THE WRITING PROCESS
RESPONDING TO ASSIGNMENTS

Specific assignment

➤ What’s wanted from you?
  ♦ Look for words to help you discern your approach:
    – Discuss, describe, analyze, report, interpret, explain, define, argue, evaluate

➤ For whom are your writing?

➤ What kind of research is required?

➤ How can you narrow the assigned subject?

General assignment

➤ What subject do you know something about?
  What have you been wondering about?

➤ Have you recently had a lively discussion about a controversial topic?

➤ What have you read or seen lately?

➤ What makes you especially happy or angry?

➤ Which of your own or others’ dislikes and preferences would you like to understand better?
QUESTIONS ABOUT AUDIENCE

➤ Who are my readers?
➤ Why are readers reading my writing and what do they expect from it?
➤ What do I want them to know or do after reading? How do I make myself clear?
➤ What is my relationship to my readers?
➤ What are my readers’ ages and sex? occupations? social or economic roles? backgrounds? beliefs? hobbies? How do these characteristics influence their attitudes towards my topic?
➤ What do my readers already know? What don’t they know?
➤ Should I use specialized language? How much?
➤ What ideas, arguments, or information might surprise readers? Excite them? Offend them?
➤ What misconceptions might readers have of my topic and/or my approach to the topic? How can I dispel them?
➤ What will readers do with my writing? Should I expect them to read every word or to scan for information? Can I help with a summary, headings, or other aids?
KNOWING WHAT READERS NEED

As a reader yourself, you know what readers need:

➤ **Context:**
  ♦ A link between what they read and their own knowledge

➤ **Predictability:**
  ♦ An understanding of the writer’s purpose and how it is being achieved

➤ **Information:**
  ♦ The specific facts, examples, and other details that make the subject clear, concrete, interesting, and convincing

➤ **Respect:**
  ♦ A sense that the writer respects their values and beliefs, their background, and their intelligence

➤ **Voice:**
  ♦ A sense that the writer is a real person

➤ **Clarity and correctness:**
  ♦ Writing free of unnecessary stumbling blocks and mistakes
 FUNCTIONS OF THE THESIS STATEMENT

➤ The thesis statement **narrows your subject** to a single, central idea that you want readers to gain from your essay.

➤ The thesis statement **claims something specific and significant** about your subject, a claim that requires support.

➤ The thesis statement **conveys your purpose**, your reason for writing.

➤ The thesis statement often concisely **previews the arrangement of ideas**.
WAYS TO GAIN DISTANCE FROM YOUR WORK

➤ Take a break after finishing the draft.
➤ Ask someone to read and react to your draft.
➤ Type a handwritten draft.
➤ Print out a word-processed draft.
➤ Outline your draft.
➤ Listen to your draft.
➤ Ease the pressure.
CHECKLIST FOR REVISION

**Purpose:** Does the purpose conform to the assignment? Is it consistent throughout the paper?

**Thesis:** Where does the thesis become clear? Does the paper stray from the thesis? Does it fulfill the commitment of the thesis?

**Structure:** List the main points of the paper. How well does each support the thesis? How effective is their arrangement for the paper’s purpose?

**Development:** How well do details, examples, and other evidence support each main point?

**Tone:** How appropriate is the tone for the purpose, topic, and intended readers?

**Unity:** What does each sentence and paragraph contribute to the thesis? Where might digressions occur?

**Coherence:** How clearly and smoothly does the paper flow? Where does it seem rough or awkward? Can transitions be improved?

**Title, introduction, conclusion:** How accurately, and interestingly does the title reflect the content? How well does the introduction engage and focus attention? How effective is the conclusion in providing a sense of completion?
WAYS TO FIND WHAT NEEDS EDITING

- Take a break, even fifteen or twenty minutes, to clear your head.

- Work on a paper copy if possible, even if you compose and revise on a computer.

- Read the draft slowly, and read what you actually see. Otherwise, you’re likely to read what you intended to write but didn’t.

- Read as if you are encountering the draft for the first time. Put yourself in the reader’s place.

- Have a classmate, friend, or relative read your work. Make sure you understand and consider the reader’s suggestions, even if eventually you decide not to take them.

- Read the draft aloud, preferably into a tape recorder, listening for awkward rhythms, repetitive sentence patterns, and missing or clumsy transitions.

- Don’t rely on a spelling grammar and style checker to find what needs editing.
CHECKLIST FOR EDITING

Clarity

*Check for* exact language, parallelism, clear modifiers, clear reference or pronouns, complete sentences, sentences separated correctly.

Effectiveness

*Check for* emphasis of main ideas, smooth and informative transitions, variety in sentence length and structure, appropriate language, concise sentences.

Correctness

*Check for* correct spelling, pronoun forms, verb forms, verb tenses, agreement between subjects and verbs, pronouns and antecedents. Also watch for sentence fragments, comma splices, and correct use of apostrophes (in possessives but not plural nouns and in contractions but not possessive personal pronouns).
COMMENTING ON OTHERS’ WRITING

➤ Be sure you know what the writer is saying. If necessary, summarize the paper to understand its content.

➤ Address only your most significant concerns with the work. Use the revision checklist (p. 55) as a guide to what is significant. Unless you have other instructions, ignore mistakes in grammar, punctuation, spelling, and the like.

➤ Remember that you are the reader, not the writer. Don’t edit sentences, add details, or otherwise assume responsibility for the paper.

➤ Be specific. If something confuses you, say why.

➤ Be supportive as well as honest. Tell the writer what you like about the paper. Word comments positively. Comment in a way that emphasizes the effect of the work on you, the reader. Avoid measuring the work against a set of external standards.

➤ While reading, make your comments in writing. Even if you will be delivering your comments in person later on, the written record will help you recall what you thought.

➤ Link comments to specific parts of a paper. Especially if you are reading the paper on a computer, be clear about what part of the paper each comment relates to.

➤ Phrase your comments carefully. Avoid misunderstandings by making sure comments are both clear and respectful.
BENEFITING FROM COMMENTS ON YOUR WRITING

➤ Think of your readers as counselors or coaches. They can help you set the virtues, and flaws in your work and sharpen your awareness of readers’ needs.

➤ Read or listen to comments closely.

➤ Know what the critic is saying. If you need more information, ask for it, or consult the appropriate section of this handbook.

➤ Don’t become defensive. Letting comments offend you will only erect a barrier to improvement in your writing.

➤ Revise your work in response to appropriate comments. Whether or not you are required to act on comments, you will learn more from actually revising than from just thinking about it.

➤ Remember that you are the final authority on your work. You should be open to suggestions, but you are free to decline advice when you think it is inappropriate.

➤ Keep track of both the strengths and the weaknesses others identify. Then in later assignments you can build on your successes and give special attention to problem areas.
EXERCISE
Editing

Edit the following passage, correcting all errors and dividing the passage into paragraphs.

When my husband Joe had cancer surgery five years ago, each of his family members responded just as I knew they would. John, his father, decided to organize the family’s calls. Because, of course, everything would run so much more smoothly. Thus Jane, Matt, and Jim received detailed sheets of instructions in the mail. Telling them which days to telephone r.j. smith hospital to talk to Joe and what presents to send. Jane, enraged, promptly threw a tantrum. Calling Matt and me to complain about her father’s overbearing behavior, “I”, she yelled, “am a Psychiatrist who knows how to handle these situations, I am not still a child.” Matt also responded predictably. By avoiding the situation. He threw himself into his work. Normally a later sleeper, Matt took to leaving at 5:00 a.m., driving on the deserted expressway and arriving at work before six a.m. In addition, he didn’t return until 11:00 p.m. When he would fall into bed so exhausted that he couldn’t worry about Joe. Jim, too, responded predictably. He fumed inside for weeks, ignored John’s instructions, and sent cartons of books to Joe. So that he would never be bored. The books were funny. Because Jim had read Norman Cousins’ book about the healing power of laughter. Within a few months, Joe recovered from the surgery. In spite of his family.
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