A 7-Step Writing Formula

Once you have received a writing assignment in class, follow the 7-step formula described below.

Step 1  List Your Random Thoughts. As soon as you know the subject of your assignment, zero in on it by making a list of every related idea that comes to mind in any order. Some of your thoughts may not even make sense, but writing them down helps you get started. It will help you avoid wasting time, sitting and wondering what to write about.

Step 2  Limit Your Subject. Your random thoughts may take you in many different directions even if most of the ideas are related, but you must limit the subject so that your theme can be made unified and coherent and can be written in the allotted time and with the allotted number of words.

Step 3  Write Your Thesis or Topic Sentence. If you are like many other students, you will not immediately hit upon the exact subject that you want to develop. By the time you have finished limiting your subject. However, you should be prepared to write a topic sentence or thesis containing your main idea. It serves as a guide for the organization and development of the balance of your paper. Writing a good topic or thesis sentence is probably the most important single factor in the writing of a good paper. When you write your topic sentence or thesis statement, at the very beginning of the process, it means that you probably have gone through the first two steps mentally, and you are ready to start step 4.

Step 4  Plan the Body. Write in outline form the major points you will use in explaining your main idea. Decide on the best order in which to present them. Now, consider how you are going to support these points. Each point must be explained, described, or proven as fully as possible. Just to say, for example, that the United Nations is a great organization does not mean any more than to say that it is a rotten organization. Your reason, examples, and detailed descriptions are vital to the development of a good paper. (This step is explained more fully later.)

Step 5  Plan Your Conclusion. Ideas for your conclusions should come easily at this juncture. Jot them down. Your conclusion should develop naturally, as an outgrowth of the introduction and body, not as something new and different. A good test is to read the conclusion and then the introduction. Do they complement each other? Do they seem to be part of the same package? They should.

Step 6  Write the Paper. This should be a relatively simple task if you have followed the formula to this point. You have already done the more difficult work. You have limited your subject and written you topic sentence. You have planned the organization and development of the body of your paper and jotted down ideas for your conclusion. The result is a rough draft of your finished product. You need only polish it with carefully worried sentences.

Step 7  Polish and Correct. Try to save at least five minutes for this chore. Read the paper twice, once to see whether your ideas hold together, and a second time to correct the diction, spelling, grammar, and mechanics. Fiction refers to your choice of words. You are asked to be aware of it at this point because, as students write longer papers, they tend to become wordy and repetitious. Use words carefully and economically. Do not repeat unnecessarily. If you have the time, recopy the paper neatly.

From The Writing Clinic
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