Pre-Writing

Analyzing prewriting activities

 (https://fletcher.instructure.com/courses/194826/files/47867604/download?wrap=1)

The activities associated with prewriting might seem like they have little in common with formal, academic writing. Prewriting is, by its nature, loose and free-flowing. It's the most open-ended part of the writing process, open to creativity and experimentation. Because of that, some people might see it as silly: a step worth skipping to get to the more "serious" work of real writing.

Avoid that temptation. Prewriting IS fun, so take the time to enjoy that part. It allows you to fall in love with your topic, to find a way into the project that seems worthy of exploring in depth.

It is also very productive time. Raw content generated during prewriting can eliminate hours of hard labor further into the writing process. It's truly an investment that you'll thank yourself for later on.

This section explores kinds of prewriting activities and the purpose behind each, so that you can select which is appropriate for each new writing task you undertake.

Prewriting Strategies

Prewriting is the first stage in the writing process. When using a prewriting strategy, you jot your initial thoughts about a topic down on paper. Prewriting has no set structure or organization; it is usually just a collection of ideas that may find themselves in your paper over time. Prewriting is also a great way to get past writer's block — that period of time when you find you have no ideas or don't know how to put your thoughts together.

There is no right or wrong way to approach prewriting, but there are some strategies that can get you thinking.

Mind-mapping Strategy

Mind-mapping is very similar to freewriting, but the outcome often looks more like a list of ideas. This strategy is quite similar to brainstorming where the listed ideas may or may not be connected with arrows or lines. You should set a time limit of 5 to 10 minutes and jot down all the ideas you have about the topic. Instead of writing sentences, you are quickly jotting down ideas, perhaps showing connections and building a map of your thoughts. Here are some online tools that can help with this process:

- Check out **Inspiration Software** **(http://www.inspiration.com/)** where you can use a free trial of their software for thirty days.
- Try **XMind** **(http://www.xmind.net/)**, a free mind mapping tool that runs on both Mac and PC computers.
- Use **Mindomo** **(http://www.mindomo.com/)**, which is a collaborative mind-mapping tool. You may use the basic tool for

free or pay a minimal fee for extra features.

Mind-mapping Strategy in Action

Explore an example of mind-mapping created for the topic: how can I reinvent myself with a new job role?

Freewriting Strategy

Freewriting Strategy is the process of simply writing down any and all ideas about the topic that pop into your mind. Set a timer for yourself and write continuously for 5 or 10 minutes on your topic. If you run out of ideas, rewrite the last word or phrase on the page until another idea jumps into your thoughts. Keep writing, even if it doesn't make sense! At this point, you are just getting your ideas down on paper without editing or judging them. If you are trying to decide between topics, it is a good idea to freewrite on all of them to see which one provides you with the best ideas.

Freewriting in Action

Explore an example of free-writing created for the topic: *What is the impact of traditional ecological knowledge on environmental management?*

Fire control, fire prevention, look at two different environments, contrasting ecosystems and the role of fire and impact on humans — Dene in Alberta — what is the role of fire in their environment? How does this contrast or compare with an African tribe? Didn't I read something about the Kissi tribe and how colonization affected their environment because the French outlawed their land management practices? What is the landscape there? Savannah is much different than the Boreal forests of Canada, and might provide a good comparison. I need to look at the European view and how it affected both communities with their policies — How did it interfere or support the traditional use of fire in these communities? They didn't appreciate the knowledge of the people who were there before . . .

Questioning Strategy

This is a basic strategy, useful at many levels, that helps you jot down the basic important information about a topic.

Questioning Strategy in Action

Explore the answers created for the topic: *What is the impact of traditional ecological knowledge on environmental management?*

Who? The Dene and Kissi tribes from two different ecosystems were impacted by European colonizers and their fire management policies.

What? Consider the impact of fire on the peoples in both environments.

Where? Canadian policies and historical data compared to African policies and historical data.

When? As far back as the last ice age, there is evidence of how fire has impacted the land. I will focus on the impact of colonization and the policies that affected the land management practices of the indigenous peoples. I will also consider the current implications of controlling and preventing fires.

Why? This information is important because the knowledge from the indigenous peoples and their traditional practices provides important insights into how to improve current fire practices.

How? Look at historical and current records, such as Lewis, Wuerthner, Fairhead and Leach . . .

Note: Notice how this series of questions and answers is more developed than the same topic explored previously in Freewriting. This author has done a bit of preliminary reading on the subject between the two prewriting activities. This helps illustrate how prewriting can be useful to return to, even after later stages of the writing process.

Sketching Strategy

A picture is worth a thousand words. Your first thinking is done in pictures. So, if you are a visual learner and like to sketch out your thoughts, grab a pen and paper and draw what you are thinking. This strategy is especially effective if you are trying to conceptualize an idea or clarify relationships between parts of an idea.

Sketching involves drawing out your ideas using a pen and paper. One strategy that can be useful for planning comparison and contrast type papers is a **Venn diagram**. A Venn diagram is a strategy that uses two (or more) overlapping circles to show relationships between sets of ideas. The information written where two circles overlap is common to both ideas. The information written outside the overlapping area is information distinct to only one of the ideas.

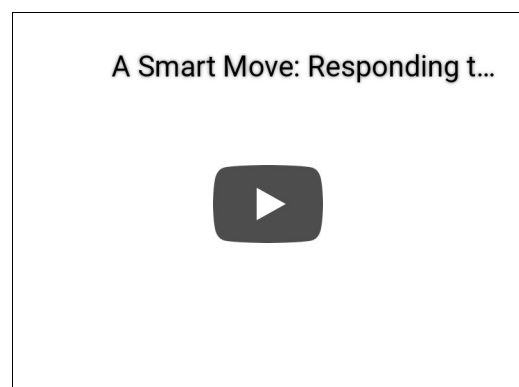**Sketching Strategy in Action**

Explore the sketch of a Venn diagram created for the topic: *What is the impact of traditional ecological knowledge on environmental management?*

Note: Notice how this Venn Diagram is even more developed than the same topic explored previously in Freewriting and Questioning. This author has done even deeper research on the subject, demonstrated by the citations given after some facts here. Again, this helps illustrate how prewriting can be useful to return to, even after later stages of the writing process.

Whichever strategy you choose, be sure to save your prewriting work. You may want to revisit this stage of the writing process again to make sure that you captured all your thoughts in your outline or first draft.

Video: Rhetorical Situation

Another component of planning a writing project is to figure out the **rhetorical situation** you're responding to. The video below illustrates the role the rhetorical situation plays, and how you can analyze the needs you when faced with a new writing task.

Transcript: **A Smart Move: Responding to the Rhetorical Situation.pdf (https://fletcher.instructure.com/courses/194826**

Can you identify:

- your purpose for writing?
- your target audience you hope to inform or influence?
- your context for writing in the first place?
- your background and experience that help shape what you think about this subject?

Working Thesis Statement

Parts of a Thesis Sentence

The thesis sentence is the key to most academic writing. This is important and worth repeating: **The thesis sentence is the key to most academic writing.**

The purpose of academic writing is to offer your own insights, analyses, and ideas—to show not only that you understand the concepts you're studying, but also that you have thought about those concepts in your own way, agreed or disagreed, or developed your own unique ideas as a result of your analysis. The thesis sentence is the one sentence that encapsulates the result of your thinking, as it offers your main insight or argument in condensed form.

A basic thesis sentence has two main parts:

1. **Topic:** What you're writing about
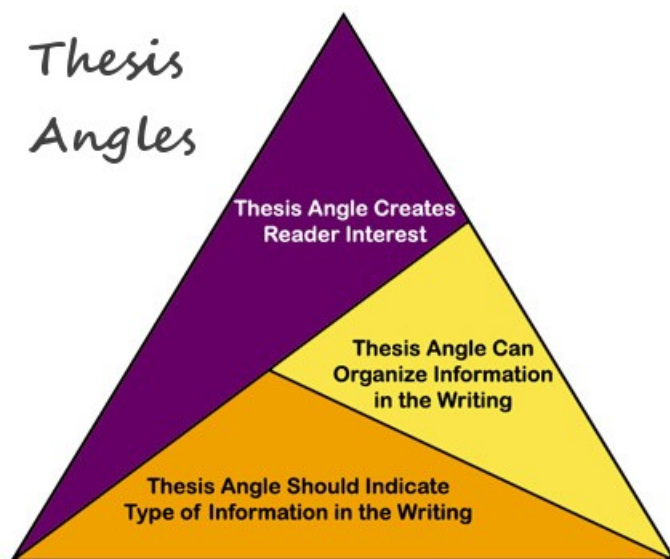2. **Angle:** What your main idea is about that topic

Thesis: A regular exercise regime leads to multiple benefits, both physical and emotional.

Topic: Regular exercise regime

Angle: Leads to multiple benefits

Thesis Angles

Most writers can easily create a topic: television viewing, the Patriot Act, Shakespeare's Hamlet. The more difficult part is creating an angle. But the angle is necessary as a means of creating interest and as a means of indicating the type and organization of the information to follow.

Thesis Angle Creates Reader Interest:

As a reader, you may have the following reactions to these statements:

- **In this paper, I'm writing about exercise.**

So what? What about exercise?

- **I will examine the experiences of adult college students.**

What about those experiences?

- **Television viewing is the topic of this paper.**

What aspect of television viewing?

Thesis Angle can Organize Information in the Writing:

The economics of television have made the viewing experience challenging for the viewer. Shows are shifted and not offered regularly; similar programming occurs at the same time to address demographic viewing statistics, which forces viewer choice; commercials are rampant; and viewers need expensive tools like TiVo to navigate the system.

As a reader, you understand intuitively that the information to come will deal with 1) shows shifted, 2) demographics controlling the viewing, 3) commercials, and 4) need for technical tools. Again, the order of information in the thesis' angle "promises" the order of information coming in the writing.

Thesis Angle Should Indicate Type of Information in the Writing:

A regular exercise regimen creates multiple benefits, both physical and emotional.

As a reader, you understand intuitively that the information to come will deal with physical and emotional benefits of exercise. Another way of thinking about the angle is that it "promises" the type of information to come in the writing.

So what about this thesis sentence? **Adult college students have different experiences than traditionally-aged college students.**

As a reader, you understand intuitively that the information to come will deal with the different types of experiences that adult college students have. But you don't quite know if the information will deal only with adults, or if it will compare adults' experiences with those of typical college students. And you don't quite know what type of information will come first, second, third, etc.

Realize that a thesis sentence offers a range of possibilities for specificity and organization. As a writer, you may opt to pique reader interest by being very specific or not fully specific in your thesis sentence. The point here is that there's no one standard way to write a thesis sentence.

Sometimes a writer is more or less specific depending on the reading audience and the effect the writer wants to create. Sometimes a writer puts the angle first and the topic last in the sentence, or sometimes the angle is even implied. You need to gauge your reading audience and you need to understand your own style as a writer. The only basic requirements are that the thesis sentence needs a topic and an angle. The rest is up to you.

Common Problems

Although you have creative control over your thesis sentence, you still should try to avoid the following problems, not for stylistic reasons, but because they indicate a problem in the thinking that underlies the thesis sentence.

Thesis Sentence too Broad

Hospice workers need support.

The sentence above actually is a thesis sentence; it has a topic (hospice workers) and an angle (need support). But the angle is very broad. When the angle in a thesis sentence is too broad, the writer may not have carefully thought through the specific support for the rest of the writing. A thesis angle that's too broad makes it easy to fall into the trap of offering

information that deviates from that angle.

Thesis Sentence too Narrow

Hospice workers have a 55% turnover rate compared to the general health care population's 25% turnover rate.

The above sentence really isn't a thesis sentence at all, because there's no angle idea to support. A narrow statistic, or a narrow statement of fact, doesn't offer the writer's own ideas or analysis about a topic. A clearer example of a thesis statement with an angle of development would be the following:

The high turnover rate in hospice workers (55 percent) compared to the general health care population (25 percent) indicates a need to develop support systems to reverse this trend.

Where to Place a Thesis?

In the U.S., it's customary for most academic writers to put the thesis sentence somewhere toward the start of the essay or research paper. The focus here is on offering the main results of your own thinking in your thesis angle and then providing evidence in the writing to support your thinking.

A legal comparison might help to understand thesis placement. If you have seen television shows or movies with courtroom scenes, the lawyer usually starts out by saying, "My client is innocent!" to set the scene, and then provides different types of evidence to support that argument. Academic writing in the U.S. is similar; your thesis sentence provides your main assertion to set the scene of the writing, and then the details and evidence in the rest of the writing support the assertion in the thesis sentence.

NOTE: Although the usual pattern is "thesis sentence toward the start," there may be reasons to place the thesis elsewhere in the writing. You may decide to place the thesis sentence at the end of the writing if your purpose is to gradually induce a reading audience to understand and accept your assertion. You may decide to place the thesis sentence in the middle of the writing if you think you need to provide relatively complicated background information to your readers before they can understand the assertion in your thesis.

As a writer, you have the option of placing the thesis anywhere in the writing. But, as a writer, you also have the obligation to make the thesis sentence idea clear to your readers. Beginning writers usually stick with "thesis sentence toward the start," as it makes the thesis prominent in the writing and also reminds them that they need to stick with providing evidence directly related to that thesis sentence's angle.

Thesis Creation

At what point do you write a thesis sentence? Of course, this varies from writer to writer and from writing assignment to writing assignment. You'll usually do some preliminary idea development first, before a thesis idea emerges. And you'll usually have a working thesis before you do the bulk of your research, or before you fully create the supporting details for your writing.

Think of the thesis as the mid-point of an hourglass.

You develop ideas for writing and prewriting, using various strategies, until a main idea or assertion emerges. This main idea or assertion becomes your point to prove—your working thesis sentence.

Once you have a working thesis sentence with your main idea, you can then develop more support for that idea, but in a more focused way that deepens your thinking about the thesis angle.

Realize that a thesis is really a working thesis until you finalize the writing. As you do more focused research, or develop more focused support, your thesis may change a bit. Just make sure that you retain the basic thesis characteristics of topic and angle.

Thesis Checklist

When you draft a working thesis, it can be helpful to review the guidelines for a strong thesis. The following checklist is a

helpful tool you can use to check your thesis once you have it drafted.

My thesis statement...

- is debatable.
- states an opinion or provides an angle on my topic.
- states my topic.
- lets my readers know the main idea of the essay.
- is specific but not so specific that I cannot develop it well for the length requirements of my assignment.