Chapter 5

Planning

The Beginning Steps

The composing habits of mind you developed in <u>Chapter 1 "Writing to Think and Writing to Learn"</u> through <u>Chapter 4 "Joining the Conversation"</u> should be applied to a writing process that works for you. When you start planning a writing project, you will need to understand the relationships among the three corners and the three sides of the rhetorical triangle described in <u>Chapter 4 "Joining the Conversation"</u>: voice, message, and audience, as well as attitude, reception, and tone. After you have these core elements of the triangle in place, you are ready to map out your writing.

5.1 Choosing a Topic

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Recognize general topics that are too broad for a single writing assignment.
2. Realize that you can and should massage a writing topic so that it interests you.
3. Understand how to narrow a topic down to match your needs.

Life is simply too short not to write about topics that interest you. You don't have to be an expert in a topic already, but you should be sufficiently interested in exploring it for a sustained period. Your readers will quickly pick up on your enthusiasm (or lack thereof) for a topic. Following up on personal interest can, at best, make a writing project fun, and at the very least, keep you (and your readers) from being miserable.

Most college writing instructors will not dictate too narrow a topic area, in part because they don't have any interest in being bored and in part because they believe that topic generation is an important piece of the student writer's job. But let's explore a worst-case scenario, just to show how you can make practically any topic your own. Let's say you are given an assignment to explore the history of South Dakota within a ten-page essay. Clearly, you can't cover the whole state in ten pages. Rather, you would think about—and maybe research a little bit—aspects of South Dakota that might be interesting to you and your readers. Let's say that you are a motorcycle enthusiast, and you are interested in Sturgis, South Dakota. Or perhaps your great-great-grandmother was a Dakota Indian, and you are interested in the Dakota Indian tribe. Or maybe you are an artist and you are interested in the corn mosaics on the Corn Palace in Mitchell, South Dakota. The point is that, if you think about South Dakota enough, you can find some direction of personal interest.

> **Example**
>
> Assigned Topic
>
> The History of South Dakota
>
> Personal Interest Direction
>
> The Motorcycle Rallies in Sturgis, South Dakota
>
> First Narrowing of Topic
>
> The Acceptance by Locals of the Mass Influx of Motorcycles over the Years
>
> Final Topic
>
> The Sturgis Motorcycle Rally as Part of the Identity of Sturgis and the Surrounding Area

Once you choose a direction of interest, such as the motorcycle rallies in Sturgis, you still have to narrow this secondary topic into a topic that you can cover in ten pages and that has an interesting point. A method of moving from your general topic of interest to your final topic is to ask questions and let your answers guide you along. The following questions and answers show how this **self-discussion**[1] could go.

Question #1: How do the Sturgis Rallies connect to the history of South Dakota?

Answer: The Sturgis Rallies have been going on for over seventy years, so they are part of the history of South Dakota.

Question #2: Over the years, how have the people of Sturgis felt about all those bikes invading their peaceful little city?

1. Asking and answering questions without involving another person.

Answer: I bet there are people on both sides of the issue. On the other hand, a lot of people there make a great deal of money on the event.

Question #3: After over seventy years, has the event become such a part of the city that the bikes aren't really seen as an invasion but rather more like a season that will naturally come?

Answer: It probably has become a natural part of the city and the whole surrounding area. That would be a good topic: The Sturgis Motorcycle Rally as Part of the Identity of Sturgis and the Surrounding Area.

You have begun to narrow your general topic down to a more manageable and interesting set of questions. Now it's time to bring in the other elements of the rhetorical situation.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Before starting a writing project, you need to narrow the topic down so that it matches the length of the essay you are to write.
- Most writing topics can be viewed in a variety of directions, and when you are writing, you should take a topic in a direction that interests you.
- Self-discussion is a helpful method when trying to narrow a topic down to a manageable size.

EXERCISES

1. Record the thought processes you would go through to narrow the writing topic "Thomas Edison" to a topic of interest to you for a ten-page assignment. Include the transcript of your self-talk and self-questioning process.
2. Work with a partner. Together, talk through moving from the general topic "Television" to a specific topic that would work well for a five-page paper.

3. With a partner or by yourself, narrow the following general topic areas to specific topics that would work in essays of approximately one thousand words:

   a. Electoral Politics
   b. Environmental Protection
   c. The First Amendment
   d. Campus Security

5.2 Freewriting and Mapping

> ### LEARNING OBJECTIVES
>
> 1. Recognize different ways to generate writing ideas.
> 2. Understand how freewriting and mapping help generate writing ideas.
> 3. Know how to create a map of writing ideas.

After you have settled on a topic, you are ready to explore general ideas that you will include when you start writing. You can generate these ideas with whatever **brainstorming**[2] method works best for you, such as browsing the Internet to do an interconnected search from topic to topic, talking or texting with others, creating related visuals, asking yourself questions, **freewriting**[3] and **mapping**[4]. In this section, we will explore these latter two options.

Freewriting requires finding a quiet place to write without distraction. Most versions involve starting with a word or phrase (usually your topic) and writing (or typing) about it *without stopping* for five minutes. It's helpful to set a timer for each round of freewriting. After the first five-minute period, you examine your text for any phrases or words that look interesting to you. Circle them (or if you are typing, highlight, italicize, bold, or underline them). In the second round, you freewrite for another five uninterrupted minutes on your choice of the most interesting word or phrase from your first freewrite. Sometimes even a third round can help you narrow the topic further. For each round of freewriting, you should be unconcerned about your writing's grammar or mechanics, how it would look to an outside audience, or even whether it would make sense to anyone but you. Freewriting is all about idea generation and exploration.

Mapping is a great visual means of gathering your ideas. Also called **clustering and branching**[5] or **making a web**[6], mapping lets you add as many ideas as you can think of and organize them as you go along. You have four general options for mapping.

1. Use **concept-mapping software**[7] such as Inspiration or SmartDraw.
2. Use concept-mapping websites such as MindMeister (http://www.mindmeister.com/).
3. Create your own circles and lines within a word processing program.
4. Draw your map by hand.

2. A technique for invention (generating ideas for writing); can be verbal or written, in collaboration or in isolation.

3. A method of idea generation usually involving a period of five to ten minutes of writing (or typing) without stopping, followed by another round of writing on a narrower passage of interest from the first round of freewriting.

4. A method of using shapes filled with text to create visual ideas for a writing process and to show how the ideas are related; also called clustering and branching, or making a web.

5. A method of using shapes filled with text to create visual ideas for a writing process and to show how the ideas are related; also called clustering, mapping, or making a web.

6. A method of using shapes filled with text to create visual ideas for a writing process and to show how the ideas are related; also called clustering and branching, or mapping.

7. Software used for mapping or clustering ideas.

No one option is superior to another. You should choose the option that works best for you. Using whichever option you choose, the point is to start with your main topic and then think of related subtopics and, for each subtopic, to think of supporting details resulting in a visual that shows the relationships between the key points of your writing plan. Since mapping is actually a visual brainstorming process, you do not have to generate your ideas in an orderly fashion. When you think of an idea, you can add it wherever it fits across the map.

In the concept-mapping software, you will be able to choose the level of the point you will add as well as the larger idea to which you want to attach each point. If you are creating your concept map structure yourself, make it clear to which level each addition belongs.

Study Figure 5.1 "Concept Map of Sturgis Motorcycle Rally" for clarification on how the process works. This map was made in Microsoft Word by creating circles, squares, and lines and placing them by hand into position. You can use all circles or all squares or whatever shape(s) you would like. This map uses a combination of squares and circles to make the subtopics stand out clearly from the details. This map also uses color to differentiate between levels.

Figure 5.1   *Concept Map of Sturgis Motorcycle Rally*

When the ideas stop flowing, put your map away and return to it later for another brainstorming session. Keep your freewrites and maps close at hand and feel free to add tidbits when they come to you. Get into the habit of keeping a writing pad and pen or pencil (or just your cell phone) next to your bed, so that you can jot down or text ideas as they come to you in the middle of the night. When you are comfortable that your map offers a good representation of the points you want to include in your paper, use it as a guide during the writing process.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- To generate ideas for your writing, you can use whatever brainstorming method works well for you. Some common methods include browsing the Internet to do an interconnected search from topic to topic, talking or messaging with others, creating related visuals, asking yourself questions, freewriting, mapping, and outlining.
- Mapping is a method of visually generating ideas while showing the relationships between the ideas.
- You can create a map using software that is specifically designed for concept mapping, creating your own shapes and lines within a word processing program, or drawing your map by hand. The best method is the one that works best for you in a given situation.

EXERCISES

1. Choose a topic of interest to you and freewrite for at least two five-minute rounds.
2. Choose a topic of interest to you and create a map to show some ideas you might include if you were writing about the topic.
3. Consider the different idea-generating methods noted in this section. Choose one of the methods and write a one-page essay explaining why that method would work well for you.
4. Many concept-mapping software packages on the Internet offer a trial version. Locate and choose such software. Then, choose a topic and create a map of related ideas using the software.

5.3 Developing Your Purposes for Writing

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Know how to identify the ideal voice, audience, and message for a given topic.
2. Explore the multiple purposes you have for writing.
3. Recognize how your writing process depends on the relationship between voice and message (attitude), message and audience (reception), and voice and audience (tone).
4. Learn how to use a statement of purpose as a tool for strategizing about, reflecting on, and presenting your work.

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After you have settled on a specific writing topic, it's time to return to some of the basic principles of rhetoric introduced in Chapter 4 "Joining the Conversation" so that you can think through your real purposes for writing and explore the key details of your rhetorical situation. This section will show you how to use both the corners and the sides of the rhetorical triangle as tools for thinking, planning, and writing. Notice how these choices you make about purpose, message, audience, and voice are never made in isolation.

- **Purpose**[8]: You may think that purpose can be boiled down to one of these single verbs or phrases:

  - To analyze
  - To ask for support
  - To call to action
  - To clarify
  - To convince
  - To counter a previously stated opinion
  - To describe
  - To entertain
  - To inform
  - To make a request
  - To make people think
  - To persuade
  - To share feelings
  - To state an opinion
  - To summarize

8. The sum total of what a writer intends to accomplish.

However, your real purposes for writing are really more complicated, interesting, and dynamic than this simple list. Purpose involves all three sides and all three corners of the rhetorical triangle: not only do you want to make your audience feel or think a certain way about your message, but you also want to explore and refine your own thoughts and feelings about that message, and furthermore, you want to establish a certain kind of relationship with your audience through the act of conveying your message to them.
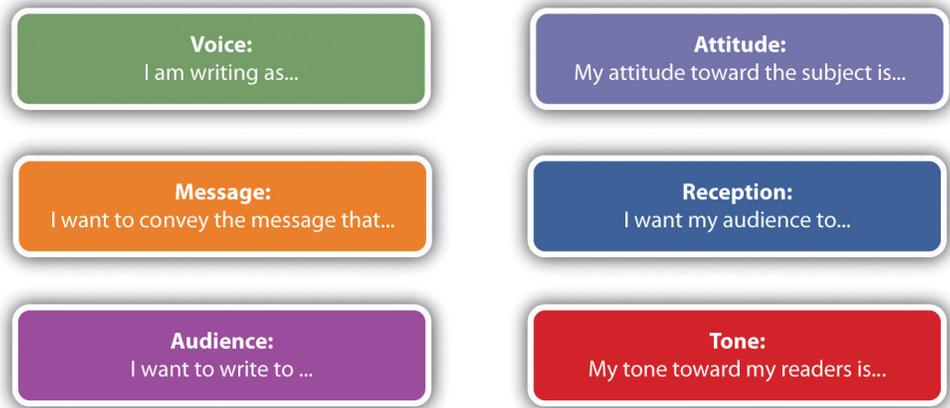
- **Audience**[9]: Sometimes your instructor will specify the audience for an essay assignment, but more often than not, this choice will be left up to you. If it's your call, ask yourself, "Who would benefit the most from receiving this message?" Not asking that simple question, not choosing a specific audience for your essay, will be a missed opportunity to sharpen your skills as a communicator. By identifying your audience, you can conjecture how much your readers will know about your topic and thus gauge the level of information you should provide. You can determine what kind of **tone**[10] is best for your audience (e.g., formal or informal, humorous or serious). Based on what you know about your audience, you can even decide the form you want your writing to take (e.g., whether to write a descriptive or more persuasive essay). Knowing your audience will guide many of the other choices you make along the way.
- **Message**[11]: Regardless of whether your topic is assigned to you or you come up with it on your own, you still have some room to develop your message. Be prepared to revise your message once you have fleshed out your own thinking about it (perhaps through asking and answering the Twenty Questions about Self, Text, and Context in <u>Chapter 1 "Writing to Think and Writing to Learn"</u>) and sharpened your sense of audience and purpose thinking.
- **Voice**[12]: Regardless of whether you're writing in an academic or a nonacademic context, you draw from a range of voices to achieve a variety of purposes. Each of the purposes listed above has an appropriate voice. If you are writing an essay to fulfill a class assignment, with your instructor as your primary if not exclusive audience, then your voice has pretty much been established for you. In such an instance, you are a student writing in a traditional academic context, subject to the evaluation of your instructor as an expert authorized to judge your work. But even in this most restrictive case, you should still try to develop a distinctive voice based on what you hope to accomplish through your writing.

9. The reader(s) of an essay or a piece of communication.

10. The relationship between the voice (writer) and the audience (readers).

11. What a voice (writer) wants to convey about a topic to an audience (readers).

12. The writer of an essay or a piece of communication.

Once you have identified your purposes and the corners of the rhetorical triangle, it's time to do some preliminary thinking about the relationships between those

corners—that is, the sides: voice and message (attitude), message and audience (reception), and voice and audience (tone). Finish the sentences below.

Figure 5.2 Your Rhetorical Situation

Voice: I am writing as...	Attitude: My attitude toward the subject is...
Message: I want to convey the message that...	Reception: I want my audience to...
Audience: I want to write to ...	Tone: My tone toward my readers is...

Near the beginning of the writing project, you could write up a preliminary **statement of purpose**[13] based on how you complete these sentences and use it as a strategy memo of sorts:

Voice	**I am writing as** a person unfamiliar with South Dakota culture who has been assigned the task of writing about it.
Message	**I want to convey the message that** the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally is an interesting phenomenon of popular culture.
Audience	**I want to write to** my teacher and the other members of my writing group.
Attitude	**My attitude toward the subject is** pretty neutral right now, bordering on bored, until I find out more about the topic.
Reception	**I want my audience to** know that I know how to research and write about any topic thrown at me.
Tone	**My tone toward my readers is** semiformal, fairly objective, like a reporter, journalist, or anthropologist.

13. A preliminary tool for developing your purposes for a writing project, specifically your message, audience, voice, attitude, reception, and tone.

14. A method of presenting, packaging, reflecting on, and commenting on one's own writing project, specifically its message, audience, voice, attitude, reception, and tone.

Because all the elements of the triangle are related to each other, all are subject to change when the direction of your work changes, so be open to the idea of returning to these questions several times over the course of your writing project. When you are ready to turn in your project, revise your preliminary statement of purpose into a final version, or **writer's memo**[14], as a way of presenting and

packaging your project, especially if your instructor invites such reflection and commentary.

Here's an example of a writer's memo submitted with the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally essay:

Voice	**I am writing as** a kind of social historian and observer of a specific example of popular culture.
Message	**I want to convey the message that** the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally has become an important part of the identity of Sturgis and the surrounding area.
Audience	**I want to write to** my instructor and classmates—but also to the citizens of Sturgis, South Dakota.
Attitude	**My attitude toward the subject is** neutral to positive. In general I think the rally has been good for Sturgis over the years.
Reception	**I want my audience to** understand and appreciate Sturgis Motorcycle Rally, and maybe to think about how something like it could work well in our community.
Tone	**My tone toward my readers will be** informal but informative, and occasionally humorous, to fit the craziness of Sturgis Motorcycle Rally.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- When completing a class assignment, your instructor will often dictate a required writing form. When you are able to choose your own writing form, you should choose a form that you think would work well for your planned writing.
- Understanding your audience allows you to gauge the level of information you should provide, choose a tone you want to use, and decide the approach you want to take.
- Your purposes for writing include what you want to learn about your own message, how you want your audience to receive your message, and the kind of working relationship you want to establish with your audience.

EXERCISES

1. Describe five possible topics you could use as the basis for an opinion essay.
2. You are to writing an essay that is a call to action. List five topics you could write about.
3. You are being asked to describe an important event in your childhood. What form of writing from the list in this section would be *most* appropriate?
4. You are writing a letter of application for a college scholarship sponsored by a local business. For what audiences would you write the letter?
5. You are writing an opinion essay and submitting it as a letter to the editor at your local newspaper. For what audiences would you write this letter?
6. From the list of purposes in this section, choose a purpose that would match this assignment: Write a letter to the editor for the school paper detailing why your classmates should vote for you for class president.
7. With your writing group, use the statement of purpose questions to sketch out the details on voice, message, audience, attitude, reception, and tone for the writing ideas you generated for Question 1 and Question 2 above.

5.4 Outlining

Your instructor may make decisions about the form your essay will take, dictating whether you are supposed to write in a particular genre. But if you're given some choice or flexibility about form, just as in the case of voice, audience, and message, you need to make the most of that responsibility. Regardless of who dictates form, you or your instructor, know what form your writing should take and make sure it suits the voice, audience, and message. Some common forms of writing include the following:

- Argument
- Book review
- **Case study**[15]
- **Comparative analysis**[16]
- **Critique**[17]
- Informative essay or report
- Lab report
- Opinion essay
- **Personal narrative**[18]
- **Persuasive essay**[19]
- **Proposal**[20]
- Research report

15. An accounting of a particular person, group, or situation over a period of time.

16. A comparison of the attributes of two or more ideas, situations, people, or things.

17. A written evaluation of an idea, situation, person, text, or thing.

18. An account of a personal situation.

19. A piece intended to sway others' opinions.

20. A detailed plan for consideration by others.

An outline is another way to visually see the relationships between ideas you are gathering. You can create an outline by hand or on a computer. If you create one by hand, leave a blank space so you can fit additional ideas in within different areas. Using a computer for your outline is preferable since you can easily add ideas and move ideas around.

Start with your core idea as the beginning point of the outline. Then use roman numerals to add the subtopics followed by indented capital letters for the details. If you add finer details, you can use further-indented numbers for the next level and even-further-indented lowercase letters for a level after that. When using a computer, the preset tabs are most likely fine for the indenting.

The outline below relates to the map from the last section. It is simply another way to accomplish the same process of idea gathering. Notice that the writer here has made a **sentence outline**[21] by writing out each element in a complete sentence. This strategy will help this writer move more easily from outline to essay draft.

> ## The Sturgis Motorcycle Rally as Part of the Identity of Sturgis and the Surrounding Area
>
> 1. Bike Week has been going on for more than seventy years.
>
>   1. It is an automatic assumption by locals that Bike Week will be held each year.
>   2. Most locals have never known life without Bike Week.
>
> 2. Bike Week is a key element of area finances.
>
>   1. Millions of dollars flow into the area economy.
>   2. Sturgis and the surrounding cities have invested heavily in the function.
>   3. Although the actual Bike Week is a central focus, bikers come here for months on either side of the week to ride the famous routes.
>
> 3. The area has grown and developed around Bike Week.
>
>   1. Every small town has a Harley-Davidson store.
>   2. Merchants continually create new products to sell to bikers.
>   3. The locals are very accepting and supportive of the bikers.
>
> 4. People around the world recognize Sturgis for Bike Week.
>
>   1. People attend Bike Week from all fifty states and many other countries.
>   2. Although Sturgis has only a few thousand people, the town is known around the world.

21. An outline with each element written out as a complete sentence.

As with the mapping process, once you have included all the ideas you have, take a break and return to your outline later. If, in the meantime, a thought comes to you, take a minute to add it. When you are satisfied with your outline, use it to guide your writing process. However, keep in mind that your outline is only a tool you are using, and you will vary from it when you have other ideas along the way.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Outlining uses roman numerals, numbers, letters, and indenting to visually show how ideas are related.
- You can create an outline by hand, but using a computer gives you much greater flexibility to add ideas and move ideas around.

  - Within an outline, the numbering/lettering order is as follows:

    - I.
    - A.
    - 1.
    - a.

EXERCISES

1. Using a topic of interest to you, create an idea outline for a short paper.

2. Using a word processing program, present the following information in a short outline using at least two roman numerals and at least two capital letters. You will have to reorder the ideas so they make sense.

   - Topic: Technology should be a part of current-day education from kindergarten through all levels of college.

      - Ideas:

      People need a natural comfort with technology before entering the workplace.

      Students think in a technological way, so it's wrong to pull them backward at school.

      Students live in a technology age, so they should be educated in a technology age.

      Students expect technology at school.

      Students must experience using technology rather than just being told about it.

      Even sixteen-year-olds are expected to be comfortable with computers on their very first jobs.

      Most students use some types of technology at home.

      Jobs ranging from waitresses to mechanics to nurses to lawyers require computer use.