Writing Your First Draft

Once you have completed your topic sentence and outline (or list or cluster), you are ready to begin writing your paragraph. The initial writing is called the first, or rough, draft. Your topic sentence is likely to be at or near the beginning of your paragraph and will be followed by your support as ordered by your outline.

Paying close attention to your outline for basic organization, you should proceed without worrying about the refinements of writing. This is not the time to concern yourself with perfect spelling, grammar, or punctuation. After you have finished that first draft, take a close look at it. If your topic sentence is sound and your outline has served you well, you have a basic discussion. You have made a statement and supported it, and you are on your way to writing a good paragraph.

Don’t be embarrassed by the roughness of your work. You should be embarrassed only if you leave it that way. You are seeing the reason why a first draft is called “rough.” Famous authors have said publicly that they wouldn’t show their rough drafts even to their closest, most forgiving friends.

The Recursive Factor

The process of writing can be called recursive, which means “going back and forth.” In this respect, writing is like reading. If you do not understand what you have read, you back up and read it again. After you have reread a passage, you may still need to read selectively. The same can be said of writing. If, for example, after having developed an outline and started writing your first draft, you discover that your subject is too broad, you have to back up, narrow your
topic sentence, and then adjust your outline. You may even want to return to an early listing or cluster of ideas to see how you can use a smaller grouping of them. Revision is usually the most recursive of all parts of the writing process. You will go over your material again and again until you are satisfied that you have expressed yourself as well as you possibly can.

Revising Your Writing

The term *first draft* suggests quite accurately that there will be other drafts, or versions, of your writing. Only in the most dire situations, such as an in-class examination when you have time for only one draft, should you be satisfied with a single effort.

What you do beyond the first draft is revising and editing. Revision is concerned with organization, content, and language effectiveness. Editing involves a final correcting of mistakes in spelling, punctuation, and capitalization. In practice, editing and revision are not always separate activities, although writers usually wait until the next-to-the-last draft to edit some minor details and attend to other small points that can be easily overlooked.

Successful revision almost always involves intense, systematic rewriting. You should learn to look for certain aspects of skillful writing as you enrich and repair your first draft. To help you recall these aspects so that you can keep them in mind and examine your material comprehensively, this textbook offers a memory device—an acronym in which each letter suggests an important feature of good writing and revision. This device enables you to memorize the features of good writing quickly. Soon you will be able to recall the features and refer to them automatically. These features need not be attended to individually when you revise your writing, although they may be. And they need not be attended to in the order presented here. The acronym is CLUESS (pronounced “clues”), which provides this guide:

- Coherence
- Language
- Unity
- Emphasis
- Support
- Sentences
Coherence

Coherence is the flow of ideas, with each idea leading logically and smoothly to the next. It is achieved by numbering parts or otherwise indicating time (*first, second, third, then, next, soon, and so on*), giving directions (according to space, as in “To the right is a map, and to the left of that map is a bulletin board”), using transitional words (*however, otherwise, therefore, similarly, hence, on the other hand, then, consequently, accordingly, thus*), using demonstrative pronouns (*this, that, those*), and moving in a clear order (from the least important to the most important or from the most important to the least important).

Language

Language here means using words that are suitable for what you are writing and for your audience. In college writing that means you will usually avoid slang and clichés such as “a barrel of laughs,” “happy as a clam,” and “six of one and a half dozen of another.” Your writing will contain standard grammar and usage. Effective writing also includes words that will convey your ideas with precision. Avoid general words such as “transportation” when a specific one such as “bus” would serve you better. Also avoid abstract words such as “cool” when a concrete word or phrase such as “faded jeans” would make your meaning clear.

Unity

Unity begins with a good topic sentence. Everything in your paragraph should be related and subordinated to your topic sentence. Repetition of a key word or phrase can make the unity even stronger.

Emphasis

Emphasize, or stress, important ideas by using position (the most emphatic parts of a work are the beginning and the end), repetition (repeat key words and phrases), and isolation (a short, direct sentence among longer ones will usually command attention).

Support

Support is the material that backs up, justifies, or proves your topic sentence. Work carefully with the material from your outline (or list or cluster) to make sure that your ideas are well supported. If your paragraph is skimpy and your ideas slender, you are probably
generalizing and not explaining how you arrived at your conclusions. Avoid repetition that does not add to the content; use details and examples; indicate parts and discuss relationships; and explain why your generalizations are true, logical, and accurate. Your readers can’t accept your ideas unless they know by what reasoning or use of evidence you developed them.

**Sentences**

Be sure your sentences are complete (not fragments) and that you have not incorrectly combined word groups that should be sentences (comma splices and run-ons). Consider using different types of sentences and different sentence beginnings. (See Chapter 14, pages 175–211.)

Write as many drafts as necessary, revising as you go for all the aspects of effective writing. Don’t confuse revising with editing (the final stage of the writing process); don’t get bogged down in fixing such things as spelling and punctuation.

### Adding Editing to Your Revision

**Editing**, the final stage of the writing process, involves a careful examination of your work. Look for problems with capitalization, omissions, punctuation, and spelling (COPS).

Before you submit your writing to your instructor, do what almost all professional writers do before sending their material along: Read it aloud, to yourself or to a willing accomplice. Reading material aloud will help you catch any awkwardness of expression, omission and misplacement of words, and other problems that are easily overlooked by an author.

As you can see, writing is a process and is not a matter of just sitting down and “banging out” a statement. The parts of the process from prewriting to revising to editing are connected, and your movement is ultimately forward, but this process allows you to go back and forth in the recursive manner discussed earlier. If your outline is not working, perhaps the flaw is in your topic sentence. You may need to go back and fix it. If one section of your paragraph is skimpy, perhaps you will have to go back and reconsider the pertinent material in your outline or cluster. There you might find more details or alter a statement so that you can move into more fertile areas of thought.

Cyrus Norton wrote this first draft, marked it for revision, and then completed the final draft, which you read on pages 3–4. For
simplification, only this draft is shown, although a typical paper might require several drafts, including one on which the author has done nothing but edit his or her revised writing.

Magic Johnson, an NBA Great (National Basketball Association)

Some NBA players are good because they are good in one area such as shooting, passing, or rebounding. Magic Johnson was a NBA star, excellent shooting, passing, great because he was good in all of those rebounding, and leading things and more. As a shooter few have been able to do what he could. He could slam, shovel, hook, and fire from three-point range. When it came to free throws, he led all NBA players in shooting percentage in 1988-89. Then he averaged more than twenty points per game, he helped others become with his passes (the quarterback of basketball) NBA stars. As the point guard he was always near the top in the league in assists and was famous for his no-look passes which often surprised even his teammates with their precision. A top rebounding guard is unusual, but Magic, standing at six feet nine inches tall, could bump shoulders and jump with 

Chapter 2 Writing, Revising, and Editing the Paragraph

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anyone. These three qualities made him probably the most spectacular triple-double threat of all time. Magic didn’t need more for greatness in the NBA, but he had more. He was also an inspirational team leader with his everlasting smile and boundless energy. Always believing in himself and his team.

When his team was down by a point and three seconds were left, you always looked for Magic to get the ball. Then you watched as he dribbled once, faded, leaped, twisted, and hooked one in from twenty feet. That was magic.

Exercise 1 Revising and Editing

Treat the following paragraph as your own rough draft, and mark it in the way Cyrus Norton marked his rough draft. First consider coherence, language, unity, emphasis, support, and sentences (CLUESS). Then edit the paragraph, correcting fundamentals such as capitalization, omissions, punctuation, and spelling (COPS).

Delete Dress Codes

High school dress codes don’t make any sense to me. I’ve heard all the reasons. Too many kids wear gang clothes and some get attacked or even killed. Parents have to put
up too much money and even then the kids without parents with deep pockets can’t compete. And then there are those that say kids behave bad if they dress in a free spirit way. Let’s take them one at a time. As for the gang stuff, it’s mainly how you act, not how you look, and if the gang stuff is still a problem, then just ban certain items of clothing. You don’t have to go to the extremes of uniforms, just change the attitude, not the clothes. Then comes the money angle. Let the kid get a part-time job if they want better clothes. The behavior number is not what I can relate to. I mean, you go to class and learn, and you do it the school way, but the way you dress should have something to do with how you want to express yourself. Do they want to turn out a bunch of little robots that think the same way, behave the same way, and yes with the dress code even look the same way. Get real! If they’ll cut us some slack with how we dress, they’ll get happier campers in the classroom. Later better-citizens in society.

**Exercise 2 Revising and Editing**

Revise the following student first draft. Then check for capitalization, omissions (oversights or grammar problems), punctuation, and spelling (COPS). Space is provided for you to add, delete, move, and correct material.

**Pain Unforgettable**

One evening in 2008 while I was working the swing shift at the General Tire Recapping Plant. I came up with the greatest pain of my life because of a terrible
accident. Raw rubber was heated up in a large tank. Pryor to its being fed into an extruder. I was recappping large off-road tires. The lowering platform was in the up position the chain snapped. It sent the heavy platform crashing down into the tank. This caused a huge wave of steaming water to surge out of the tank. Unfortunately, I was in its path the wave hit my back just above my waist. The sudden pain shook me up. I could not move. My clothes were steaming I freaked out. Co-workers ran to my aid and striped the hot clothing from my body, taking skin as they did. I lay face down on the plant floor, naked and shaking for a long time. The paramedics came to pick me up. The painful experience is still scary when I think about it.

Exercise 3 Revising and Editing

Mark the following rough draft for coherence, language, unity, emphasis, support, and sentences (CLUESS). Then edit it, correcting fundamentals such as capitalization, omissions, punctuation, and spelling (COPS).

If I Were a Traffic Cop

Make me a traffic cop, and I’ll crack down on certain types of driver. First off are the drunks. I’d zap them off the highways right off, and any cop would. But what I’m really talking about is the jerks of the highway. Near the top are the up-tight lane changers, for example, this morning when I was driving to school, I saw several. I could have carved at least a couple notches in a violation pad, and I wasn’t even cranky. They cut off
people and force their way in, and leave behind upset and hurt people. Then there’s the left-turn bullies the ones that keep moving out when the yellow turn to red. They come in all ages and sexes, they can be young or old, male or female. Yesterday, I saw this female in a pick-up barrel right out into the teeth of a red light. She had a baby on board. She had lead in her foot. She had evil in her eye. She was hostile and self-centered. Taking advantage of others. She knew that the facing traffic would probably not pull out and risk a head-on crash. The key word there is probably but many times people with a green light do move out and collide with the left turn bullies. Third, I’d sap the tailgaters. No one goes fast enough for these guys. I’m not alone in this peeve. One bumper sticker reads, “Stay back. I chew tobacky.” And James Bond sprayed oil on cars that chased him. Since the first is dirty and the second is against the law, if I had the clout of a Rambo-cop I’d just rack up a lot of tailgater tickets. But there’s a lot of road demons out there. Maybe it’s good I’m not a traffic cop, Rambo or otherwise, cause traffic cops are suppose to inforce hundreds of laws. I don’t know if I’d have time cause I have my own pet peeves in mind.

**Exercise 4 Writing a Paragraph**

*Fill in the following two blanks to complete the topic sentence.*

____________ [person’s name] is an excellent __________ [boss, coach, doctor, neighbor, parent, preacher, teacher, sibling].
Then use the topic sentence to write a paragraph. Go through the complete writing process. Use one or more prewriting techniques (freewriting, brainstorming, listing, clustering, outlining), write a first draft, revise your draft as many times as necessary, edit your work, and write a final, polished paragraph.

In your drafts, you may rephrase the topic sentence as necessary. Using the paragraph on pages 3–4 (showing Magic Johnson as a shooter, passer, rebounder, and leader) as a model, divide your topic into whatever qualities make your subject an excellent example of whichever type of person you have chosen.

Writer’s Guidelines at a Glance: Writing, Revising, and Editing

1. **Write the rough draft.** Referring to your outline for guidance and to your topic sentence for limits, write a first, or rough, draft. Do not get caught up in correcting and polishing your writing during this stage.

2. **Revise.** Mark and revise your rough draft, rewriting as many times as necessary to produce an effective paragraph. The main points of revision are contained in the acronym CLUESS, expressed here as questions.

   - **Coherence:** Does the material flow smoothly from one idea to the next?
   - **Language:** Are the words appropriate for the message, occasion, and audience?
   - **Unity:** Are all the ideas related to and subordinate to the topic sentence?
   - **Emphasis:** Have you used techniques such as repetition and placement of ideas to emphasize your main point[s]?
   - **Support:** Have you presented material to back up, justify, or prove your topic sentence?
   - **Sentences:** Have you used some variety of structure and avoided fragments, comma splices, and run-ons?

3. **Edit.** Examine your work carefully. Look for problems in capitalization, omissions, punctuation, and spelling (COPS).