TENTH EDITION

The Writing Process

A CONCISE RHETORIC, READER, AND HANDBOOK

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CHAPTER 2

Decisions in Planning

Why writers need to plan

Writing is a battle with impatience, a fight against the natural urge to "be done with it." Effective writers win this battle by *planning*: analyzing their writing situation, exploring their assets, and finding a voice. Of course, planning continues throughout the writing process, but an initial plan gives you a place to start and a direction for your decisions.

DECIDING ON A TOPIC, PURPOSE, THESIS, AND AUDIENCE

Your earliest planning decisions will require that you analyze your writing situation.

Questions for Analyzing a Writing Situation

- *What, exactly, is my topic?*
- *Why am I writing about this?*
- *What is my thesis?*
- *Who are my readers?*

You won't always follow the same order in making these decisions; in Chapter 1, Wendy Gianacoples discovers her thesis before brainstorming for material. The key is to make all the decisions in whichever order works best for you.

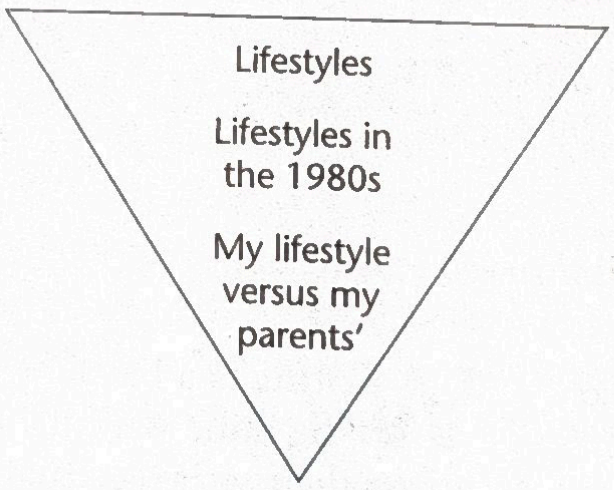
As with any stage in the writing process, you might have to return again and again to your plan.

Decide on Your Topic

When you are asked to choose your own topic, remember one word: *focus.* Sometimes, afraid we'll have too little to say, we mistakenly choose the broadest topic. But a focused topic provides more to write about by allowing for the nitty-gritty details that show readers what we mean. A *focused topic* is something you know and can talk about, something that has real meaning for you.

"What, exactly, is my topic?"

Within any subject, you need to discover a *topic*, your own angle of vision, a viewpoint. First, make the subject narrow:



Even the limited subject "my lifestyle versus my parents'" could be narrowed again—say, to one specific difference (in respective attitudes about money or work or education or the like).

Narrow your subject until you get to where you can take a definite position; then make it a topic by inserting your viewpoint.

SUBJECT	TOPIC
My lifestyle versus my parents'	→ How I want my life to differ from that of my parents

Suppose your instructor asks for an essay about a vivid memory. This time, part of your focusing job is done (memory → a vivid memory). But you need even more focus:

A vivid memory →

A memory from high school →

High school gym class →

Unpleasant memories of my gym class

The last subject seems focused enough for a short essay. But what in this subject do you wish to explore? What do you want readers to know and understand? Make the subject a topic by inserting a viewpoint:

Why I hated high school gym class

GUIDELINES for Choosing Your Essay Topic

- *Begin with something you know and can talk about.*
- *Say a lot about a little rather than a little about a lot.* Sometimes, afraid we'll have too little to say, we mistakenly choose the broadest topic. But a focused topic actually provides *more* to write about by allowing for the nitty-gritty details that show readers what we mean.
- *Narrow the topic until you can express a definite position.* Instead of "My lifestyle versus my parents'," state a specific point of view: "How I want my life to differ from that of my parents."
- *Take your time.* People who begin writing too early usually hit a dead end.

Note *Use the Internet to locate topics of interest via Wikipedia, for example, or the Google or Yahoo search engines.*

Once you have a suitable topic, you're on your way. You might get stuck later and have to discard the whole thing, but for now you have something clear and definite to work from.

Decide on Your Purpose

"Why am I writing this?"

Finding a *purpose* means asking yourself, Why am I writing this piece? Each writing situation has a specific *goal.* Perhaps you want audience members to see what you saw, to feel what you felt, or to think differently. To achieve your goal, you will need a definite *strategy.*

Goal plus strategy equals purpose. Consider one writer's inadequate answers to the familiar question "Why am I writing this paper?"

Inadequate statements of purpose

> I'm writing this essay to pass the course.
>
> My goal is to write an essay about college life.
>
> My goal is to describe to classmates the experience of being a nontraditional student.

The first two responses tell nothing about the specific goal. The third response defines the goal but offers no strategy. Here is our writer's final purpose statement (goal plus strategy):

A useful statement of purpose

> My purpose is to describe to classmates the experience of being a nontraditional student. I'll focus on the special anxieties, difficulties, and rewards.

Sometimes you will be unable to define your purpose immediately. You might need to jot down as many purposes as possible until one pops up. Or you might need to write a rough draft first or make an outline. In any case, the purpose statement should provide the raw material for your thesis.

GUIDELINES for Deciding on Your Writing Purpose

- *Specify your goal.* Perhaps you want readers to see what you saw, to feel what you felt, or to change their opinion. The goal of "writing an essay about yoga" is too general; "writing an essay to persuade my classmates to give yoga a try" is more definite.
- *Identify an effective strategy.* Here is a clear strategy for a persuasive essay about yoga: "My purpose is to write an essay persuading classmates to try yoga by explaining how it relaxes the body, clears the mind, and stimulates the imagination."
- *Take your time.* Sometimes you won't be able to define your purpose immediately. You might need to make a rough draft or outline first.

Note

The purpose statement is part of the discovery process; the thesis is part of the finished essay. *(See pages 23–28.)*

Decide on Your Thesis

"What is my thesis?"

Your purpose statement identifies exactly what you want to *do.* Your thesis announces exactly what you want to *say*—the "big picture" boiled down to one or two (or sometimes three) sentences. Usually appearing early in your essay, the thesis conveys two kinds of information: It names the topic, and it states your viewpoint about the topic:

Topic plus viewpoint

TOPIC	VIEWPOINT
[Chemical pesticides and herbicides]	[are not only hazardous but also ineffective].

The essay can then be built around this central idea.

What a thesis does

By telling readers exactly what to expect, your thesis makes a definite commitment. Besides serving as the reader's road map, the thesis serves as your planning tool—the basic thread that holds your ideas together and that makes your thinking clear in your own mind.

The thesis itself can be expressed in various ways, as in these examples:

An opinion

Starting college after the age of 30 hasn't been easy, but the good points definitely outweigh the bad.

An evaluation

I want my life to be better than that of my parents.

A suggestion

Computers should be provided for all students.

A question

Should college be for everyone?

A debatable claim

College is not for everyone.

Each of these thesis statements creates a clear expectation. They don't keep readers guessing. They make their points quickly.

Note

Think of your thesis as "the one sentence you would keep if you could keep only one" (U.S. Air Force Academy 11).

Thesis as Framework. Consciously or unconsciously, readers look for a thesis, usually in the essay's early paragraphs. Even a single paragraph is hard to understand if the main point is missing. Read this paragraph only once, and then try answering the questions that follow it.

A paragraph with its main point omitted

> This person's job is not to punish but to heal. Most students are bad writers, but the more serious the injuries, the more confusing the symptoms, the greater the need for effective diagnostic work. When an accident victim is carried into the hospital emergency ward, the doctor does not start treating the patient at the top and slowly work down without a sense of priority, spending a great deal of time on the black eye before [getting] to the punctured lung. Yet that is exactly what the

> English teacher too often does. The doctor looks for the most vital problem; he [or she] wants to keep the patient alive, and . . . goes to work on the critical injury.
>
> —*Donald Murray*

Can you identify the paragraph's main idea? Probably not. Without the topic sentence, you have no framework for understanding this information in its larger meaning.

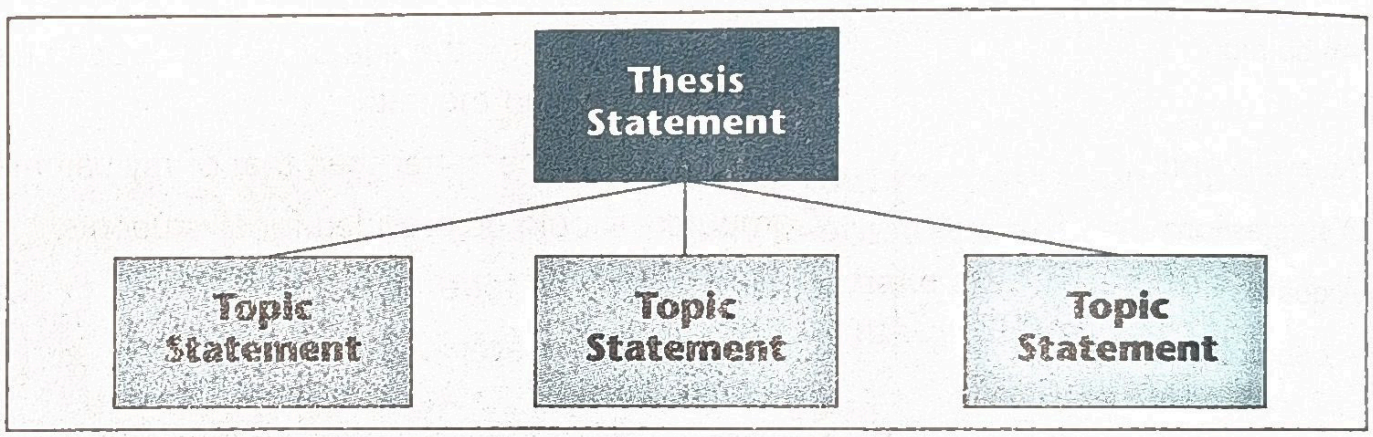
Now insert the following sentence at the beginning and reread the paragraph.

The missing main idea

> The writing teacher must not be a judge but a physician.

This orientation makes the paragraph's exact meaning obvious.

In the basic essay framework, each body paragraph supports its own *topic statement,* which focuses on one aspect of the thesis. The thesis is the controlling idea; each topic statement treats one part of the controlling idea, as diagrammed here:



Introductory paragraph

Support paragraphs

Some writers include in the thesis an explicit preview of supporting points; some don't. For instance, an essay titled "Beef Cost and the Cattle Rancher" might have this thesis statement:

A thesis that includes a preview

> Because of rising costs, unpredictable weather, and long hours, many cattle ranchers have trouble staying in business.

An alternative is to omit such a preview:

> Cattle ranchers' biggest challenge is survival for their businesses.

Including a preview in their thesis helps some writers stay on track as they develop each support paragraph. With or without the preview, be sure that supporting points appear as topic statements in subsequent paragraphs, as in this next example:

Introductory paragraph

Thesis

> _____
>
> _____
>
> _____ Starting college after age 30 hasn't been easy, but the good points definitely outweigh the bad.

Although that thesis does not preview the main supporting points, each point is spelled out in respective topic statements:

First support paragraph

My major obstacles were lack of self-confidence and fear of failure. [*topic statement*]

Second support paragraph

While struggling to overcome my panic, I worked at developing good study habits and sharpening my basic skills. [*topic statement*]

Third support paragraph

After realizing I could do the work, I began to relax and savor the "joy of learning." [*topic statement*]

Evaluating Your Thesis. The first thing readers want to know is this:

What readers ask about your thesis

What, exactly, is your point, and why is it worth reading about?

Always check to see that your thesis provides a sharp focus and a definite and significant viewpoint.

- *Is the topic sharply focused?* In a short essay, avoid broad topics:

Too broad

Some experiences can be unforgettable.

- *Is a definite viewpoint expressed?* Convey your exact position. These thesis statements are not clear:

No clear viewpoint

I started college at age 35. *[Merely states a fact.]*

College can be a complex experience.

- *Is the viewpoint worthwhile?* Whether your thesis is expressed as an opinion, an evaluation, a suggestion, a question, or a debatable claim, it should trigger some fresh insight or have some value or importance for readers. A thesis that contributes nothing new is worthless:

Insignificant viewpoints

The college years can be traumatic. *[Everyone would agree, so why discuss something obvious?]*

Every nontraditional student has a unique college experience. *[No big surprise here!]*

GUIDELINES for Developing Your Thesis

- *Allow plenty of time for getting your thinking straight.* Don't expect your thesis to pop up automatically. For any writer, deciding on a solid thesis is often half the battle.
- *Use whatever works to get yourself started.* Try writing a *working thesis,* summarizing in one or two sentences the main point you want your essay to convey. If you get stuck, try freewriting, brainstorming, or other discovery strategies from pages 30–33. Keep at it until a working thesis emerges.
- *Settle on a specific topic.* Never tackle something too broad. Instead of writing, say, about *school reform* (a huge topic), focus on *school uniforms* or *dress codes.*
- *Stick to one clear and definite main point.* Spell out your viewpoint on the topic: For example, "School uniforms offer one promising way of improving the learning environment." Take a position that leads somewhere; don't merely state a *fact,* as in "Nearly three-fourths of New York City schools now have dress codes." Facts serve as evidence to *support* a thesis, but once a fact has been verified (page 83), there is little else to say about it. However, your viewpoint about what a fact "means" could serve as a thesis, as in "The growing popularity of dress codes is one more sign that school reform is headed back to the basics."

  Once you have settled on a position, don't be vague about it: Instead of "School dress codes have benefits and drawbacks," write "The benefits of school dress codes outweigh the drawbacks."
- *Make a worthwhile point.* Be sure that your point is worth discussing or arguing—that it offers something new or significant (page 84). Don't merely restate the obvious, as in "School uniforms are a controversial issue."
- *Make your point supportable.* Readers always want to know "Says who?" Don't make an overstated claim, as in "Uniforms and dress codes are the best way to improve our schools." Don't make a highly opinionated claim that can't be backed up, as in "Uniforms make students look and feel more attractive." Instead, rely on the evidence: "As many schools are

- *Is the point supportable?* Avoid any claim that you can't back up with credible evidence (page 82):

Unsupportable claim

> Older students are more serious about schoolwork than their younger counterparts.

- *Does the thesis offer a preview?* Provide a concise but clear picture of where your essay is headed. This next sentence offers no such preview:

No preview

> My experience as a nontraditional student has been interesting, to say the least.

discovering, uniforms and dress codes can enhance the learning environment." Be sure you can support your point within the length of your essay. Also be sure that you have enough to say to justify an entire essay.

- *Get your facts straight.* Some claims will require research; some will not. For example, research would be needed to support this thesis: "Evidence increasingly suggests that dress codes promote a more disciplined learning environment."
- *Offer a preview of the whole essay.* Key words or phrases in your thesis tell readers what to expect in terms of the essay's purpose, scope, and direction. Replace abstract and general words ("good," "poor," "interesting," "significant," "complex") with concrete and specific words ("evidence suggests," "disciplined learning environment"). Avoid needless and self-evident prefaces, as in "The purpose of this essay is to . . ." or "In this paper, I will show . . ."; instead, let your key words provide the forecast.

  For a more explicit preview, list your supporting points in your thesis. This might require two or more sentences, as in "School uniforms and dress codes are on the rise and for good reason: They work. School districts across the country are finding that uniforms promote discipline, safety, and learning, along with a sense of equality among differing social groups." Each of those four supporting points then will appear in its own topic sentence.
- *Use the thesis to check on your paper.* As you work on your paper, keep checking back to make sure you haven't wandered—but if you happen to discover some new and promising direction, you might rethink your thesis and adjust it as needed.
- *Always leave room for revision.* Plan on writing numerous versions and be prepared to revise the thesis while you are writing your essay, all the way to the end.
- *Decide where to place your thesis.* In a college essay, the thesis usually appears as the final sentence of the essay's introduction. But in some writing situations, it can appear elsewhere, as shown on page 50.

In this next sentence, the preview is adequate, but the preface is needless:

Needless preface

> [In this essay, I will discuss how] the good points of starting college after the age of 30 definitely outweigh the bad.

How thesis form and location can vary

Variations in Your Thesis. The thesis statement can take different forms:

- The thesis need not be limited to one sentence.
- The thesis does not always explicitly preview the main supporting points.
- A thesis does not automatically call for only three supporting points. Three is a good minimum, but some topics call for more, others for only one or two.

How you phrase the thesis and how you support it depends on your purpose and your audience.

When to Compose Your Thesis. In an ideal world, writers would be able to (1) settle on a topic, (2) compose a purpose statement, and (3) compose a thesis. But these steps rarely occur in such neat order. If you have trouble coming up with a thesis right away, go on to some other activity: List some ideas, work on an outline, do some freewriting, or take a walk. Writing, after all, is a way of discovering what you want to say.

Even if you do begin with a workable thesis, it might not be the one you end up with. As you work and discover new meanings, you might need to revise or start again.

"Who are my readers and what do they expect?"

Decide on Your Audience

Audiences you might encounter

Except for a diary or a journal, everything you write is for readers who will react to your information. You might write to a prospective employer who wants to know why you quit a recent job, to a committee who wants to know why you deserve a scholarship, to a classmate who wants to know you better, or to a professor who wants to know whether you understand the material.

GUIDELINES for Analyzing Your Audience

- *Picture your readers and exactly what they need and expect.* Whether your audience is the company president or the person sitting next to you in first-year English, that audience is motivated by specific concerns and information needs. Your readers may expect to acquire information, solve a problem, make a decision, evaluate your performance, or merely be entertained.
- *When you don't know exactly who will be reading your essay, picture the "general reader."* General readers, like almost all of us, are impatient with abstract theories yet expect enough background to help them grasp your message. They are bored or confused by excessive detail, and they are frustrated by raw facts left unexplained or uninterpreted. Instead of trying to show readers how smart you are, make *them* feel smart.
- *Anticipate your readers' questions.* Based on their specific needs and concerns, readers have various questions: What is it? What does it mean? What happened? Who was involved? When, where, and why did it happen? What might happen? How do I do it? How did you do it? Why is X better than Y? Can you give examples? Says who? So what? Give readers what they need to know, not what they already know.
- *Anticipate your readers' reactions.* If your topic is controversial, will some people resist what you have to say? Will some feel threatened or offended? Should you be bold and outspoken, or tread lightly? No matter how sensible your ideas, they will be rejected out of hand by any audience you alienate. (For achieving a likable persona, see page 308.)

For any audience, your task is to deliver a message that makes a difference with readers and helps them see things your way.

What audiences expect

Out of school, you will write for diverse audiences (customers, employers, politicians, and so on). But in school, you can envision a definite audience besides your instructor: your classmates. Like anyone else, they expect your writing to be clear, informative, and persuasive. Whoever your readers are, they need enough material to understand your position and to react appropriately. Readers don't need repetition of material they already know. To put readers in your place, first put yourself in theirs. Anticipate their most probable questions.

Anticipating your readers' questions gives you a better chance of discovering and selecting material that really makes a difference—that offers readers what they need and expect.

CASE STUDY

ANALYZING YOUR WRITING SITUATION

Assume that you are writing in response to this assignment:

> Illustrate some feature of our societal values or behavior that you find humorous, depressing, contemptible, or admirable. Possible topics: our consumer or dress habits, the cars we drive, our ideas of entertainment.

First, focus your topic:

Focusing your topic

> societal values or behavior →
>
> the cars we drive →
>
> our love affair with cars →
>
> why we love our cars →

This last topic seems focused enough for a short essay. But what in this topic do you wish to explore? What do you want readers to see and understand?

Your focused topic

> How cars appeal to our sense of individuality

Now that you have a suitable topic, you're on your way. You might get stuck later and have to start from scratch, but for now you can move forward and decide on your purpose.

Because the essay examines *how*, you organize a rough outline to lay out a sequence of examples:

Your rough outline

> 1. The car as an individual statement
> 2. The car as a political statement
> 3. The car as a personal sanctuary

Now you can compose your statement of purpose:

Your purpose statement

> My purpose is to poke fun at our obsession with cars by explaining to my classmates how cars appeal to our sense of individuality. I'll discuss uses of the car as a lifestyle statement, personal billboard, and private sanctuary.

This is your map for reaching your goal. (Keep in mind that the purpose statement is part of the discovery process, but the thesis is part of the finished essay.)

Based on the purpose statement, you might derive the following thesis:

Your thesis

> Today's self-centered consumers demand cars that satisfy their craving for individuality.

As you consider your audience (teacher and classmates), you anticipate the following general questions about your thesis:

General questions you can anticipate

- *Exactly what do you mean by "individuality"?*
- *What is the connection between cars and individuality?*
- *Can you give examples?*
- *Who cares?*

As this case study continues, after the following section, you will identify more specific audience questions you need to answer.

DISCOVERING, SELECTING, AND ORGANIZING YOUR MATERIAL

Once you have analyzed your writing situation by choosing a topic, honing your purpose, writing a thesis, and anticipating your audience, you need to ask yourself the following questions.

Questions for Exploring Your Assets

- *What do I know about the topic?*
- *How much of my material is useful in this situation?*
- *How will readers want this organized?*

Discover Useful Material

"What do I know about the topic?"

Discovering useful material is called *invention*. When you begin working with an idea or exploring a topic, you search for useful material, for content—insight, facts, statistics, opinions, examples, images—that might help answer the question "How can I find something worthwhile to say—something that will advance my meaning?"

Some people use invention as an early writing step, a way of getting started. Some save the invention stage until they've made other decisions. Regardless of the sequence, all writers use invention throughout the writing process.

The goal of invention is to get as much material as possible on paper through the use of strategies like the following.

Freewriting. *Freewriting* is a version of the "quick effort" approach discussed in Chapter 1. Wendy Gianacoples' first attempt (page 8) is the product of freewriting. As the term suggests, when freewriting, you simply write whatever comes to mind, hoping that the very act of recording your thinking will generate useful content.

How to freewrite

Try freewriting by exploring what makes you angry or happy or frightened or worried. Write about what surprises you or what you think is unfair or what you would like to see happen. If you keep a journal, consult it to see if you've written anything related to your topic in the past. Don't stop writing until you've filled a page or two, and don't worry about organization or correctness—just get your thoughts down. Although it will never produce a finished essay, freewriting can give you a good start by uncovering all kinds of buried ideas. It can be especially useful for curing "writer's block."

Using Journalists' Questions. To probe the many angles and dimensions of a topic, journalists ask these questions:

Questions Journalists Ask

- *Who was involved?*
- *What happened?*
- *When did it happen?*
- *Where did it happen?*
- *How did it happen?*
- *Why did it happen?*

Unlike freewriting, the journalists' questions offer a built-in organizing strategy—an array of different "perspectives" on your topic.

Asking Yourself Questions. If you can't seem to settle on a definite viewpoint, try answering any of these questions that apply to your topic.

Discovery Questions You Can Ask

- *What is my opinion of X?*
- *Am I for it or against it?*
- *Does it make me happy or sad?*
- *Is it good or bad?*
- *Will it work or fail?*
- *Does it make sense?*
- *What have I observed about X?*
- *What have I seen happen?*
- *What is special or unique about it?*
- *What strikes me about it?*
- *What can I suggest about X?*
- *What would I like to see happen?*
- *What should or should not be done?*

Brainstorming. Brainstorming is a sure bet for coming up with useful material; its aim is to produce as many ideas as possible. Here is how brainstorming works:

GUIDELINES for Brainstorming

1. *Find a quiet spot, and bring an alarm clock, a pencil, and plenty of paper.*
2. *Set the alarm to ring in 30 minutes.*
3. *Try to protect yourself from interruptions: phones, music, or the like.* Sit with eyes closed for 2 minutes, thinking about absolutely nothing.
4. *Now concentrate on your writing situation.* If you've already spelled out your purpose and your audience's questions, focus on them. Otherwise, repeat this question: "What can I say about my topic, at all?"
5. *As ideas begin to flow, record every one.* Don't stop to judge relevance or worth, and don't worry about complete sentences (or even correct spelling). Simply get everything on paper. Even the wildest idea might lead to some valuable insight.
6. *Keep pushing and sweating until the alarm rings.*
7. *If the ideas are still flowing, reset the alarm and go on.*
8. *At the end, you should have a chaotic mixture of junk, irrelevancies, and useful material.*
9. *Take a break.*
10. *Now confront your list.* Strike out what is useless, and sort the remainder into categories. Include any other ideas that crop up. Your finished list should provide plenty of raw material.

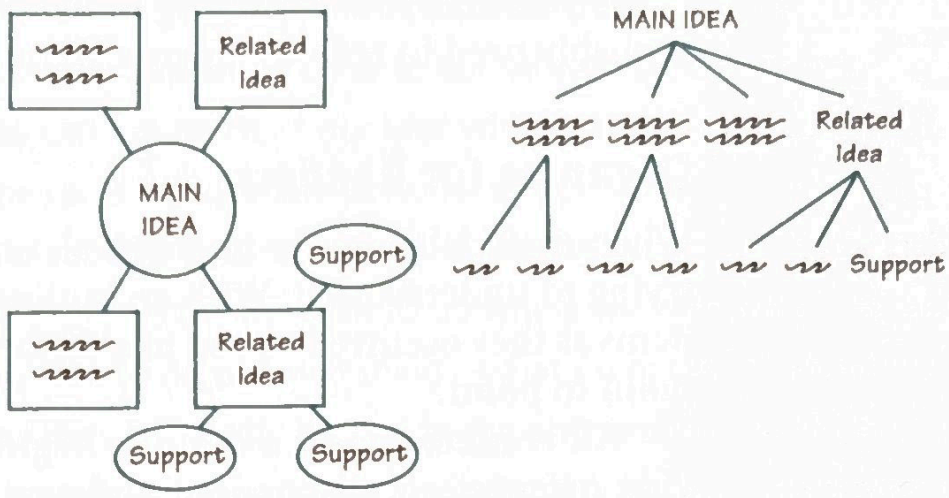
Note *Try "invisible" brainstorming at the computer: Freewrite with the monitor turned off or covered; then, after 15 minutes, look at the screen and review your list.*

Mind-Mapping. A more structured version of brainstorming, *mind-mapping* (see Figure 2.1a) helps visualize relationships. Begin by drawing a circle around the main issue or concept, centered on the paper or whiteboard. Then add related ideas, each in its own box, connected to the circle by a ruled line (or "branch"). Add branches as lines to some other distinct geometric shape containing supporting ideas. Unlike a traditional outline, a mind-map does not require sequential thinking: as each idea pops up, it is connected to related ideas by its own branch.

A simplified form of mind-mapping is the *tree diagram* (see Figure 2.1b), in which major topic, minor topics, and subtopics are connected by branches that indicate their relationships.

Note *A number of mind-mapping programs, such as Mind Mapper, Mind Genius, and Mind Jet, are available for free trial use and purchase online. These programs walk you through the mind-mapping process and allow you to revise concepts and add or change branches quickly and easily.*

FIGURE 2.1
Two visual techniques for thinking creatively



(a) Mind-Map (b) Tree Diagram

Reading and Researching. Some of our best ideas, insights, and questions often come from our reading (as discussed in Chapter 9). Or we might want to consider what others have said or discovered about our topic (as discussed in Chapter 20) before we reach our own conclusions. Reading and research are indispensable tools for any serious writer.

Select Your Best Material

"How much of my material is useful in this situation?"

Invention invariably produces more material than a writer needs. Select only the material that best advances your meaning (see Chapter 5, "Revising the Content").

GUIDELINES for Selecting and Organizing Your Material

- *Never expect to use everything.* Trim your inventory—but save each version in a separate file in case you need something later.
- *Organize logically.* All readers expect a definite beginning, middle, and ending:
  - —The beginning (or *introduction*) provides orientation by telling readers what they need to know first.
  - —The middle (or *body*) reveals your exact meaning, with one idea logically following another.
  - —The ending (or *conclusion*) emphasizes what is most important and leaves readers reflecting on what they have just read.
- *Check your outline for unity and coherence.* An outline has *unity* when everything directly supports the thesis. An outline has *coherence* when the thesis and all supporting material form one connected line of thought, like links in a chain. (See pages 99–101.)
- *Check your outline for emphasis.* An outline has suitable *emphasis* when the important things stand out. Last things are best remembered; middles are too easily forgotten.

If you find yourself trying to include everything you've discovered, you probably need to refocus on your purpose and audience.

Organize for Readers

"How will readers want this organized?"

When material is left in its original, unstructured form, readers waste time trying to understand it. With an outline, you move from a random listing of items as they occurred to you to a deliberate map that will guide readers from point to point.

All readers expect a definite beginning, middle, and ending that provide orientation, discussion, and review. But specific readers want these sections tailored to their expectations. Identify your readers' expectations by (1) anticipating their probable questions about your thesis and (2) visualizing the sequence in which readers would want these questions answered.

Some writers can organize merely by working from a good thesis statement. Others prefer to begin with some type of outline. And some writers like to write a draft and then an outline to check their line of thinking. You might outline early or later. But you need to move from a random collection of ideas to an organized list that helps readers follow your material.

Note

No single form of outline should be followed slavishly. The organization of any writing is ultimately determined by its audience's needs and expectations.

CASE STUDY

EXPLORING AND ARRANGING ASSETS

For your essay on our obsession with cars (see page 29), assume you've developed this brainstorming list:

Your brainstorming list

1. to get us from point A to point B, junkers would suffice
2. we demand variety in our lives
3. we want cars that make us look cool
4. people seem to love their bumper stickers
5. with bumper stickers we exercise our right to free speech
6. nobody likes driving an old bomber
7. no matter what the sticker price we don't care
8. off-road vehicles are everywhere, but most of them never leave the pavement
9. "creativity is more important than knowledge"—what kind of bumper sticker logic is that?
10. Henry Ford's Model T's all looked exactly alike—they were basic transportation, not fashion statements!

11. today's cars are fiberglass and metal gods
12. today's automakers cater to our self-centered fantasies
13. we can run much of our lives without leaving the comfy car
14. the car is the ultimate personal space
15. a great way to escape the daily hassles
16. cars give us the freedom to go where we want when we want
17. we love to do our own thing—what America's all about
18. the car's popularity has led to the phenomenon of drive-up windows
19. people in other countries don't mind public transportation, but we seem to hate it
20. what about the bumper stickers that announce "I'm a tough guy" or "I'm an intellectual"?
21. we can even sing aloud in the car without seeming weird

With your raw material collected, you can now move into the selection phase—leaving open the possibility that new material may surface.

As you review your brainstorming list, you decide to cut items 11, 16, and 19.

Your selection of material to omit

- *Item 11 doesn't relate to the theme of individualism.*
- *Item 16 is a cliché and too general to have real meaning in this essay.*
- *Item 19 makes an unsupportable generalization.*

(If you end up trying to include *all* your raw material, you probably need to refocus on your purpose and audience. Chapter 5 offers advice for selecting fresh and worthwhile material.)

Next, you try to anticipate specific readers' questions about your essay, and you come up with this list of possibilities:

Specific reader questions you anticipate

- *Can you set the scene for us and give us a context for your thesis?*
- *Why do we identify so strongly with our cars?*
- *Where do bumper stickers fit in?*
- *Why do we often hang out in the car?*
- *What does all this say about us as a culture?*

Your readers' expectations give you a basis for organizing your brainstorming material into categories:

Your general outline

I. How our relationship to cars has evolved
II. How cars help us project an ideal self
III. Why we decorate our cars with stickers

IV. How cars provide a private space
V. How cars serve as the ultimate mechanism for achieving individuality

Within each category, you arrange your brainstorming items, along with any other worthwhile material that occurs to you. Your final outline might resemble this one:

Your final outline

I. Why do we love our cars so much?
   A. Originally, cars were merely basic transportation.
   B. All Model T's looked alike.
   C. Today's automakers cater to our urge to do our own thing.
   D. Consumers love this kind of attention.
   E. Thesis: Today's self-centered consumers demand cars that satisfy our craving for individuality.
II. We want cars that make a unique lifestyle statement.
   A. If basic transportation was the issue, an old junker would do.
   B. But we want to project that special image.
   C. Roughly 50 percent of consumers buy some type of off-road vehicle.
   D. Most of these Jeeps and SUVs never leave the pavement.
   E. Driving a sports car really makes us feel special.
III. Stickers serve as our own personal billboard.
   A. They allow us to exercise our right to free speech.
   B. They announce exactly where we stand.
   C. They tell the world that we're animal lovers, intellectuals, tough guys, or whatever.
   D. Volvos often display political or intellectual statements.
   E. NRA stickers, especially on trucks, intimidate wimps like me.
   F. I hurry to get out of the line of fire.
IV. Public transportation is torture for individuals like us.
   A. America's cars are personal hideaways, places to escape other humans.
   B. Drive-up windows are one popular form of escape.
   C. We can transact business, order meals, and dine without ever leaving the car.
   D. We can sing along with the radio as we gobble our fatburgers and fries.
   E. If you try singing on a bus or subway, people look at you funny.
V. Cars entice us because they provide the ultimate mechanism for achieving individuality.
   A. The cars we drive and the stickers we sport proclaim our prepackaged uniqueness.
   B. We can do what we want without seeming weird.

Haley's tone is friendly and relaxed—the voice of a writer who seems at home with herself, her subject, and her readers. We are treated to comfortable images of family things. But the long list of "traditional" family activities also hints at the writer's restlessness and lets us share her mixed feelings of attraction and repulsion.

Suppose Haley had decided to sound more "academic":

Academic tone

> Among my friends and acquaintances, I am apparently the only individual with the good fortune to have parents who remain married. Our family activities are grounded in American tradition: We attend church services and football games; we watch televised sporting events and engage in political debates; at Thanksgiving, we dine at Grandmother's, and at Christmas, we visit an aunt who has always been quite tolerant of children's behavior.

Which tone is better? To see for yourself which version is more inviting, test each against the three big questions for readers on page 37.

Avoid an Overly Informal Tone

How tone can be too informal

Achieving a conversational tone does not mean writing in the same way we would speak to friends at the local burger joint. *Substandard usage* ("He ain't got none"; "I seen it today") is unacceptable in formal writing; so is *slang* ("hurling," "phat," "chillin"), which usually has specific meaning only for members of a particular in-group. *Profanity* ("pissed off"; "This idea sucks"; "What the hell") not only conveys contempt for the audience but often triggers contempt for the person using it. *Colloquialisms* ("OK," "a lot," "snooze") tend to crop up more in speaking than in writing.

How tone can offend

Tone is offensive when it violates the reader's expectations: when it seems disrespectful, tasteless, distant and aloof, too "chummy," casual, or otherwise inappropriate for the topic, the reader, and the situation.

When to use an academic tone

A formal or academic tone is appropriate in countless writing situations: a research paper, a job application, a report for the company president. In a history essay, for example, you would not refer to George Washington and Abraham Lincoln as "those dudes George and Abe." Whenever you begin with freewriting or brainstorming, your tone might be overly informal and is likely to require some adjustment during subsequent drafts.

THE WRITER'S PLANNING GUIDE

Decisions and strategies covered in this chapter apply to almost any writing situation. You can make sure your own planning decisions are complete by following the Planning Guide whenever you write. Items in the Planning Guide are reminders of things to be done.

PLANNING GUIDE

Broad subject:

Limited topic:

Purpose statement:

Thesis statement:

Audience:

Probable audience questions:

Brainstorming list (with irrelevant items deleted):

Outline:

Appropriate tone for audience and purpose:

Your instructor might ask you to use the Planning Guide for early assignments and to submit your responses along with your essay.

This next Planning Guide has been completed to show a typical set of decisions for "Cars R Us" (pages 57–59).

COMPLETED PLANNING GUIDE

Broad subject: Societal values or behavior

Limited topic: How cars appeal to our sense of individuality

Purpose statement (what you want to do): My purpose is to poke fun at our obsession with cars by explaining to my classmates how cars appeal to our sense of individuality. I'll discuss uses of the car as a lifestyle statement, personal billboard, and private sanctuary.

Thesis statement (what you want to say): Today's self-centered consumers demand cars that satisfy our craving for individuality.

Audience: Classmates

Probable audience questions:

Can you set the scene for us and give us a context for your thesis?
Why do we identify so strongly with our cars?
Where do bumper stickers fit in?
Why do we often hang out in the car?
What does all this say about us as a culture?

Brainstorming list:

1. to get us from point A to point B, junkers would suffice
2. we demand variety in our lives
3. we want cars that make us look cool . . . *and so on*

Outline:

I. Why do we love our cars so much?
   A. Originally, cars were merely basic transportation.
   B. All Model T's looked alike.
   C. Today's automakers cater to our urge to do our own thing. . . . *and so on.*

Appropriate tone for audience and purpose: relaxed and humorous

Note *Remember that your decisions for completing the Planning Guide need not follow the strict order of the items listed, so long as you make all the necessary decisions.*

PLANNING FOR GROUP WORK

In Chapter 1, you thought ahead to the kinds of decisions groups must make if they are to benefit from all members' contributions. The following guidelines will enable your group to prepare for collaborative work.

Guidelines for Working Collaboratively

- *Appoint a group manager.* The manager assigns tasks, enforces deadlines, conducts meetings, consults with the instructor, and "runs the show."
- *Prepare a project management plan.* Figure 2.2 shows a sample plan sheet.
- *Compose a purpose statement* (page 22). Spell out the goal and the plan for achieving it.
- *Decide how the group will be organized.* For example, the group will research and plan together, but each person will write a different part of the document.

  Alternatively, some members will plan and research, one person will write a complete draft, and others will review, edit, revise, and produce the final version.

Note *The final revision should display one consistent style throughout, as though written by one person only.*

- *Divide the task.* Who will be responsible for which parts of the essay or report or which phases of the project? Who is the best at doing what (writing, editing, using a word processor, giving an oral presentation to the class)?

Note *Spell out—in writing—specific expectations for each team member.*

- *Establish specific completion dates for each phase.* Keep everyone focused on what is due when.

(*continues*)

Management Plan

Project title:
Audience:
Project manager:
Team members:
Purpose of the project:

Specific Assignments

Research:
Planning:
Drafting:
Revising:
Preparing final document:
Presenting oral briefing:

Due Dates

Research due:
Planning due:
First draft due:
Reviews due:
Revisions due:
Final document due:
Progress reports due:

Specific Assignments

	Date	*Place*	*Time*	*Note Taker*
Group meetings:				
#1				
#2				
#3				
... and so on				
Meetings with instructor				
#1				
#2				
... and so on				

Miscellaneous

How will disputes and grievances be resolved?
How will performances be evaluated?
Other matters (Internet searches, email routing, computer conferences)?

FIGURE 2.2
Sample plan sheet for managing a collaborative project

Guidelines (continued)

- *Decide on a meeting schedule and format.* How often will the group meet, where, and for how long? In or out of class? Who will take notes? Set a strict time limit for each discussion topic. Distribute copies of the meeting agenda and timetable beforehand, and stick to this plan. Meetings work best when each member prepares a specific contribution ahead of time.

(*continues*)

Guidelines (continued)

- *Establish a procedure for responding to the work of other members.* Will reviewing and editing (pages 73–74) be done in writing, face to face, as a group, one on one, or online? Will this process be supervised by the project manager?
- *Develop a file-naming system for various drafts.* When working with multiple drafts, it's too easy to save over a previous version and lose something important.
- *Establish procedures for dealing with group problems.* How will gripes and disagreements be aired and resolved? How will irrelevant discussion be curtailed?
- *Select a group decision-making style.* Will decisions be made alone by the group manager or by group input or majority vote?
- *Appoint a different "observer" for each meeting.* This group member will make a list of what worked and didn't work during the meeting.
- *Decide how to evaluate each member's contribution.* Figure 2.3 shows possible criteria a manager can use to evaluate members. Criteria for evaluating the manager might include open-mindedness, fairness in assigning tasks, ability to organize the team, ability to resolve conflicts, and so on. (Members might keep a journal of personal observations for overall evaluation of the project.)

Sources: Debs 38–41; Hill-Duin 45–50; Hulbert 53–54; Matson 30–31; McGuire 467–68; Morgan 540–41.

FIGURE 2.3
Sample form for evaluating team members

Performance Appraisal for J. Fishkill
(Rate each element as *[superior]*, *[acceptable]*, or *[unacceptable]*, and use the "Comment" section to explain each rating briefly)

- *Cooperation:* [superior]
  Comment: works extremely well with others; always willing to help out
- *Dependability:* [acceptable]
  Comment: arrives on time for meetings; completes all assigned work
- *Effort:* [acceptable]
  Comment: does fair share of work; needs no prodding
- *Quality of work produced:* [superior]
  Comment: produces work that is carefully researched
- *Ability to meet deadlines:* [superior]
  Comment: delivers all assigned work on or before the deadline; helps other team members with last-minute tasks

Project manager's signature R. P. Ketchum

Note *Any evaluation of strengths and weaknesses should be backed up by comments that explain the ratings (as in Figure 2.3). A group needs to decide beforehand what constitutes "effort," "cooperation," and so on.*

☑ A CHECKLIST for Planning

Narrowing Your Topic

- ☐ Is the topic sufficiently **focused** for a college essay? (20)
- ☐ Do **I know enough** about this topic to write something worthwhile? (21)

Identifying Your Purpose

- ☐ Have I identified a definite **goal?** (22)
- ☐ Have I mapped out a clear **strategy** for achieving my goal? (22)

Developing Your Thesis

- ☐ Does my thesis express a definite and worthwhile **viewpoint?** (25)
- ☐ Is the position expressed in my thesis one that I can **support** convincingly? (26)

Pinpointing Your Audience

- ☐ Have I identified my audience's **needs and expectations?** (28)
- ☐ Have I anticipated my audience's **major questions?** (28)
- ☐ Have I anticipated my audience's **reactions?** (28)

Discovering Useful Material

- ☐ Have I used the **invention strategies** that work best for me? (30)
- ☐ Have I discovered **sufficient material** to support my thesis? (30)

Selecting and Organizing Your Material

- ☐ Have I identified my **best material** and retained only that? (33)
- ☐ Have I organized so that readers can **follow my thinking?** (34)
- ☐ Is everything **logically connected** and **related** to my thesis? (33)

Finding Your Voice

- ☐ Does my **tone** fit the topic and the situation? (37)
- ☐ Is my tone **conversational** but **not overly informal?** (38)

Application 2.1

Narrow two or three of the broad topics in this list to a topic suitable for a short essay. (Review pages 20–21.)

EXAMPLE

social rituals →

high school proms →

how the romantic image of prom night has become a myth →

how today's typical prom night is based on competition and appearances and polluted by drugs, alcohol, and sex

Topics to Be Narrowed

entertainment	careers	war	family
life	sports	crime	sex
social rituals	automobiles	fashion	music
marriage	alcohol	studying	drugs

Application 2.2

Compose statements of purpose for essays on three or more of the topics in Application 2.1. (Review page 22.)

EXAMPLE

Topic The problems with prom night

Purpose statement My purpose is to persuade past and present high school students that high school proms have become a waste of time. I will discuss four major problems with prom night: drugs and alcohol, sexual promiscuity, competition, and danger.

Application 2.3

Convert your statements of purpose from Application 2.2 into thesis statements. (Review pages 23–28.)

EXAMPLE

Purpose statement My purpose is to persuade past and present high school students that proms have become a waste of time. I will discuss four major problems with prom night: drugs and alcohol, sexual promiscuity, competition, and danger.

Thesis statement High school proms have lost their value as social events and have become expensive and exaggerated rituals that entrap students in situations they often despise.

Application 2.4

For each thesis statement in Application 2.3, brainstorm and write three or four topic statements for individual supporting paragraphs. Arrange your topic statements in logical order. (Review pages 24–25.)

EXAMPLE

Thesis statement	High school proms have lost their value as social events and have become expensive and exaggerated rituals that entrap students in situations they often despise.
First topic statement	Parents, teachers, coaches, and other role models seem to merely accept the fact that students are going to drink or get high on prom night.
Second topic statement	It is almost an unspoken law that a couple (no matter how unacquainted) should have sex on prom night.
Third topic statement	Competition over who has the most expensive dress, the most unusual tux, the biggest limousine, or the cutest date also detracts from the evening.
Fourth topic statement	Not only do many students feel obliged to attend the prom in order to fit in, but they also feel obliged to participate in often dangerous after-prom events.

Application **2.5**

Revise the following thesis statements that do not already (1) focus on a limited topic, (2) establish a definite viewpoint, (3) offer a worthwhile viewpoint, (4) make a supportable claim, or (5) preview, in order, the supporting ideas.* Mark an X next to those that are adequate. (Review pages 25–27.)

EXAMPLE

Faulty thesis	Grades are a way of life in college. *[establishes no definite or worthwhile viewpoint and fails to preview the supporting ideas]*
Revised thesis	Grades are an aid to education because they motivate students, provide an objective measure of performance, and prepare people to compete successfully in their careers.

1. My academic adviser is a new professor.
2. Less than one semester in college has changed my outlook.
3. My last blind date was childish, repulsive, and boring.
4. I would love to spend a year in (name a country).
5. Nuclear power is a controversial issue.

*For practice, this exercise asks that each thesis statement include an explicit preview. Any of your own thesis statements that do not include such an explicit preview should nonetheless provide a clear hint of the essay's direction.

6. I have three great fears.
7. This essay concerns my attitude toward online education.
8. Elvis Presley had an amazing career.
9. The Batmobile is a good car for students because it's inexpensive, fuel-efficient, and dependable.
10. My significant other is the kindest person I know.

Application **2.6**

Collaborative Project: Organize into small groups. Choose a subject from the following list. Then decide on a thesis statement and brainstorm (not necessarily in this order). Identify a specific audience. Group similar items under the same major categories, and develop an outline. When each group completes this procedure, one representative can present the outline to the class for suggestions about revision. (Review page 32.)

a description of the ideal classroom
instructions for surviving the first semester of college
instructions for surviving a blind date
suggestions for improving one's college experience
causes of teenage suicide
arguments for or against a formal grading system
an argument for an improvement you think this college needs
the qualities of a good parent
how you expect your country to be different in 10 years
young people's needs that parents often ignore
difficulties faced by nontraditional students

Application **2.7**

Web-Based Project: Go to the University of Victoria's Writer's Guide at **<http://web.uvic.ca/wguide/>**. Use the Table of Contents page to find *Audience and Tone.* Locate one item of information about audience and tone (or voice) not covered in this chapter. Take careful notes for a brief discussion of this information in class. Attach a copy of all relevant Web pages to your written notes.

ALTERNATIVE ASSIGNMENTS

1. Locate additional information on thesis statements from the Writing Workshop at the University of Illinois at **<http://www.english.uiuc.edu/cws/wworkshop/>.** Follow the *Tips and Techniques* link to *Developing a Thesis.*

2. For advice about organizing a paper, go to the Paradigm Online Writing Assistant at
<http://www.powa.org/content/blogcategory/17/106/>.
3. For advice about discovering useful material (invention), go to the Paradigm Online Writing Assistant at
<http://www.powa.org/content/blogcategory/18/104/>.

Note *Instead of quoting your sources directly, paraphrase (page 409). Be sure to credit each source of information (page 405).*

Application **2.8**

From Application 2.4, select the most promising set of materials, and write your best essay. Use selected items from your brainstorming list to develop each support paragraph. Outline as necessary. Provide an engaging introduction and a definite conclusion. Use the questions on page 16 as guidelines for revising your essay.

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