

CHAPTER 2

Plan and Draft

KEY POINTS

- Experienced writers establish their goals before beginning any writing project.
- When completing any academic assignment, it's crucial that students (1) respond to the assignment appropriately, and (2) select a topic that both fits the assignment and appeals to them.
- Experienced writers use a number of different strategies for exploring topics, brainstorming, focusing their thinking, and drafting their work. Students should begin learning which strategies work best for them.
- After generating ideas, an experienced writer selects the best of them to continue working with. She aims to produce a working thesis that is specific, manageable, and interesting.
- The best writers know that nobody gets everything right the first time. Their goal is to write a good draft that they can go back and revise later.

TEACHING SUGGESTIONS

- The very first step in any academic writing project is reading the assignment carefully and understanding it. Help students break this process down into discrete steps. Students should learn to (1) recognize important words in the assignment, (2) discern the purpose of the assignment, (3) determine the material the assignment is meant to cover, (4) understand the details of the assignment, and (5) ask questions about any aspect of the assignment that they don't understand.
- Consider allowing students to select their own topics for their major assignments. Alternatively, allow them to select their topic in at least *one* of their major assignments. Encourage them to experiment with some of the invention exercises in Chapter 2.
- Some of your students will have a fairly clear sense of how they work and learn best. (For example, some will already know that they are primarily visual or aural learners.) Encourage these students to use the prewriting exercises that work best for them. But also encourage them to try new methods, since many people work best with a combination of visual, aural, and tactile input.
- Explain that the writing process is not linear but recursive. As students move forward through the stages of prewriting, drafting, and revising, they'll also occasionally return to earlier steps in the process.
- Many students have poor inventional resources. They assume that experienced writers don't

have to rely on such “tricks” as brainstorming and freewriting; that, for the lucky few, words and ideas just appear out of thin air. Sharing your own invention process for a piece of writing may give them a better sense of its value.

- Encourage students to think about time management. How much time do they have to complete the assignment? How much time will they need to develop a topic? To write a first draft? To revise that draft? You want your pedagogy to seem practical and realistic. Encourage your students to be both responsible and efficient writers.

- Some students won’t know what you mean by “rough draft.” You should define what a rough draft is—perhaps even working with students to produce a definition—in specific terms. Here are some possibilities:

- A rough draft is an early pass through the *entire* project. It is the result of substantial time and work.

- A rough draft has an introduction, a thesis statement, arguments and evidence supporting that thesis statement, and a conclusion.

- A rough draft isn’t perfect. But it *is* complete enough to give a reader a glimpse of the writer’s complete argument and evidence.

- A rough draft is readable. It’s double-spaced, with ample margins. If it’s handwritten, it is printed in ink and written on every other line.

- Have a reasonable policy regarding group work, and explain it to your students so they know they will not end up doing more than their share of the work on a project. One option is to assign “Process Logs,” which each member of a group turns in directly to you two or three times during a group project. Students must record what work they have done, and when, and what the rest of the group’s contributions have been to date. Requiring these Process Logs does much to prevent unfair workload distribution.

IN-CLASS ACTIVITIES

- Survey your students to see which invention strategies they have used in the past, and which ones have worked well for them. Ask them to describe what they like or don’t like about particular strategies. Also ask them if there are strategies described in the chapter that they have never tried. Encourage them to try at least one new invention strategy for their next assignment.

- Choose an issue that is of concern on your campus and hold a group brainstorming session. Use the six “reporter’s questions” in section 2b to generate ideas around the topic. Write all the ideas on the board. List every idea, and model for students how to defer *evaluation* of ideas during this stage of the writing process. Keep the brainstorming going as long as students have ideas, and

then push it a little farther. A good rule of thumb is, “Think of all the ideas you can, and then think of at least three more.”

- **Collaborative activity.** After completing the brainstorming activity above, break students into pairs or small groups and have them develop up to three focused topics from the ideas generated by the class.
- Most students need to practice writing, revising, and evaluating thesis statements. Show students a range of thesis statements—from student papers, from academic articles, from newspapers and magazines. You can also have students work up thesis statements from the focused topics they generated in the collaborative activity above.
- **Collaborative activity.** Use the *Staying on Track* box “Evaluate your working thesis” to focus students’ theses before they begin drafting. You can have them draft a working thesis and exchange with their peers. Ask them to respond to their peer’s thesis along the same lines as the examples in the box. In what ways is the thesis too specific or not specific enough? How much research does it seem likely to require? How interesting is it? What might improve it? Have students discuss the comments they receive, revise their working thesis, and then switch with new partners to see if they get better responses.
- If you can, have a professional writer visit your class. Have her describe her own prewriting practices. How does she brainstorm? How does she focus her topic and draft her work? How does she manage her time?

SHORT ASSIGNMENTS

- Keeping a “Time Log” for the complete writing process of one paper is one way to help students learn to manage their writing time. Help them work backwards from the deadline to set proximal goals for different steps in their writing process. This can be especially helpful for research projects.
- **Disciplinary writing assignment.** Give students five or six short essay questions from different academic disciplines and, for each, have students write a paragraph describing (1) the kind of work the question is asking students to do, and (2) how they would answer it if they encountered it on an exam. Alternately, ask them to describe writing they have done that was prompted by key words such as those listed in 2a. What does “analyze” mean in an English class? Does it mean the same thing in a chemistry class? “Define” has very specific, very different meanings in rhetoric and in psychology. Have them write a paragraph or two about their experience with these kinds of words. Note that, in addition to different disciplinary meanings, these terms can be understood very differently by different instructors. Encourage your students to always check with the instructor whenever they are in doubt about the writing task required of them. This is part of assessing one’s audience as a writer.
- **Teaching with technology assignment.** Assign two freewriting activities. Require students to complete one of the activities using a computer and the other using pen and paper. Then, have

students share their experiences. Which of the two technologies did they find more effective for freewriting? Did one offer any clear advantages or disadvantages?

- **Teaching with technology assignment.** Provide students with a big subject to consider (e.g., sea level rise, cloning, gun control). Have students use different keywords for an internet search, to narrow the focus of the subject until they have a topic that is manageable in a five- page academic essay.

- **Collaborative assignment.** After students have researched their topics, have them compare the topics they chose (see assignment above). Have students assess one another's topics. Is each topic manageable? Are some still too large? Have some become too narrow? You can use the questions in the *Staying on Track* box "Evaluate your working thesis."

- **Disciplinary writing assignment.** The hypothesis of an experiment may seem like a starting point, but in fact it is the result of a great deal of preliminary exploration. Have each student choose a famous scientific experiment—Ben Franklin's kite and key, Edward Jenner's smallpox vaccine, Galileo's falling bodies experiment, for example—and try to reconstruct the hypothesis that gave rise to the experiment. This is a good exercise in "focusing" a topic. They might then reverse the process, constructing a hypothesis of their own for an experiment based on their observation of the world around them.