

Tips for Rough Draft Beginnings and Revisions

- 1) **THINK!** One way to get started is to think about the prompt, if only for twenty minutes or so. Take a scrape piece of paper, go for a walk, and jot down any notes. Or you could take your phone with you and text yourself some thoughts. Maybe even go to the gym and jot down thoughts as you exercise.
- 2) **JUST WRITE!** Getting started is difficult. But one way to begin is just simply to write a reaction to the prompt about your thoughts. Don't worry about audience in this opening act of your writing process. Just write, write, write.
- 3) **MAKE BULLET POINTS.** Remember that paragraphs are usually developed ideas. An essay is a journey and journeys always begin somewhere. It's perfectly acceptable to use the bullet points to help form paragraphs at a later moment in your writing process.
- 4) **WHAT IS YOUR PURPOSE?** If the writing is something other than journal writing, writing has a purpose for other people. What kinds of effects do you want your writing to have? What kind of effects is your writing supposed to have (either for a professor, co-worker, boss, or even friend)?
- 5) **TAKE TIME AWAY.** A lot of people want to revise their drafts immediately after writing the first draft. Always take a bit of time away from your text, even if it's only a few hours. Go for a walk and reflect on the draft. Then come back to it with a fresh eye.
- 6) **PRINT OUT THE DRAFT.** Computers have a way of making you feel like your essay is finished because all the words form a wall of text. Take the print copy and mark it up. Think of this copy as a practice run. Remember all crafts, hobbies, and sports require practice. Writing is no different.
- 7) **IDENTIFY IDEAS THAT ARE IMPORTANT TO YOU.** Most people think of revision as editing spelling or grammar. This is a narrow vision of the revision process. A broader way to think of this process is to critique your various ideas, arguments, and examples. Identify these ideas and decide, for yourself, which is most important and which ones are less important. Maybe make a list, with #1 being the most important idea or example.
- 8) **EXAMINE THE FIRST PARAGRAPH.** Read the first paragraph and only the first paragraph. What ideas are in this paragraph? Why are they the ones presented? What is your rationale for presenting these first? Then read the rest of the essay and reflect on how effect the opening is and what changes you could make.
- 9) **EXAMINE THE LAST PARAGRAPH.** Many times, the last paragraph in the essay is the main point that could act as the introduction. The conclusion is also the place that summarizes the essay's point. Try to add a few paragraphs or thoughts that come AFTER this last paragraph. This will not only help you expand the draft and give more details, but it make also change the main point, which will allow you to alter the introduction.

- 10) **CUT THE PAPER DRAFT.** If you're having trouble with organization, flow, or transitions, print the essay out and cut the paragraphs in separate pieces. Read the paragraphs separately. You can even shuffle the paragraphs into a different order to see if a new order might help make the essay more effective. It will also help you to see the paragraphs as idea-based. You can ask yourself which paragraphs need expanding, which ones need shortening, and even places where you could add a whole NEW paragraph.

- 11) **THE WRITING PROCESS IS NON-LINEAR AND RECURSIVE.** Non-linear means occurring in NOT a straight line. Writing starts and stops; it is a bumpy road! You can reflect and change your mind. It almost never comes out right the first time. No novelist writes the story in one shot or perfect the first time. Recursive means to happen in an overlapping way and happens in a cycle (meaning you can write the last paragraph first, and vice-versa). It's okay to write different sections of your essay (or writing in a broader sense) out of order. You can revise any part of it. Further, when you revise something, this may also lead you to consider a different part of the essay that may be changed as a result of various revisions.

- 12) **START SMALL.** Even when you're writing a larger project, don't worry if you're only writing a little bit at a time. If you take time to write *consistently*, then these small parts add up, and you'll have more to work from for the next part of your process. Starting from scratch can be hard, but once you have something you can revise, it will get easier and you'll begin to see the final draft take shape.

- 13) **ASK YOUR FRIENDS.** Ask your friends to read the essay and offer their thoughts.

- 14) **READ THE ESSAY OUT LOUD TO YOURSELF.** It always helps to read the essay out loud to yourself. Read slowly, so that you are not only reading but also comprehending what you're reading. If you don't like something, make note of it and ask yourself why you don't like it. If you like something, ask yourself what makes it effective. Try to discover the reasons for effective sentences and less effective ones.

- 15) **WRITE, WRITE, WRITE.** Often, writers are scared about initial drafts. Remember, rough drafts are exactly that—they're supposed to be a bit bumpy. They are in-process. All skills take time and practice to develop. Writing is no different.