot of repetition in your first draft. That's fine.

1.5.2 When writing your first draft, don't worry about your introduction.

One of the reasons why many of us have trouble writing a first draft is that we try to write the essay beginning with the introduction. This is a difficult, and sometimes an impossible, task. How can you introduce an essay you haven't written yet? Until you see what the body of your essay will say, it is almost impossible to write an effective introduction. You can easily fall into the trap of writing dozens of introductions, rejecting them all, and starting over each time. It's fairly obvious that this is a non-productive waste of time. Save the introduction for your second draft. Start right out with your trial thesis statement and support it. Start writing with the second or third paragraph of the essay and go on from there. You will make much more progress writing the body of your essay than trying to guess at what will make a good introduction.

1.5.3 When writing your first draft, bracket those sections you can't write yet and try to finish a draft of the whole essay.

When you are writing your first draft you will probably find that you don't have all of the material you need for a finished essay. For example, you may know that you need examples of several of your points. If you have them, fine. If you're stumped, just put a note in brackets: "[need example of classroom exercise for team building]." Then move on to the next point. Likewise with evidence that you haven't found yet. Put a note in brackets to remind yourself what you need, but don't stop to look for it as you write your draft. It is important that you make notes to yourself as to what you need to find and develop before you have a finished essay. Doing so

will save you a great deal of time because you will have a "shopping list" to bring to class or to the library that will help define what you need to finish the essay. This will make your further research much easier. But it is equally important that you try to get down on paper what you want the whole essay to say. This is the only way to test and develop your trial thesis statement. The whole should determine the parts, not the parts the whole. You may find that your thesis needs major revision and that you really want to take a different approach than you had originally planned. That will help to clarify what details are important enough to pursue and what can be omitted.

1.5.4 Rewrite your thesis statement whenever you can make it a better guide for writing and revising your essay.

Remember that your trial thesis statement is a guide or a yardstick to help you see where your essay is going. It is a mirror that you can hold up to your essay to show what you are really saying. It is not an external standard that somebody is imposing on you; it is your decision about what you want to say. But one of the greatest dangers in trying to write an essay is that you change your mind without realizing it, that you lose track of what you started to say and end up saying something else, without being aware of it. That is why your thesis statement is so important. It's fine, it's usually good, when you decide to change direction or emphasis *if you know what you're changing and how*. But if you don't notice, it almost always leads to problems, as when your essay starts out promising one thing and ends by delivering something else. So keep comparing your thesis with your essay. When you have finished your first draft, re-read your thesis statement and ask if that is still what you are saying. If it isn't, revise the thesis. It is not unusual to rewrite your thesis statement a dozen times in the course of revising your essay.

1.5.5 Write your first draft in the way that is easiest and most comfortable for you.

If you are an experienced typist, you will probably type your first draft. But if it is easier for you to write in longhand, do that. In writing your first draft, you want to write as quickly and easily as you can, concentrating just on the words but not on the way of producing the words. So go with whatever comes easiest. You will be revising this work. Many writers find that after writing a draft on longhand the process of entering it into the word processor gives them a chance to easily revise and correct the errors in the original. Do whatever you're most comfortable with. Do not try to make the first draft the final draft. Assume you will revise, and you can be much more loose and free in writing your first draft, and you can do it much more quickly.

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