

DRAFTING: How to get it done

Sometimes getting started is the hardest part

"I don't know what my thesis is, so how can I start writing?"

"The blank page is like a black hole."

"I don't know if I know what I'm doing!"

"I'm afraid I'll do it all wrong!"

If you're feeling like any of the writers quoted above, take heart! All writers get stuck sometimes when it comes time to DRAFT. **Below are some thoughts about drafting to help you get started and keep you working.**



Schedule your time, find your place, & pick your tools

Create a schedule and make a plan. Consider how you work:

- **What time of day (or night) are you most effective** when doing academic writing?
- **Do you work better in long blocks of time, or in shorter blocks?** How long, and how many?
- **Where do you work most effectively**—not be distracted nor tempted to distract yourself?
- **What tools are most effective for you?** Pen and paper? Laptop? Computer in the dining room?

Don't let drafting get you "stuck"

Once you have a schedule, the right place, and the right tools, then what? **Here are ideas students have shared in the past about breaking the "dread of drafting":**

Just get started: Do whatever you need to do to get started and to keep going. Make an appointment if you need to: set an alarm on your phone and promise yourself that when it goes off, you are going to get to it. (Repeat daily, if necessary.)

Start anywhere: Don't worry about starting with the introduction, or even with the beginning of the body. **Just start somewhere**—a part you feel most confident about or that you think will be easiest or most straightforward.

"Talk" through the draft in an extended freewrite: Imagine that you are explaining the information in your essay in an organized way to a friend or peer. This can produce a "narrative" version of a draft that you can then go through and break up into the parts, which you can then begin to address one at a time.

Talk through the draft into dictation software: This is the same as the advice above, just a different approach.

“Methods” for Drafting from an outline: A few ideas

You might have developed a detailed outline and/or a synthesis matrix already. Here are some ways to work with those:

Draft *directly* from an outline or synthesis matrix: If you have an effective outline or synthesis matrix, you are perfectly positioned to start drafting: follow along the outline and refer to the synthesis matrix or your notes to flesh out the paragraphs as you go.

Draft *indirectly* from an outline: If it stresses you out or slows you down to keep an eye on an outline, review it and then draft without looking at it until you've finished the first pass. Then you can consult as you revise the first draft.

Expand / extend the outline: With this approach, continue to "flesh out" each part of your outline into smaller and smaller sub-parts, finally right down to each piece of evidence and what you will say about it. Then you can "transform" the detailed outline by essentially editing it into paragraphs.

Some Important Cautions/reminders

Let drafting be drafting: Don't get hung up on whether your draft is "any good" as you go along. You will revise and edit a lot later. Editing or rehashing sentences as you draft is bad for momentum and puts the emphasis on perfection rather than progress.

Topic sentences: Think in terms of topic sentences as you draft; they can help guide you through your drafting just as they guide a reader through the finished piece. But don't let coming up with topic sentences stop you from drafting; you can add them to paragraphs that need them later.

Paraphrase as you write: We hope you took all or at least most of your notes as paraphrases (NOT as simply cut and paste quotations). In any case, **always** paraphrase your notes as you draft; don't plan to go back and do all the paraphrasing later. This will help you better understand the material and how the parts of your discussion hang together, and better ensure that your paraphrases will be effective.

And if you're writing from source material: CITE AS YOU WRITE!

- **DON'T** make the mistake of writing all your source support into your essay *without citing it*. **DON'T** plan to "go back and add the citations." This DOES NOT work and DOES lead to error and overlooked source use—which both end up as accidental plagiarism—!
- **DO "cite as you write"**—incorporate citations in as you draft. This will ensure that you don't miss or miss-cite any source material in your essay. Don't worry if they're not perfect; just be sure the needed info is there. You can edit them later.
- **Even better, practice incorporating source support using narrative citations.** This helps to integrate the sources into the writing smoothly. (Need help with this? See our Writing Guide!)

Finally, try these ideas whenever you're feeling stuck:



Take a break.
Go for a walk.

Eat something.
Talk it through with a buddy.

Try a different approach.
Contact the Writing Center!