

**PART 1**

# The Writing Process

**CHAPTER 1****Assessing the Writing Situation****CHAPTER 2****Developing and Shaping Ideas****CHAPTER 3****Drafting and Revising****CHAPTER 4****Writing and Revising Paragraphs****CHAPTER 5****Designing Documents****CHAPTER 1**

# Assessing the Writing Situation

“Writing is easy,” snarled the late sportswriter Red Smith. “All you do is sit down at the typewriter and open a vein.” Most writers would smile in agreement, and so might you. Like anything worthwhile, writing well takes hard work. This chapter and the next two will show you some techniques that successful writers use to ease the discomfort of writing and produce effective compositions.

**1a Understanding how writing happens**

Every time you sit down to write, you embark on a **writing process**—the term for all the activities, mental and physical, that go into creating what eventually becomes a finished piece of work. Even for experienced writers the process is usually messy, which is one reason that it is sometimes difficult. Though we may get a sense of ease and orderliness from a well-crafted magazine article, we can safely assume that the writer had to work hard to achieve those qualities, struggling to express half-formed thoughts, shaping and reshaping paragraphs to make a point convincingly.

There is no *one* writing process: no two writers proceed in the same way, and even an individual writer adapts his or her process to the task at hand. Still, most experienced writers pass through overlapping stages:

- ✓ **Analyzing the writing situation:** considering subject, purpose, audience, and other elements of the project (pp. 4–15).
- ✓ **Developing or planning:** gathering information, focusing on a central theme, and organizing material (pp. 16–43).
- ✓ **Drafting:** expressing and connecting ideas (pp. 44–48).
- ✓ **Revising and editing:** rethinking and improving structure, content, style, and presentation (pp. 48–65).

With experience, as you complete varied assignments and try the varied techniques described in this book, you will develop your own basic writing process.

**Note** Like many others, you may believe that writing is only, or even mainly, a matter of correctness. True, any written message will find a more receptive audience if it is correct in grammar, spelling, and similar matters. But these concerns should come late in the writing process, after you've allowed yourself to discover what you want to say, freeing yourself to make mistakes along the way. As one writer put it, you need to get the clay on the potter's wheel before you can shape it into a bowl, and you need to shape the bowl before you can perfect it. So get your clay on the wheel, and work with it until it looks like a bowl. Then worry about correctness.

### EXERCISE 1.1 Starting a writing journal

Recall several writing experiences that you have had—a letter you had difficulty composing, an essay you enjoyed writing, an all-nighter spent happily or miserably on a term paper, a posting to an online newsgroup that received a surprising response. What do these experiences reveal to you about writing, particularly your successes and problems with it? Consider the following questions:

- Do you like to experiment with language?
- Are some kinds of writing easier than others?
- Do you have trouble getting ideas or expressing them?
- Do you worry about grammar and spelling?
- Do your readers usually understand what you mean?

Record your thoughts as part of continuing journal entries that track your experiences as a writer. (See pp. 17–19 on keeping a journal, and see the exercises titled “Considering your past work” in Chapters 1–4.) As you complete writing assignments for your composition course and other courses, keep adding to the journal, noting especially which procedures seem most helpful to you. Your aim is to discover your feelings about writing so that you can develop a dependable writing process of your own.

## 1b Analyzing the writing situation

Any writing you do for others occurs in a context that both limits and clarifies your choices. You are communicating something about a particular subject to a particular audience of readers for a specific reason. You may need to conduct research. You'll be up against a length requirement and a deadline. And you may be expected to present your work in a certain format.

These are the elements of the **writing situation**, and analyzing them at the very start of a project can tell you much about how to proceed. (For more information about these elements, refer to the page numbers given in parentheses.)

### Context

- ✓ **What is your writing for?** A course in school? Work? Something else? What do you know of the requirements for writing in this context?
- ✓ **Will you present your writing on paper, online, or orally?** What does the presentation method require in preparation time, special skills, and use of technology?
- ✓ **How much leeway do you have for this writing?** What does the stated or implied assignment tell you?

### Subject (pp. 6–9)

- ✓ **What does your writing assignment require you to write about?** If you don't have a specific assignment, what subjects might be appropriate for this situation?

- v **What interests you about the subject?** What do you already know about it? What questions do you have about it?
- v **What does the assignment require you to do with the subject?**

**Audience** (pp. 9–13)

- v **Who will read your writing?**
- v **What do your readers already know and think about your subject?** What characteristics—such as education or political views—might influence their response?
- v **What is your relationship to your readers?** How formal or informal should your writing be?
- v **What do you want readers to do or think after they read your writing?**

**Purpose** (pp. 13–15)

- v **What aim does your assignment specify?** For instance, does it ask you to explain something or argue a point?
- v **Why are you writing?**
- v **What do you want your work to accomplish?** What effect do you intend it to have on readers?
- v **How can you best achieve your purpose?**

**Research** (pp. 558–638)

- v **What kinds of evidence will best suit your subject, audience, and purpose?** What combination of facts, examples, and expert opinions will support your ideas?
- v **Does your assignment require research?** Will you need to consult sources or conduct interviews, surveys, or experiments?
- v **Even if research is not required, what information do you need to develop your subject?** How will you obtain it?
- v **What documentation style should you use to cite your sources?** (See pp. 637–38 on source documentation in the aca-demic disciplines.)

**Deadline and length**

- v **When is the assignment due?** How will you apportion the work you have to do in the time available?
- v **How long should your writing be?** If no length is assigned, what seems appropriate for your subject, audience, and purpose?

**Document design**

- v **What organization and format does the assignment require?** (See pp. 111–12 on format in the academic disciplines and pp. 839–54 on format in public writing.)
- v **How might you use margins, headings, and other elements to achieve your purpose?** (See pp. 116–20.)
- v **How might you use graphs, photographs, or other images to support ideas and engage readers?** (See pp. 120–25, 225–29.)

### EXERCISE 1.2 Analyzing a writing situation

The following assignment was given in a survey course in psychology. What does the assignment specify about the elements of the writing situation? What does it imply? Given this assignment, how would you answer the questions on the previous two pages? (You can do this exercise online at [ablongman.com/littlebrown](http://ablongman.com/littlebrown).)

When is psychotherapy most likely to work? That is, what combinations of client, therapist, and theory tend to achieve good results?

In your paper, cite studies supporting your conclusions. Length: 1500 to 1800 words. Post your paper online to me and to your discussion group by March 30.

## 1c Discovering and limiting a subject

For most college and public writing, you will write in response to an assignment. The assignment may specify your subject, or it may leave the choice to you. (If you're stuck, you can use the discovery techniques on pp. 16–26 to think of subjects.) Whether the subject is assigned or not, it will probably need some thought if it is to achieve these aims:

- ✓ **The subject should be suitable for the assignment.**
- ✓ **It should be neither too general nor too limited** for the length of project and deadline assigned.
- ✓ **It should be something you care about.**

### 1 Responding to a specific assignment

Many assignments will set boundaries for your subject. For instance, you might be asked to discuss what makes psychotherapy effective, to prepare a lab report on a physics experiment, or to analyze a character in a short story.

Such assignments may seem to leave little room for you to move around, but in fact you'll have several questions to answer:

- ✓ **What's wanted from you?** Writing assignments often contain words such as *discuss*, *describe*, *analyze*, *report*, *interpret*, *explain*, *define*, *argue*, and *evaluate*. These words specify the way you are to approach your subject, what kind of thinking is expected of you, and what your general purpose is. (See pp. 13–15 for more on purpose.)
- ✓ **For whom are you writing?** Many assignments will specify or imply your readers, but sometimes you will have to figure out for yourself who your audience is and what it expects from you. (For more on analyzing audience, see pp. 9–13.)
- ✓ **What kind of research is required?** Sometimes an assignment specifies the kinds of sources you are expected to consult, and you can use such information to choose your subject. (If you are unsure whether research is required, check with your instructor.)
- ✓ **How can you narrow the assigned subject to do it justice in the length and time required?** (See below.)

### 2 Responding to a general assignment

Some assignments specify features such as length or amount of research, but they leave the choice of subject entirely to you. Others are somewhat more focused—for instance, “Respond to a reading assigned in this course” or “Discuss a proposal for solving a local social problem”—but still give you much leeway in choosing a particular reading or a particular proposal. To find your approach, consider your experiences, interests, or curiosities:

- ✓ **What subject do you already know something about or have you been wondering about?** Athletic scholarships? Unemployment in your town?
- ✓ **Have you recently disagreed with someone over a substantial issue?** The change in relations between men and women? The methods being used to fight terrorism?
- ✓ **What have you read or seen lately?** A shocking book? A violent or funny movie? An effective television commercial?
- ✓ **What topic in the reading or class discussion for a course has intrigued you?** An economic issue such as taxes? A psychological problem such as depression?
- ✓ **What makes you especially happy or especially angry?** A hobby? The behavior of your neighbors?
- ✓ **Which of your own or others' dislikes and preferences would you like to understand better?** The demand for sport-utility vehicles? A taste for vegetarian cuisine?

Once you have a subject, you'll also need to answer the questions in the bulleted list opposite.

### 3 Narrowing a subject to a question

Let's say you've decided to write about communication on the Internet or about a particular character in a short story. You've got a subject, but it's still broad, worthy of a lengthy article if not

a whole book. For a relatively brief paper, you'll need a narrow focus in order to provide the specific details that make writing significant and interesting—all within the length and deadline specified by the assignment.

One helpful technique for narrowing a subject is to ask focused questions about it, seeking one that seems appropriate for your assignment and that promises to sustain your interest through the writing process. The following examples illustrate how questioning can scale down broad subjects to specific subjects that are limited and manageable:

| Broad subjects                                       | Specific subjects  |
|--|--|
| Communication on the Internet                        | What are the advantages of online communication?<br>How, if at all, should the government regulate Internet content?<br>How might the Internet contribute to social and economic equality?         |
| Mrs. Mallard in Kate Chopin's "The Story of an Hour" | What changes does Mrs. Mallard undergo?<br>Why does Mrs. Mallard respond as she does to news of her husband's death?<br>What does the story's irony contribute to the character of Mrs. Mallard?   |
| Lincoln's weaknesses as President                    | What was Lincoln's most significant error as commander-in-chief of the Union army?<br>Why did Lincoln delay emancipating the slaves?<br>Why did Lincoln have difficulties controlling his cabinet? |
| Federal aid to college students                      | Which students should be entitled to federal aid?<br>How adequate are the kinds of federal aid available to college students?<br>Why should the federal government aid college students?           |

As these examples illustrate, your questions should not lend themselves to yes-or-no answers but should require further thinking.

Here are some guidelines for posing questions:

- ✓ **Reread the assignment.** Consider what it tells you about purpose, audience, sources, length, and deadline.
- ✓ **Pursue your interests.** If questions don't come easily, try freewriting or brainstorming (pp. 20–22) or use a tree diagram (pp. 34–35).
- ✓ **Ask as many questions as you can think of.**
- ✓ **Test the question that seems most interesting and appropriate by roughly sketching out the main ideas.** Consider how many paragraphs or pages of specific facts, examples, and other details you would need to pin those ideas down. This thinking should give you at least a vague idea of how much work you'd have to do and how long the resulting paper might be.
- ✓ **Break a too-broad question down further, and repeat the previous step.**

The Internet can also help you limit a general subject. On the Web, browse a directory such as *BUBL LINK* ([bubl.ac.uk](http://bubl.ac.uk)). As you pursue increasingly narrow categories, you may find a suitably limited topic.

Don't be discouraged if the perfect question does not come easily or early. You may find that you need to do some planning and writing, exploring different facets of the general subject and pursuing your specific interests, before you hit on the best question. And the question you select may require further narrowing or may shift subtly or even dramatically as you move through the writing process.

### EXERCISE 1.3 Narrowing subjects

Following are some general writing assignments. Use the given information and your own interests to pose specific questions for three of these assignments. (You can do this exercise online at [ablongman.com/littlebrown](http://ablongman.com/littlebrown).)

1. For a writing course, consider how the World Wide Web could alter the experience of popular culture. Length: three pages. Deadline: one week.
2. For a course in sociology, research and analyze the dynamics of a particular group of people. Length: unspecified. Deadline: four weeks.
3. For a writing course, read and respond to an essay in a text you are using. Length: three pages. Deadline: two weeks.
4. For a government course, consider possible restrictions on legislators. Length: five pages. Deadline: two weeks.
5. For a letter to the editor of the town newspaper, describe the effects of immigration on your community. Length: two pages. Deadline: unspecified.

**EXERCISE 1.4 Considering your past work:  
Discovering and limiting a subject**

Think of something you've recently written—perhaps an application essay, a business report, or a term paper. How did your subject evolve from beginning to end? In retrospect, was it appropriate for your writing situation? How, if at all, might it have been modified?

**EXERCISE 1.5 Finding and narrowing a subject for your essay**

As the first step in developing a three- to four-page essay for the instructor and the other students in your writing course, choose a subject and narrow it. Use the guidelines in the previous section to come up with a question that is suitably interesting, appropriate, and specific.

## 1d Considering the audience

- ✓ **Who are my readers?**
- ✓ **Why will they read my writing?**
- ✓ **What will they need from me?**
- ✓ **What do I want them to think or do after they read my writing?**

These questions are central to any writing project, and they will crop up again and again. Except in writing meant only for yourself, you are always trying to communicate with readers—something about a particular subject, for a particular purpose.

Your audience will often be specified or implied in a writing assignment. When you write an editorial for the student newspaper, your audience consists of fellow students. When you write a report on a physics experiment, your audience consists of your physics instructor and perhaps other physicists or your classmates. (See pp. 129–30 for more on audience in academic writing.) Whatever the audience, considering its needs and expectations can help you form or focus a question about your subject, gather answers to the question, and ultimately decide what to say and how to say it.

### 1 Knowing what readers need

As a reader yourself, you know what readers need:

- ✓ **Context:** a link between what they read and their own knowledge and experiences.
- ✓ **Predictability:** an understanding of the writer's purpose and how it is being achieved.
- ✓ **Information:** the specific facts, examples, and other details that make the subject clear, concrete, interesting, and convincing.
- ✓ **Respect:** a sense that the writer respects their values and beliefs, their background, and their intelligence.
- ✓ **Voice:** a sense that the writer is a real person.
- ✓ **Clarity and correctness:** writing free of unnecessary stumbling blocks and mistakes.

For much academic and public writing, readers have definite needs and expectations. Thus Chapter 6 discusses academic writing in general, Chapters 49–53 discuss writing in various disciplines, and Chapter 55 discusses public writing. Even in these areas, you must make many choices based on audience. In other areas where the conventions of structure and presentation are



vaguer, the choices are even more numerous. The box opposite contains questions that can help you define and make these choices.

## 2 Pitching your writing to your audience

Your sense of your audience will influence three key elements of what you write:

- ✓ **The specific information you use to gain and keep the attention of readers and to guide them to accept your conclusions.** This information may consist of concrete details, facts, examples, or other evidence that makes your ideas clear, supports your assertions, and suits your readers' background, biases, and special interests.
- ✓ **The role you choose to play in relation to your readers.** Depending on your purpose and your attitude toward your topic, you will want readers to perceive you in a certain way. The possible roles are many and varied—for instance, scholar, storyteller, lecturer, guide, reporter, advocate, inspirer.
- ✓ **The tone you use.** **Tone** in writing is like tone of voice in speaking: words and sentence structures on the page convey some of the same information as pitch and volume in the voice. Depending on your writing situation and what you think your readers will expect and respond to, your tone may be formal or informal. The attitude you convey may be serious or light, forceful or calm, irritated or cheerful.

Even when you're writing on the same subject, your information, role, and tone may change substantially for different audiences. Both memos below were written by a student who worked part-time in a small company and wanted to get the company to conserve paper. But the two memos address different readers.

To coworkers

Ever notice how much paper collects in your trash basket every day? Well, most of it can be recycled with little effort, I promise. Basically, all you need to do is set a bag or box near your desk and deposit wastepaper in it. I know, space is cramped in these little cubicles. But what's a little more crowding when the earth's at stake? . . .

To management

In my four months here, I have observed that all of us throw out baskets of potentially recyclable paper every day. Considering the drain on our forest resources and the pressure on landfills that paper causes, we could make a valuable contribution to the environmental movement by helping to recycle the paper we use. At the company where I worked before, employees separate clean wastepaper from other trash at their desks. The maintenance staff collects trash in two receptacles, and the trash hauler (the same one we use here) makes separate pickups. I do not know what the hauler charges for handling recyclable material. . . .

Typically for business writing, the information grows more specific and the tone more formal as the rank and number of readers rise.

If you are writing online—for instance, to an Internet newsgroup—you may not know enough about your audience to pitch your writing to particular expectations and needs. Consider, then, providing more information than you otherwise might, assuming the role of an equal (perhaps a colleague), and using a level tone (neither hostile nor chummy, neither very formal nor very informal).

**EXERCISE 1.6 Considering audience**

Choose one of the following subjects, and, for each audience specified, ask the questions on page 11. Decide on four points you would make, the role you would assume, and the tone you would adopt for each audience. Then write a paragraph for each based on your decisions. (You can do this exercise online at [ablongman.com/littlebrown](http://ablongman.com/littlebrown).)

1. The effects of smoking: for elementary school students and for adult smokers
2. Your opposition to a proposed law requiring adult bicyclists to wear helmets: for cyclists who oppose the law and for people who favor it
3. Why your neighbors should remove the wrecked truck from their front yard: for your neighbors and for your town zoning board

**EXERCISE 1.7 Considering your past work:  
Writing for a specific audience**

How did audience figure in a piece of writing you've done in the recent past—perhaps an essay for an application or a paper for a course? Who were your readers? How did your awareness of them influence your choice of information, your role, and your tone? At what point in the writing process did you find it most productive to consider your readers consciously?

**EXERCISE 1.8 Analyzing the audience for your essay**

Use the questions on page 11 to determine as much as you can about the probable readers of your essay-in-progress (see Exercise 1.5). What does your analysis reveal about the specific information your readers need? What role do you want to assume, and what tone will best convey your attitude toward your topic?

**1e Defining a purpose**

When you write, your **purpose** is your chief reason for communicating something about a topic to a particular audience. Purpose thus links both the specific situation in which you are working and the goal you hope to achieve. It is your answer to a potential reader's question, "So what?"

**1 Defining a general purpose**

Your purpose may fall into one of four general categories: entertainment, self-expression, explanation, or persuasion. These purposes may overlap in a single piece of writing, but usually one predominates. And the dominant purpose will influence your particular slant on your topic, the supporting details you choose, even the words you use.

In college or public writing, by far the most common purposes are explanation and persuasion:

- **Writing that is mainly explanatory is often called *exposition*** (from a Latin word meaning "to explain or set forth"). Using examples, facts, and other evidence, you present an idea about your subject so that readers understand it as you do. Almost any subject is suitable for exposition: how to pitch a knuckleball, why you want to major in business, the implications of a new discovery in computer science, the interpretation of a short story, the causes of an economic slump. Exposition is the kind of writing encountered most often in newspapers, magazines, and textbooks.
- **Writing that is primarily persuasive is often called *argument***. Using examples, facts, and other evidence, you support your position on a debatable subject so that readers will at least consider your view and perhaps agree with it or act on it. A newspaper editorial favoring city council reform, a business proposal for a new personnel policy, a student paper recommending more required courses or defending a theory about human psychological development—all these are arguments. (Chapters 9–11 discuss argument in some detail and provide examples.)

## 2 Defining a specific purpose

Purpose can be conceived more specifically, too, in a way that incorporates your particular subject and the outcome you intend—what you want readers to do or think as a result of reading your writing. Here are some examples of specific purposes:

To explain how Annie Dillard’s “Total Eclipse” builds to its climax so that readers appreciate the author’s skill

To explain the methods and results of an engineering experiment so that readers understand and accept your conclusions

To explain why the county has been unable to attract new businesses so that readers better understand the local economic slump

To persuade readers to support the college administration’s plan for more required courses

To argue against additional regulation of health-maintenance organizations so that readers perceive the disadvantages for themselves

To argue for additional gun-control laws so that readers agree on their necessity

Often, a writing assignment will specify or imply both a general and a specific purpose. Say, for instance, that a psychology teacher assigns a review of the research on infants’ perception of color. You know that the purpose is generally to explain, more specifically to summarize and analyze the established findings on the subject. You want readers to come away understanding the current state of the investigation into the subject. In addition, you want your instructor to see that you can competently read others’ work and write about it. (See p. 130 for more on purpose in academic writing.)

With any writing assignment, try to define your specific purpose as soon as you have formed a question about your subject. Don’t worry, though, if you feel uncertain of your purpose at the start. Sometimes you may not discover your purpose until you begin drafting, or you may find that your initial sense of purpose changes as you move through the writing process.

### EXERCISE 1.9 Finding purpose in assignments

For each of your questions from Exercise 1.3 (p. 9), suggest a likely general purpose (entertainment, self-expression, explanation, persuasion) and try to define a specific purpose as well. Make audience part of your suggestions: What would you want readers to do or think in each case? (If you completed Exercise 1.3 online, you can add these suggestions to that file.)

### EXERCISE 1.10 Considering your past work:

#### Defining a purpose

Look over two or three things you’ve written in the past year or so. What was your specific purpose in each one? How did the purpose influence your writing? Did you achieve your purpose?

### EXERCISE 1.11 Defining a purpose for your essay

For your essay-in-progress, use your thinking so far about topic (Exercise 1.5, p. 9) and audience (Exercise 1.8, p. 13) to define a general and specific purpose for your writing.

<http://www.ablongman.com/littlebrown>

Visit the companion Web site for more help and additional exercises on the writing situation and the writing process.

### The writing process

## Questions about audience

### Identity and expectations

- ✓ **Who are my readers?**
- ✓ **What are my readers' expectations for the kind of writing I'm doing?** Do readers expect features such as a particular organization and format, distinctive kinds of evidence, or a certain style of documenting sources?
- ✓ **What do I want readers to know or do after reading my work?** How should I make that clear to them?
- ✓ **What is my relationship to my readers?** How formal or informal will they expect me to be? What role and tone should I assume?

### Characteristics, knowledge, and attitudes

- ✓ **What characteristics of readers are relevant for my subject and purpose?** For instance:
  - Age and sex
  - Occupation: students, professional colleagues, etc.
  - Social or economic role: subject-matter experts, voters, car buyers, potential employers, etc.
  - Economic or educational background
  - Ethnic background
  - Political, religious, or moral beliefs and values
  - Hobbies or activities
- ✓ **How will the characteristics of readers influence their attitudes toward my subject?**
- ✓ **What do readers already know and *not* know about my subject?** How much do I have to tell them?
- ✓ **How should I handle any specialized terms?** Will readers know them? If not, should I define them or avoid them?
- ✓ **What ideas, arguments, or information might surprise, excite, or offend readers?** How should I handle these points?
- ✓ **What misconceptions might readers have of my subject and/or my approach to it?** How can I dispel these misconceptions?

### Uses and format

- ✓ **What will readers do with my writing?** Should I expect them to read every word from the top, to scan for information, to look for conclusions? Can I help by providing a summary, headings, illustrations, or other aids? (See pp. 111–26 on document design.)

You can download these questions from [ablongman.com/littlebrown](http://ablongman.com/littlebrown). Save them in a file of their own, duplicate the file for each writing project, and insert appropriate answers between the questions. Print your answers for reference as you develop your paper.

**Information:** how employees could handle recycling; no mention of costs

**Role:** cheerful, equally harried colleague

**Tone:** informal, personal (*Ever notice; Well; you; I know, space is cramped; what's*)

**Information:** specific reasons; view of company as a whole; reference to another company; problem of cost

**Role:** serious, thoughtful, responsible employee

**Tone:** formal, serious (*Considering the drain; forest resources; valuable contribution; no you or contractions*)

## The general purposes for writing

- ✓ To entertain readers

- √ To express your feelings or ideas
- √ To explain something to readers (exposition)
- √ To persuade readers to accept or act on your opinion (argument)