

Plan Your Writing Writing Commons (2012)

"Plan Your Writing" was written by Joe Moxley.

As children many of us heard the classic fable about the tortoise and the hare. The moral of the story is that rushing straight from point A to point B is not always the swiftest way to the destination. Sometimes it makes sense to pause for a few moments and ask yourself, "Do I really want to go there? What obstacles can I expect to encounter? Do I need to take a compass and a map? Is the path well marked? What provisions am I likely to need along the journey?"



Like many children's tales, the tortoise and the hare has implications for adults, too. For even though logic tells us that we can save time by quickly writing a first draft, we in fact might manage our time more effectively by doing some preliminary planning and prewriting.

Complete a Document Planner to navigate writing projects efficiently.

Be Flexible

Unlike a chef who follows a single recipe for preparing chocolate cheesecake, writers lack a single modus operandi. Sometimes you may need to write 30 drafts and other times a single draft will do. Sometimes you should dictate your ideas; sometimes you should write them on the computer; sometimes you should scratch them out carefully with a pencil.

Instead of expecting yourself to write perfect first drafts or to develop your best ideas before writing, you need to learn to trust the generative nature of composing. By being flexible and open minded, you will sometimes discover your most innovative ideas in progress, because language generates thought. In fact, what you learn as you write will sometimes contradict your preliminary hunches, so be prepared to revise accordingly.

You also need to be flexible about how you compose documents. You need to be aware that some documents will be more demanding than others. For example, a semester-long research paper or an international corporation's annual report would require a different amount of collaboration, research, and revision than a biography or a memoir.

Collaborate

Sharing your writing with friends and classmates can help motivate you to get the work done and help you judge whether or not your writing successfully communicates your ideas. By collaborating early in the life of a document, you can help focus and enrich the work.

Sometimes inexperienced writers are so inspired by seeing their words in print or published on the Internet that they fail to see the problem in the document. Inexperienced writers are often astonished by the amount of criticism that professional writers receive as part of the pre-publication process. Typically, before publishing an essay or book, a

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document goes through extensive revisions in light of peer reviews, professional critiques by editors, and copyediting. Even people who do not write as a career will face evaluation of their writing. The final writing activity for many people involves submitting their work to clients, co-workers, or supervisors. For students, primary audiences tend to be teachers or other students. Whether you're writing for a teacher or a client, criticism can often be painful so it is understandable that many of us try to avoid hearing or thinking much about our critics' comments. Nevertheless, your growth as a writer is largely dependent on your ability to learn from past mistakes and to improve drafts in response to readers' comments.

Be Organized

Maintaining organized files for all of your classes can be an important time-saver. By keeping lists of ideas or drafts of essays that might be worth developing and by organizing reading notes, you will have less trouble generating subjects to write about.

Use Technology Wisely

Used wisely, technology can literally transform how you write, research, collaborate, and publish. Writing tools, drawing tools, collaboration tools, animation tools—these are just a few of the examples of technologies that are transforming how and what we write.

1. Microsoft's Track Changes or Commenting can help you organize feedback from critics.
2. A wiki, such as [/placeholders/external_placeholder.html?http%3A%2F%2Fwritingwiki.org](#), facilitates co-authoring and enables you to easily publish your work on the Internet.
3. Charting and graphics tools enable you to use visual language to facilitate invention and creativity.
4. To aid your research, your college or university's library can provide you access to thousands of online journals, books, and databases.
5. Google Docs

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