

WRITING ROADMAP

1 PHASE 1: PLAN YOUR PIECE

80% of the time you spend "writing"... will NOT be spent writing. It will be spent planning. The more time you spend planning, the less time you will spend writing and revising.

WRITING TOOLS

To access the various "thinking tools" referenced in this map, go to:

ELASKILLS.COM/TOOLS



A. THE WHY: "WHY Am I Writing This Piece?"

a. What is the *purpose* for writing this piece?

Most often, your real purpose is, "Because my teacher said so!" So, let's ask, "*Why did my teacher assign it? What does he/she want to get from this assignment?*"



b. What is the *topic*?

What are you going to write about? Often, teachers assign the topic. If you can select your own but need help choosing it, look for a Brainstorm Prompt on the Thinking Tools page.



c. Who is the *intended audience*?

Once again, for a school assignment, your teacher may be your one and only real audience. *If that's the case, who do you think your potential audience should be?*



d. What is my *angle*?

What, exactly, do I want to say about my topic? If your angle is "too big," you'll struggle to focus. If your angle is "too small," you won't have much to say.



See the Thinking Tools for help on how to "Cut the Right-Sized Slice of Your Topic."

e. What is my *role*?

Is my primary objective to persuade, inform, entertain? Or a combination?



B. THE OUTCOME: "What Should the Final Piece Look Like?"

a. What are the *specific parameters required*?

READ DIRECTIONS CAREFULLY! Underline every detail that must be included. (Missing elements is how students lose most points.) If possible, staple assignment rubric to this map.



b. What *questions* should my paper answer?

Look at the assignment for required sub-topics; convert them to questions.



Combine smaller questions. In an essay, each guiding question should have 3-4 answers; questions resulting in only 1-2 answers should combine them into broader questions.

Use the Writing Planning Guide on page 2 to get started...

PHASE 1: PLAN YOUR PIECE – NARRATIVE

Use this planning guide to prepare a 3-D Writing Organizer for a narrative; copy the questions, below, on corresponding “envelope pockets.” The questions are listed in the order most relevant to authors. However, story elements will come to mind in random order, making the notecard system ideal for planning a narrative!

se this Planning Guide

Pocket A Insert cards listing all characters:	(A) Who is this story about? Who are supporting characters?	Pocket B: Insert cards describing a summary of the conflict <i>and</i> of the resolution:	(B) What is the main conflict/climax? What is the resolution?	Pocket C: Insert cards describing possible themes of the story:	(C) What is the theme? Why is this story important to share?	Pocket D: Insert cards describing possible inciting actions:	(D) What is the inciting action? What initially <i>triggers</i> the main conflict?
Pocket E: Insert cards describing mini conflicts/plot twists:	(E) What are mini conflicts/plot twists that happen between the inciting action and climax?	Pocket F: Insert cards describing possible rising actions:	(F) What are other, rising actions that triggered mini conflicts/plot twists and/or main conflict?	The “Exposition” Insert cards listing all details to include in the exposition:	(G) What is the background, setting, point-of-view? How can the reader be ‘hooked’ in the first 200 words?	Falling Actions Insert cards listing all details to cover following the resolution:	(H) Following the resolution, what lose ends need to be wrapped up?

PHASE 2: WRITE

In Phase 1, you determined WHAT to say. Now you must determine HOW to say it; let your 3-D Organizer guide you.

If you get stuck, imagine that you’re writing an email to a friend. Still stuck? Talk to someone! A conversation about your topic is a great way to get words flowing. (It’s best if the person does NOT know much about your topic; if they’re confused, their questions will help you clarify your message.)

PHASE 3: REVISE, IMPROVE, CONFERENCE

Revising is about reviewing your ideas; did you express them completely and clearly? Before revising, take a break! (A minimum 24-hour break is optimal.) Reread your first draft with fresh eyes! Also, review your own writing at least once *before* conferencing with your teacher. **Use the REDecoder to help you evaluate your writing:**

COMPOSITION REDECODER

SENTENCES...

- A. Are complete with subjects and predicates. [Fragment present.]
- B. Include descriptive adjectives/adverbs, used clearly. [Clarification needed.]
- C. Are varied in length, including use of: prepositions, conjunctions, and interjections to add detail and interest. [Sentences are short and feel choppy.]
- D. “Sound” varied, with clauses placed before *and* after the core sentence. [Sentence-flow sounds choppy.]

PARAGRAPHS...

- E. Begin with a sentence that clearly introduces the topic. [Topic is not clear.]
- F. Include following sentences: related to topic, make sense, & in logical order.
 - 1. [Sentence(s) do not relate to topic.]
 - 2. [Confusing or contradictory language; I don’t understand this part.]
 - 3. [Sentences seem out of order.]
- G. Include specific examples to support generalizations or opinions. [This statement needs more evidence.]
- H. Include transition words that flow from one sentence to the next. [This sentence is an abrupt or surprise shift.]
- I. Conclude with a summarizing sentence and signals the ending. [The closing sentence needs attention.]

MULTI-PARAGRAPH COMPOSITIONS...

- J. The first paragraph introduces the main topic; it tells the reader what they are about to read and why they should keep reading. [The topic of this essay is not clearly defined or communicated.]
- K. The “first 100 words” have a good “hook” to capture readers’ interest. NOTE: Often, the best hooks are hiding later in the piece. [Opening could be stronger.]
- L. Each paragraph in body has only one sub-topic that supports the main topic.
 - 1. [The sub-topic of this paragraph is not clear.]
 - 2. [There is more than one sub-topic in this paragraph.]
 - 3. [Some details in this do not support the sub-topic.]
- M. Paragraphs transition smoothly, from one to the next. [This paragraph is an abrupt shift and/or does not make clear sense here.]
- N. The final paragraph:
 - 1. Closes all open loops. [Reader is left with unanswered questions.]
 - 2. Signals that the piece is ending. [Ending is abrupt.]

STYLE ELEMENTS...

- O. Remove unnecessary words:
 - 1. Avoid “clearing the throat.”
 - 2. Use positive form.
 - 3. Use active voice.
 - 4. Remove all words adding no value.
- P. Optimize word-choice:
 - 1. Use words that activate the five senses; “show” vs “tell.”
 - 2. Use descriptive verbs.
 - 3. Avoid clichés, tired phrases, slang.
- Q. Use compound sentences intentionally; stack together for cadence (flow).
- R. Use parallel structure; sentence elements alike in function share the same grammatical form, including:
 - 1. Lists
 - 2. Comparisons
 - 3. Headings & subheadings
 - 4. Phrases and clauses within a sentence
- S. Keep related words together.
- T. Place emphatic words at the end of sentences.

EXPOSITORY/ARGUMENT WRITING

- U. Determine style/voice:
 - 1. “Classical” = 1st/2nd person conversation.
 - 2. “Formal” = 3rd person reporting.
- V. Avoid rhetorical questions.
- W. Avoid unsure language (may, might, etc).
- X. Provide background info; do not assume reader has prior knowledge of your topic.
- Y. For arguments, defend opinions with facts/evidence.

LITERARY ANALYSIS

- Z. Literary analysis is present tense.
- AA. Provide background; assume reader of your piece has NOT read the literature.
- BB. Support quotes with proper lead-in and transition.
- CC. Plot summary must be balanced with your unique and thoughtful analysis.

NARRATIVE

- DD. Dialogue: new speakers are signaled with new paragraph and framed with proper transitions.
- EE. New characters are introduced with plenty of background.
- FF. Plot is developed with strong conflicts.
- GG. The resolution solves all conflicts and closes all loops.

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PHASE 4: EDIT / IMPROVE / CONFERENCE

Editing focuses on punctuation and spelling. This phase is done after we have clarified the composition and expression of our ideas, in Phase 3. It is difficult to edit our own writing because the content becomes so familiar to our brain, we often become blind to “obvious” details. Nonetheless, do another review for editing, then ask 1-2 other people to review your work.

PUNCTUATION REDECODER

WORDS

1. Use apostrophes with possessive nouns/pronouns:

- Singular possessive ('s)
- Plural possessive (s')
- Possessive pronouns *avoid* apostrophes.
 - it's = it is
 - its = possessive form of it

2. Use pronouns that match their antecedents in gender, person, and number.

SENTENCES

3. End with a: period, question mark, or exclamation mark.

4. Capitalize:

- First letter in sentence
- Proper nouns (names of people, places, things)
- Titles; all words but articles, conjunctions, prepositions less than five letters
- Quote; first word of quote
- Days, months, holidays (not seasons)
- Time-periods; specific names

5. Use commas:

- Between separate items in a list. (Ex: I like grapes, pears, and strawberries.)
- Between two adjectives of similar meaning or tone used to describe the same noun. (Ex: We went for a walk in the crisp, cold air.)
- To prevent misreading. (Ex: Ever since, they've been happy. -vs- Ever since they've been happy... [fragment])
- To set off introductory clauses. (Ex: Screaming with excitement, she ran to her grandma.)
- To separate a dependent clause in the middle of a sentence; separate with a comma on both sides. If the dependent clause provides clarifying information, it may also be separated by parentheses.
- To set off the explainers of a direct quotation. (Ex: The girl sighed, "I don't want to leave.")

- Between two independent clauses joined by: for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so. (FANBOYS)
- To set off an interjection. If the interjection is at the beginning of a sentence, place comma after it. If interjection is at the end of a sentence, place comma before it.
- (This code indicates an *unnecessary* comma.)

6. Use semi-colons:

- to separate two independent clauses that are closely related in meaning.
- as a “fancy period,” not as a comma

7. Use colons to: introduce a list or quotation, before explanation, clarification, or elaboration, between independent clauses, to separate times and ratios.

8. Use quotation marks to identify words spoken/written by another source:

- When introduced within a sentence, place a comma before the first quotation mark.
- When commas and periods come at the end of a quotation, place them inside the quotation marks.

9. Insert extra information into a sentence with commas, dashes, or parenthesis:

- Commas are most formal, least intrusive.
- Dashes are very informal; used in emails and dialogue, not a formal report.
- Parentheses are best for inserting short asides such as numbers and dates.

OTHER

10. 1st/2nd or 3rd person is consistent across piece.

11. Verb tense is consistent; past, present, or future.

12. Titles formatted correctly:

- Major works (books, plays, long poems) are underlined in handwriting, italicized in type.
- Minor works (short stories, articles, poems, songs) are placed in quotation marks.
- Titles of works not published (such as your essays) only capitalized.

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PHASE 5: “PUBLISH”

Before you turn in or “publish” your work, do one final review: does it make sense? Did you include everything required by your teacher?

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PHASE 6: THE RETROSPECTIVE

Congratulations, you're DONE! I know, the last thing you want to do is spend more time on this project. BUT, take a few moments to reflect on how this process went to save yourself a lot of time/effort/energy on the next one:

- What did you learn about this process?
- What went well? What did not go so well?
- What could you do better next time?