PART II

THE WRITING PROCESS

Getting Started Through Prewriting

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Observations About the Writing Process

Not many people retire at age thirty-eight. But Michel Montaigne, a sixteenth-century French attorney, did exactly that. Montaigne retired at a young age because he wanted to read, think, and write about all the subjects that interested him. After spending years getting his ideas down on paper, Montaigne finally published his short prose pieces. He called them *essais*—French for "trials" or "attempts."

In fact, all writing is an attempt to transform ideas into words, thus giving order and meaning to life. By using the term *essais,* Montaigne acknowledged that a written piece is never really finished. Of course, writers have to stop at some point, especially if they have deadlines to meet. But, as all experienced writers know, even after they dot the final *i,* cross the final *t,* and say "That's it," there's always something that could have been explored further or expressed a little better.

When we read a piece of writing, we see only the finished product. Not being privy to the writer's effort to convey meaning, we may hold a romanticized notion of what it means to be a writer. We may imagine the writer transported by flashes

of creativity, polished prose appearing—as if by magic—on the page. In practice, though, most writers do anything but pour out well-formed thoughts. Rather, they stare into space, dash off a few pages, crumple them up, and start all over. Even E. B. White, the American essayist celebrated for his eloquent, seemingly effortless prose, confessed, "Writing . . . is a hell of a chore for me, closely related to acid indigestion."

If White, who made his living as a writer, admitted such anxiety, you shouldn't be surprised if you feel some apprehension when it's time to write a paper. Your uneasiness may stem in part from your belief that some people are born writers, others are not—and that you're one of the latter. Some people *do* seem to be born with a gift for language, just as some people seem to be born with a gift for athletics or music. But with practice, just about anyone can learn to play a solid game of tennis or to sing on key. And that's what most of us are aiming for—not to be the Venus Williamses, the Pavarottis, or the E. B. Whites of the world, but to perform skillfully and confidently.

As with singing or playing tennis, learning to write well is a challenge. Shaky starts and changes in direction aren't uncommon. Although there's no way to eliminate the work needed to write effectively, certain approaches can make the process more manageable and rewarding. In Chapters 2–9, we describe a sequence of steps for writing essays. Each step is presented in a full-color graphic "process diagram" so you can see clearly each step of the writing process. Familiarity with a specific sequence develops your awareness of strategies and choices, making you feel more confident when it comes time to write. You're less likely to look at a blank piece of paper and think, "Help! Now what do I do?" During the sequence, you do the following:

- Prewrite
- Identify your thesis
- Support the thesis with evidence
- Organize the evidence
- Write the paragraphs of the first draft
- Revise meaning, structure, and paragraph development
- Revise sentences and words
- Edit and proofread

Even though we present the sequence as a series of steps, it's not a rigid formula that you must follow step by unchanging step. Somewhere in school we were taught that a straight line is the shortest distance between two points. But writing isn't as simple or tidy as that. Most people develop personalized approaches to the writing process. Some writers mull over a topic in their heads and then move quickly into a promising first draft; others outline their essays in detail before beginning to write. Between these two extremes are any number of effective approaches.

Most of us tend to be creatures of habit; we feel secure and comfortable doing things the way we always have. You've probably approached writing in much the same way for many years. At first, you may be reluctant to try the techniques we

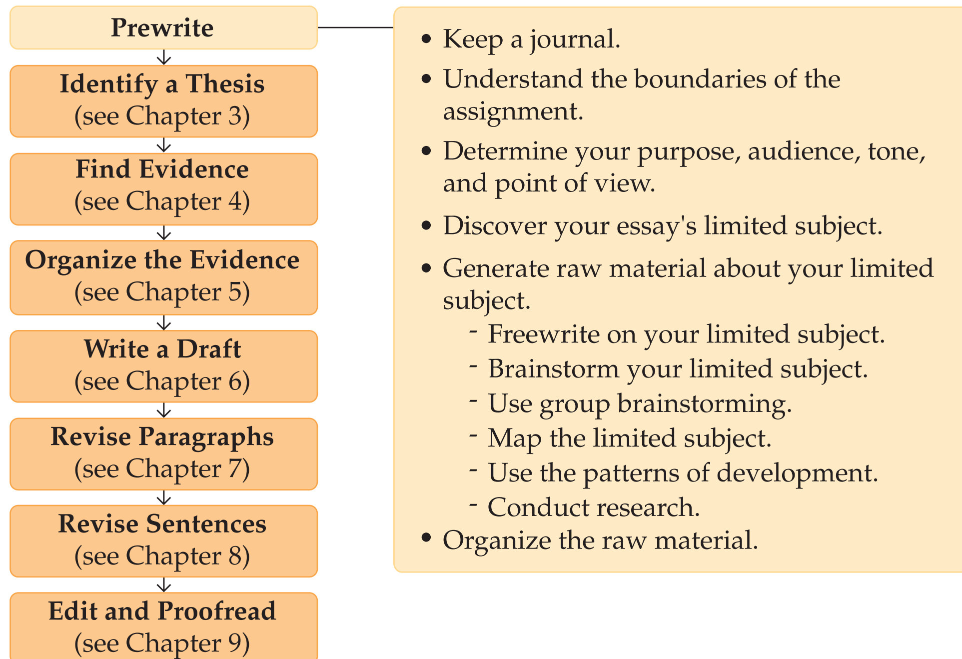
describe here and in the following chapters. That's understandable. But we urge you to experiment with the strategies we present. Try them, use what works, discard what doesn't. And always feel free to streamline or alter the steps in the sequence to suit your individual needs and the requirements of specific writing assignments.

USE PREWRITING TO GET STARTED

Prewriting refers to strategies you can use to generate ideas *before* starting the first draft of a paper. (See Figure 2.1 below.) Prewriting techniques are like the warm-ups you do before going out to jog—they loosen you up, get you moving, and help you to develop a sense of well-being and confidence. Since prewriting techniques encourage imaginative exploration, they also help you discover what interests you most about your subject. Having such a focus early in the writing process keeps you from plunging into your initial draft without first giving some thought to what you want to say. Prewriting thus saves you time in the long run by keeping you on course.

Prewriting can help in other ways, too. When we write, we often sabotage our ability to generate material because we continually critique what we put down

FIGURE 2.1
Process Diagram: Prewriting



on paper. "This makes no sense," "This is stupid," "I can't say that," and other critical thoughts pop into our minds. Such negative, self-critical comments stop the flow of our thoughts and reinforce the fear that we have nothing to say and aren't very good at writing. During prewriting, you deliberately ignore your internal critic. Your purpose is simply to get ideas down on paper or on a computer screen *without evaluating* their effectiveness. Writing without immediately judging what you produce can be liberating. Once you feel less pressure, you'll probably find that you can generate a good deal of material. And that can make your confidence soar.

One final advantage of prewriting: The random associations typical of prewriting tap the mind's ability to make unusual connections. When you prewrite, you're like an archaeologist going on a dig. On the one hand, you may not unearth anything; on the other hand, you may stumble upon one interesting find after another. Prewriting helps you appreciate—right from the start—this element of surprise in the writing process.

Keep a Journal

Of all the prewriting techniques, keeping a **journal** (daily or almost daily) is the one most likely to make writing a part of your life. If you prefer keeping a handwritten journal, consider using a small notebook that you can carry with you for on-the-spot writing. If you feel more comfortable working at a computer, keep your journal printouts in a loose-leaf notebook. No matter how you proceed, be sure to date all entries.

Some journal entries focus on a single theme; others wander from topic to topic. Your starting point may be a dream, a snippet of overheard conversation, a video on YouTube, a political cartoon, an issue raised in class or in your reading—anything that surprises, interests, angers, depresses, confuses, or amuses you. You may also use a journal to experiment with your writing style—say, to vary your sentence structure if you tend to use predictable patterns.

Here is a fairly focused excerpt from a student's journal:

Today I had to show Paul around school. He and Mom got here at 9. I didn't let on that this was the earliest I've gotten up all semester! He got out of the car looking kind of nervous. Maybe he thought his big brother would be different after a couple of months of college. I walked him around part of the campus and then he went with me to Am. Civ. and then to lunch. He met Greg and some other guys. Everyone seemed to like him. He's got a nice, quiet sense of humor. When I went to Bio., I told him that he could walk around on his own since he wasn't crazy about sitting in on a science class. But he said "I'd rather stick with you." Was he flattering me or was he just

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scared? Anyway it made me feel good. Later when he was leaving,
he told me he's definitely going to apply. I guess that'd be kind
of nice, having him here. Mom thinks it's great and she's pushing
it. I don't know. I feel kind of like it would invade my privacy.
I found this school and have made a life for myself here. Let him
find his own school! But it could be great having my kid brother
here. I guess this is a classic case of what my psych teacher
calls ambivalence. Part of me wants him to come, and part of me
doesn't. (November 10)
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The journal is a place for you to get in touch with the writer inside you. Although some instructors collect students' journals, you needn't be overly concerned with spelling, grammar, sentence structure, or organization. While journal writing is typically more structured than freewriting (see pages 26–27), you don't have to strive for entries that read like mini-essays. On the contrary, sometimes you may find it helpful to use a simple list (see the journal entry on page 17) when recording your thoughts about a subject. You may leave loose ends, drift to new topics, and evoke the personal and private without fully explaining or describing. The most important thing is to let your journal writing prompt reflection and insights.

Writing openly and fluently doesn't happen overnight; you need to keep at it. Try to complete a page-long journal entry three to five times a week. It's also a good idea to reread each week's entries to identify recurring themes and concerns. Keep a list of these issues at the back of your journal, under a heading like "Possible Essay Subjects." Here, for instance, are a few topics suggested by the preceding journal entry: deciding which college to attend, leaving home, sibling rivalry. Each of these topics could be developed in a full-length essay.

Using the journal to identify potential essay subjects helps you see that everyday life can be the source of meaningful writing. Most of us have become so accustomed to the routines of our lives that we cannot see the interesting in the ordinary. In *Walden,* a collection of journal entries, Henry David Thoreau wrote that our lives would be enriched immeasurably if we "employ[ed] a certain portion of each day looking back upon the time which has passed and in writing down . . . [our] thoughts and feelings." Keeping a journal does indeed foster an awareness of our own lives. It prevents us from thinking of ourselves as dull, dreary people to whom nothing happens. And it provides a wealth of material to draw on in our writing.

The Pre-Reading Journal Entry

To reinforce the value of journal writing, we've included a journal assignment before every selection in the book. This assignment, called the *Pre-Reading Journal Entry,* gets you ready for the piece by encouraging you to explore—in a tentative fashion—your thoughts about an issue that will be raised in the selection.

Here, once again, is the *Pre-Reading Journal Entry* assignment that precedes Ellen Goodman's "Family Counterculture" (see page 6):

> Television is often blamed for having a harmful effect on children. Do you think this criticism is merited? In what ways does TV exert a negative influence on children? In what ways does TV exert a positive influence on youngsters? Take a few minutes to respond to these questions in your journal.

The following journal entry shows how one student, Harriet Davids, responded to the journal assignment. A thirty-eight-year-old college student and mother of two young teenagers, Harriet was understandably intrigued by the assignment. As you'll see, Harriet used a listing strategy to prepare her journal entry. She found that lists were perfect for dealing with the essentially "for or against" nature of the journal assignment.

TV's Negative Influence on Kids	TV's Positive Influence on Kids
Teaches negative behaviors (violence, sex, swearing, drugs, alcohol, etc.)	Teaches important educational concepts (Sesame Street, shows on The Learning Channel, etc.)
Cuts down on imagination and creativity	Exposes kids to new images and worlds (Dora the Explorer, Mister Rogers' Neighborhood)
Cuts down on time spent with parents (talking, reading, playing games together)	Can inspire important discussions (about morals, sexuality, drugs, etc.) between kids and parents
Encourages parents' lack of involvement with kids	Gives parents a needed break from kids
Frightens kids excessively by showing images of real-life violence (terrorist attacks, war, murders, etc.)	Educates kids about the painful realities in the world
Encourages isolation (watching screen rather than interacting with other kids)	Creates common ground among kids, basis of conversations and games
De-emphasizes reading and creates need for constant stimulation	Encourages kids to slow down and read books based on a TV series or show (the Arthur and the Clifford, the Big Red Dog series, The Bookworm Bunch, etc.)
Promotes materialism (commercials)	Can be used by parents to teach kids that they can't have everything they see

The journal assignment and subsequent journal entry do more than prepare you to read a selection with extra care and attention; they also pave the way to a full-length essay. Here's how. The final assignment following each selection is called *Writing Assignment Using a Journal Entry as a Starting Point.* This assignment helps you to translate the raw material in your journal entry into a thoughtful, well-considered essay. By the time you get to the assignment, the rough ideas in your journal entry will have been enriched by your reading of the selection. (For an example of a writing assignment that draws upon material in a pre-reading journal entry, turn to page 167.)

As you've just seen, journal writing can stimulate thinking in a loose, unstructured way; journal writing can also prompt the focused thinking required by a specific writing assignment. When you have a specific piece to write, you should approach prewriting in a purposeful, focused manner. You need to:

- Understand the boundaries of the assignment
- Determine your purpose, audience, tone, and point of view
- Discover your essay's limited subject
- Generate raw material about your limited subject
- Organize the raw material

We'll discuss each of these steps in turn. But first, here's a practical tip: If you don't use a computer during the prewriting stage, try using a pencil and scrap paper. They reinforce the notion that prewriting is tentative and exploratory.

Understand the Boundaries of the Assignment

Most likely, you'll find considerable variety in your college writing assignments. Sometimes a professor will indicate that you can write on a topic of your own choosing; other times you may be given a highly specific assignment. Most assignments, though, will fit somewhere in between. In any case, you shouldn't start writing a paper until you know what's expected. First, clarify the *kind of paper* the instructor has in mind. Assume the instructor asks you to discuss the key ideas in an assigned reading. What exactly does the instructor want you to do? Should you include a brief summary of the selection? Should you compare the author's ideas with your own view of the subject? Should you determine if the author's view is supported by valid evidence? If you're not sure about an assignment, ask your instructor—not the student next to you, who may be as confused as you—to make the requirements clear. Most instructors are more than willing to provide an explanation. They would rather take a few minutes of class time to explain the assignment than spend hours reading dozens of student essays that miss the mark.

Second, find out *how long* the paper is expected to be. Many instructors will indicate the approximate length of the papers they assign. If no length requirements are provided, discuss with the instructor what you plan to cover and indicate how long you think your paper will be. The instructor will either give you the go-ahead or help you refine the direction and scope of your work.

Determine Your Purpose, Audience, Tone, and Point of View

Once you understand the requirements for a writing assignment, you're ready to begin thinking about the essay. What is its *purpose?* For what *audience* will it be written? What *tone* and *point of view* will you use? Later on, you may modify your decisions about these issues. That's fine. But you need to understand the way these considerations influence your work in the early phases of the writing process.

Purpose

Start by clarifying to yourself the essay's broad **purpose.** What do you want the essay to accomplish? The papers you write in college are usually meant to *inform* or *explain,* to *convince* or *persuade,* and sometimes to *entertain.*

In practice, writing often combines purposes. You might, for example, write an essay trying to *convince* people to support a new trash recycling program in your community. But before you win readers over, you most likely would have to *explain* something about current waste-disposal technology.

When purposes blend in this way, the predominant one influences the essay's content, organization, pattern of development, emphasis, and language. Assume you're writing about a political campaign. If your primary goal is to *entertain,* to take a gentle poke at two candidates, you might use the comparison-contrast pattern to organize your essay. You might, for example, start with several accounts of one candidate's "foot-in-mouth disease" and then describe the attempts of the other candidate, a multimillionaire, to portray himself as an average Joe. Your language, full of exaggeration, would reflect your objective. But if your primary purpose is to *persuade* readers that the candidates are incompetent and shouldn't be elected, you might adopt a serious, straightforward style. Selecting the argumentation-persuasion pattern to structure the essay, you might use one candidate's gaffes and the other's posturings to build a case that neither is worthy of public office.

Audience

Writing is a social act and thus implies a reader or an **audience.** To write effectively, you need to identify who your readers are and to take their expectations and needs into account. An essay about the artificial preservatives in the food served by the campus cafeteria would take one form if submitted to your chemistry professor and a very different form if written for the college newspaper. The chemistry paper would probably be formal and technical, complete with chemical formulations and scientific data: "Distillation revealed sodium benzoate particles suspended in a gelatinous medium." But such technical material would be inappropriate in a newspaper column intended for general readers. In this case, you might provide specific examples of cafeteria foods containing additives—"Those deliciously smoky cold cuts are loaded with nitrates and nitrites, both known to cause cancer in laboratory animals"—and suggest ways to eat more healthfully—"Pass by the deli counter and fill up instead on vegetarian pizza and fruit juices."

If you forget your readers, your essay can run into problems. Consider what happened when one student, Roger Salucci, submitted a draft of his essay to his

instructor for feedback. The assignment was to write about an experience that demonstrated the value of education. Here's the opening paragraph from Roger's first draft:

> When I received my first page as an EMT, I realized pretty quickly that all the weeks of KED and CPR training paid off. At first, when the call came in, I was all nerves, I can tell you. When the heat is on, my mind tends to go as blank as an unplugged computer screen. But I beat it to the van right away. After a couple of false turns, my partner and I finally got the right house and found a woman fibrillating and suffering severe myocardial arrhythmia. Despite our anxiety, our heads were on straight; we knew exactly what to do.

Roger's instructor found his essay unclear because she knew nothing about being an EMT (emergency medical technician). When writing the essay, Roger neglected to consider his audience; specifically, he forgot that college instructors are no more knowledgeable than anyone else about subjects outside their specialty. Roger's instructor also commented that she was thrown off guard by the paper's casual, slangy approach ("I was all nerves, I can tell you"; "I beat it to the van right away"). Roger used a breezy, colloquial style—almost as though he were chatting about the experience with friends—but the instructor had expected a more formal approach.

The more you know about your readers, the more you can adapt your writing to fit their needs and expectations. The accompanying checklist will help you analyze your audience.

ANALYZING YOUR AUDIENCE: A CHECKLIST

- ☐ What are my readers' age, sex, and educational levels? How do these factors affect what I need to tell and don't need to tell my readers?
- ☐ What are my readers' political, religious, and other beliefs? How do these beliefs influence their attitudes and actions?
- ☐ What interests and needs motivate my audience?
- ☐ How much do my readers already know about my subject? Do they have any misconceptions?
- ☐ What biases do they have about me, my subject, and my opinion?
- ☐ How do my readers expect me to relate to them?
- ☐ What values do I share with my readers that will help me communicate with them?

Tone

Just as your voice may project a range of feelings, your writing can convey one or more **tones,** or emotional states: enthusiasm, anger, resignation, and so on. Tone isn't a decorative adornment tacked on as an afterthought. Rather, tone is integral to meaning. It permeates writing and reflects your attitude toward yourself, your purpose, your subject, and your readers.

In everyday conversation, vocal inflections, facial expressions, and body gestures help convey tone. In writing, how do you project tone without these aids? You pay close attention to *sentence structure* and *word choice.* In Chapter 8, we present detailed strategies for finetuning sentences and words during the revision stage. Here we simply want to help you see that determining your tone should come early in the writing process because the tone you select influences the sentences and words you use later.

Sentence structure refers to the way sentences are shaped. Although the two paragraphs that follow deal with exactly the same subject, note how differences in sentence structure create sharply dissimilar tones:

> During the 1960s, many inner-city minorities considered the police an occupying force and an oppressive agent of control. As a result, violence grew against police in poorer neighborhoods, as did the number of residents killed by police.

> An occupying force. An agent of control. An oppressor. That's how many inner-city minorities in the '60s viewed the police. Violence against police soared. Police killings of residents mounted.

Informative in its approach, the first paragraph projects a neutral, almost dispassionate tone. The sentences are fairly long, and clear transitions ("During the 1960s"; "As a result") mark the progression of thought. But the second paragraph, with its dramatic, almost alarmist tone, seems intended to elicit a strong emotional response; its short sentences, fragments, and abrupt transitions reflect the turbulence of earlier times.

Word choice also plays a role in establishing the tone of an essay. Words have **denotations,** neutral dictionary meanings, as well as **connotations,** emotional associations that go beyond the literal meaning. The word *beach,* for instance, is defined in the dictionary as "a nearly level stretch of pebbles and sand beside a body of water." This definition, however, doesn't capture individual responses to the word. For some, *beach* suggests warmth and relaxation; for others, it calls up images of hospital waste and sewage washed up on a once-clean stretch of shoreline.

Since tone and meaning are tightly bound, you must be sensitive to the emotional nuances of words. Think about some of the terms denoting *adult human female: woman, chick, broad, member of the fair sex.* While all of these words denote the same thing, their connotations—the pictures they call up—are sharply different. Similarly, in a respectful essay about police officers, you wouldn't refer to *cops, narcs,* or *flatfoots;* such terms convey a contempt inconsistent with the tone intended. Your words must also convey tone clearly; otherwise, meaning is lost. Suppose you're writing a satirical piece criticizing a local beauty pageant.

Dubbing the participants "livestock on view" leaves no question about your tone. But if you simply referred to the participants as "attractive young women," readers might be unsure of your attitude. Remember, readers can't read your mind, only your paper.

Point of View

When you write, you speak to your audience as a unique individual. **Point of view** reveals the person you decide to be as you write. Like tone, point of view is closely tied to your purpose, audience, and subject. Imagine you want to convey to students in your composition class the way your grandfather's death—on your eighth birthday—impressed you with life's fragility. To capture that day's impact on you, you might tell what happened from the point of view of a child: "Today is my birthday. I'm eight. Grandpa died an hour before I was supposed to have my party." Or you might choose instead to recount the event speaking as the adult you are today: "My grandfather died an hour before my eighth birthday party." Your point of view will obviously affect the essay's content and organization.

The most strongly individualized point of view is the **first person** (*I, me, mine, we, us, our*). Because it focuses on the writer, the first-person point of view is appropriate in narrative and descriptive essays based on personal experience. It also suits other types of essays (for example, causal analyses and process analyses) when the bulk of evidence presented consists of personal observation. In such essays, avoiding the first person often leads to stilted sentences like "There was strong parental opposition to the decision" or "Although Organic Chemistry had been dreaded, it became a passion." In contrast, the sentences sound much more natural when the first person is used: "*Our* parents strongly opposed the decision" and "Although *I* had dreaded Organic Chemistry, it became *my* passion."

Like many students, you may feel that a lightning bolt will strike you if you use the first person when writing. Indeed, in high school, you may have been warned away from (even forbidden to use) the first person. And it does have its dangers. For one thing, in essays voicing an opinion, most first-person expressions ("I believe that . . ." and "In my opinion . . .") are unnecessary; the point of view stated is assumed to be the writer's unless another source is indicated. Second, in a paper intended to be an objective presentation of an issue, the first person distracts from the issue by drawing unwarranted attention to the writer: "I think it's important to realize that most violent crime in this country is directly related to substance abuse." By way of contrast, note how the matter under discussion is clearly highlighted when the first person is omitted: "Most violent crime in this country is directly related to substance abuse."

In some situations, writers use the **second person** (*you, your, yours*), alone or in combination with the first person. In fact, we frequently use forms of *you* in this book. For instance, we write, "If *you're* the kind of person who doodles while thinking, *you* may want to try mapping . . ." rather than "If a *writer* is the kind of person who doodles while thinking, *he* or *she* may want to try mapping. . . ." As you can see, the second person simplifies style and involves the reader in a

more personal way. You'll also find that the *imperative* form of the verb ("*Send* letters of protest to the television networks") engages readers in much the same way. The implied *you* speaks to the audience directly and lends immediacy to the directions. Despite these advantages, the second-person point of view often isn't appropriate in many college courses where more formal, less conversational writing is called for.

The **third-person** point of view is by far the most common in academic writing. The third person gets its name from the stance it conveys—that of an outsider or "third person" observing and reporting on matters of primarily public rather than private importance: "The international team of negotiators failed to resolve the border dispute between the two nations." In discussions of historical events, scientific phenomena, works of art, and the like, the third-person point of view conveys a feeling of distance and objectivity. When you write in the third person, though, don't adopt such a detached stance that you end up using a stiff, artificial style: "On this campus, approximately two-thirds of the student body is dependent on bicycles as the primary mode of transportation to class." Aim instead for a more natural and personable quality: "Two-thirds of the students on campus ride their bikes to class." (For a more detailed discussion of levels of formality, see pages 124–127 in Chapter 8.)

Discover Your Essay's Limited Subject

Once you have a firm grasp of the assignment's boundaries and have determined your purpose, audience, tone, and point of view, you're ready to focus on a **limited subject** of the general assignment. Because too broad a subject can result in a diffuse, rambling essay, be sure to restrict your general subject before starting to write.

The following examples show the difference between general subjects that are too broad for an essay and limited subjects that are appropriate and workable. The examples, of course, represent only a few among many possibilities.

General Subject	Less General	Limited Subject
Education	Computers in education	Computers in elementary school arithmetic classes
	High school education	High school electives
Transportation	Low-cost travel	Hitchhiking
	Getting around a metropolitan area	The transit system in a nearby city
Work	Planning for a career	College internships
	Women in the work force	Women's success as managers

How do you move from a general to a narrow subject? Imagine that you're asked to prepare a straightforward, informative essay for your writing class.

The assignment, prompted by Ellen Goodman's essay "Family Counterculture" (page 6), is an extension of the journal-writing assignment on page 11.

> Goodman implies that, in some ways, today's world is hostile to children. Do you agree? Drawing upon but not limiting yourself to the material in your pre-reading journal, write an essay in which you support or reject this viewpoint.

You might feel unsure about how to proceed. But two techniques can help you limit such a general assignment. Keeping your purpose, audience, tone, and point of view in mind, you may **question** or **brainstorm** the general subject. These two techniques have a paradoxical effect. Although they encourage you to roam freely over a subject, they also help restrict the discussion by revealing which aspects of the subject interest you most.

Question the General Subject

One way to narrow a subject is to ask a series of *who, how, why, where, when*, and *what* questions. The following example shows how Harriet Davids, the mother of two young teenagers, used this technique to limit the Goodman assignment.

You may recall that, before reading Goodman's essay, Harriet had used her journal to explore TV's effect on children (see page 17). After reading "Family Counterculture," Harriet concluded that she essentially agreed with Goodman; like Goodman, she felt that parents nowadays are indeed forced to raise their children in an "increasingly hostile environment." She was pleased that the writing assignment gave her an opportunity to expand preliminary ideas she had jotted down in her journal.

Harriet realized that she had to narrow the Goodman assignment. She started by asking a number of pointed questions about the general topic. As she proceeded, she was aware that the same questions could have led to different limited subjects—just as other questions would have.

General Assignment: We live in a world that is difficult, even hostile toward children.

Question	**Limited Subject**
Who is to blame for the difficult conditions under which children grow up?	Parents' casual attitude toward child rearing
How have schools contributed to the problems children face?	Not enough counseling programs for kids in distress
Why do children feel frightened?	Divorce
Where do kids go to escape?	Television, which makes the world seem even more dangerous
When are children most vulnerable?	The special problems of adolescents

What dangers or fears should parents discuss with their children?	AIDS, drugs, alcohol, war, terrorism, school shootings

Brainstorm the General Subject

Another way to focus on a limited subject is to list quickly everything about the general topic that pops into your mind. Working vertically down a page of paper or computer screen, note brief words, phrases, and abbreviations that capture your free-floating thoughts. Writing in complete sentences will slow you down. Don't try to organize or censor your ideas. Even the most fleeting, random, or seemingly outrageous thoughts can be productive.

Here's an example of the brainstorming that Harriet Davids decided to do in an effort to gather even more material for the Goodman assignment:

General Subject: We live in a world that is difficult, even hostile toward children.

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TV--shows corrupt politicians, casual sex, sexually explicit
videos, drugs, alcohol, foul language, violence
Real-life violence on TV, esp. terrorist attacks, war, and
school shootings, scares kids--have nightmares!
Kids babysat by TV
Not enough guidance from parents
Kids raise selves
Too many divorces
Parents squabbling over material goods in settlements
Money too important
Kids feel unimportant
Families move a lot
I moved in fourth grade--hated it
Rootless feeling
Nobody graduates from high school in the same district in
which they went to kindergarten
Drug abuse all over, in little kids' schools
Pop music glorifies drugs
Kids not innocent--know too much
Single-parent homes
Day-care problems
Abuse of little kids in day care
TV coverage of day-care abuse frightens kids
Perfect families on TV make kids feel inadequate
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As you can see, questioning and brainstorming suggest many possible limited subjects. To identify especially promising ones, reread your material. What arouses your interest, anger, or curiosity? What themes seem to dominate and cut to the

heart of the matter? Star or circle ideas with potential. Be sure to pay close attention to material generated at the end of your questioning and brainstorming. Often your mind takes a few minutes to warm up, with the best ideas popping out last.

After marking the material, write or type several phrases or sentences summarizing the most promising limited subjects. These, for example, are just a few that emerged from Harriet Davids's questioning and brainstorming the Goodman assignment:

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TV partly to blame for children having such a hard time
Relocation stressful to children
Schools also at fault
The special problems that parents face raising children today
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Harriet decided to write on the last of these limited subjects. This topic, in turn, is the focus of our discussion on the pages ahead.

Generate Raw Material About Your Limited Subject

When a limited subject strikes you as having possibilities, your next step is to begin generating material about that topic. If you do this now, in the prewriting stage, you'll find it easier to write the paper later on. Since you'll already have amassed much of the material for your essay, you'll be able to concentrate on other matters—say, finding just the right words to convey your ideas. Taking the time to sound out your limited subject during the prewriting stage also means you won't find yourself halfway through the first draft without much to say.

To generate raw material, you may use *freewriting, brainstorming, mapping,* and other techniques.

Freewrite on Your Limited Subject

Although freewriting can help you narrow a general subject, it's more valuable once you have limited your topic. **Freewriting** means jotting down (whether on paper or on a computer) in rough sentences or phrases everything that comes to mind. Although freewriting looks like regular prose because it is recorded horizontally, from margin to margin, it's much more fragmented. As you freewrite, you get swept along and go wherever your thoughts take you. You may skip back and forth between ideas, taking off in a more focused manner when you stumble across something interesting.

To capture this continuous stream of thought, write or type nonstop for ten minutes or more. Don't censor anything; put down whatever pops into your head. Don't reread, edit, or pay attention to organization, spelling, or grammar. If your mind goes blank, repeat words until another thought emerges.

Consider part of the freewriting that Harriet Davids generated about her limited subject, "The special problems that parents face raising children today":

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   Parents today have tough problems to face. Lots
of dangers. The Internet first and foremost. Also crimes of
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violence against kids. Parents also have to keep up with cost of living, everything costs more, kids want and expect more. Television? Another thing is Playboy, Penthouse. Sexy ads and videos on TV, movies deal with sex. Kids grow up too fast, too fast. Drugs and alcohol. Witness real-life violence on TV, like terrorist attacks and school shootings. Little kids can't handle knowing too much at an early age. Both parents at work much of the day. Finding good day care a real problem. Lots of latchkey kids. Another problem is getting kids to do homework, lots of other things to do. Especially like going to the mall or chatting with friends online! When I was young, we did homework after dinner, no excuses accepted by my parents.

Brainstorm Your Limited Subject

Let your mind wander freely, as you did when narrowing your general subject. This time, though, list every idea, fact, and example that occurs to you about your limited subject. Use brief words and phrases, so you don't get bogged down writing full sentences. For now, don't worry whether ideas fit together or whether the points listed make sense.

To gather additional material on her limited subject for the Goodman assignment ("The special problems that parents face raising children today"), Harriet brainstormed the following list:

Trying to raise kids when both parents work
Prices of everything outrageous, even when both parents work
Commercials make everyone want more of everything
Clothes so important
Day care not always the answer--cases of abuse
Day care very expensive
Sex everywhere--TV, movies, magazines, Internet
Sexy clothes on little kids. Absurd!
Sexual abuse of kids
Violence on TV, esp. images of real-life terrorist attacks and school shootings--scary for kids!
Violence against kids when parents abuse drugs
Acid, Ecstasy, heroin, cocaine, AIDS
Schools have to teach kids about these things
Schools doing too much--not as good as they used to be
Not enough homework assigned--kids unprepared
Distractions from homework--Internet, TV, cellphones, MP3s, computer games, malls

Use Group Brainstorming

Brainstorming can also be conducted as a group activity. Thrashing out ideas with other people stretches the imagination, revealing possibilities you may not have considered on your own. Group brainstorming doesn't have to be conducted in a formal classroom situation. You can bounce ideas around with friends and family anywhere—over lunch, at the student center, and so on.

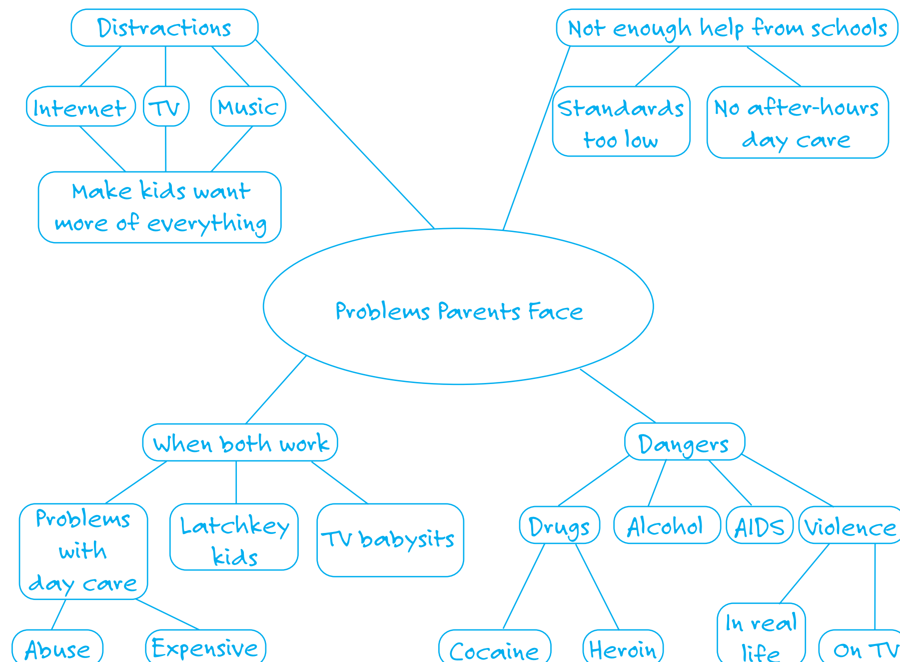
Map the Limited Subject

If you're the kind of person who doodles while thinking, you may want to try **mapping,** sometimes called **diagramming** or **clustering.** Like other prewriting techniques, mapping proceeds rapidly and encourages the free flow of ideas.

Begin by expressing your limited subject in a crisp phrase and placing it in the center of a blank sheet of paper. As ideas come to you, put them along lines or in boxes or circles around the limited subject. Draw arrows and lines to show the relationships among ideas. Don't stop there, however. Focus on each idea; as sub-points and details come to you, connect them to their source idea, again using boxes, lines, circles, or arrows to clarify how everything relates.

Figure 2.2 is an example of the kind of map that Harriet Davids could have drawn to generate material for her limited subject based on the Goodman assignment.

FIGURE 2.2
Mapping the Limited Subject



There's no right or wrong way to do mapping. Sometimes you'll move from the limited subject to a key related idea and all the details it prompts before moving to the next key idea; other times you'll map all the major divisions of a limited subject before mapping the details of any one idea.

Use the Patterns of Development

Throughout this book, we show how writers use various **patterns of development,** singly or in combination, to develop and organize their ideas. Because each pattern has its own distinctive logic, the patterns encourage you to think about a limited subject in surprising new ways.

The various patterns of development are discussed in detail in Chapters 10–18 of Part III. At this point, though, you should find the following chart helpful. It not only summarizes the broad purpose of each pattern but also shows the way each pattern could generate different raw material for the limited subject of Harriet Davids's essay.

Limited Subject: The special problems that parents face raising children today.

Pattern of Development	Purpose	Raw Material
Description	To detail what a person, place, or object is like	Detail the sights and sounds of a glitzy mall that attracts lots of kids
Narration	To relate an event	Recount what happened when neighbors tried to forbid their kids from going online
Illustration	To provide specific instances or examples	Offer examples of family arguments nowadays: Can a friend known to use drugs visit? Will permission be given to go to a party where alcohol will be served? Can parents outlaw certain websites on the Internet?
Division-classification	To divide something into parts or to group related things into categories	Identify the components of a TV commercial that distorts kids' values Classify the kinds of commercials that make it difficult to teach kids values
Process analysis	To explain how something happens or how something is done	Explain step by step how family life can disintegrate when parents have to work all the time to make ends meet
Comparison-contrast	To point out similarities and/or dissimilarities	Contrast families today with those of a generation ago

(Continued)

Pattern of Development	Purpose	Raw Material
Cause-effect	To analyze reasons and consequences	Explain why parents are not around to be with their kids: industry's failure to provide day care and its inflexibility about granting time off for parents with sick kids Explain the consequences of absentee parents: Kids feel unloved; they spend long hours on the Internet; they turn to TV for role models; they're undisciplined; they take on adult responsibility too early
Definition	To explain the meaning of a term or concept	What is meant by "tough love"?
Argumentation-persuasion	To win people over to a point of view	Convince parents that they must work with the schools to develop programs that make kids feel safer and more secure

(For more on ways to use the patterns of development in different phases of the writing process, see pages 39, 46–48, 55, and Part III.)

Conduct Research

Some limited subjects (for example, "Industry's day-care policies") can be developed only if you do some research. You may conduct **primary research,** in which you interview experts, conduct your own studies, compile your own statistics, and the like. Or you may conduct **secondary research,** in which you visit the library and/or go online to identify books and articles about your limited subject. (See pages 529–532 in Part IV on how to conduct research.) At this point, you don't need to read closely the material you find. Just skim and perhaps take a few brief notes on ideas and points that could be useful.

In researching the Goodman assignment, for instance, Harriet Davids could look under the following headings and subheadings:

- Day care
- Drug abuse
- Family
- Parent-child relationship
  - Child abuse
  - Children of divorced parents
  - Children of working mothers
- School and home

Organize the Raw Material

Some students prefer to wait until after they have formulated a thesis to shape their prewriting material. (For information on thesis statements, see Chapter 3.) But if you find that imposing a preliminary order on your prewriting provides the focus needed to devise an effective thesis, you'll probably want to prepare a **scratch list** or **outline** at this point. In Chapter 5, we talk about the more formal outline you may need later on in the writing process (pages 58–61). Here we show how a rough outline or scratch list can help shape the tentative ideas generated during prewriting.

As you reread your exploratory thoughts about the limited subject, keep the following questions in mind: What *purpose* have you decided on? What are the characteristics of your *audience?* What *tone* will be effective in achieving your purpose with your audience? What *point of view* will you adopt? Record your responses to these questions at the top of your prewriting material.

Now go to work on the raw material itself. Cross out anything not appropriate for your purpose, audience, tone, and point of view; add points that didn't originally occur to you. Star or circle compelling items that warrant further development. Then draw arrows between related items, your goal being to group such material under a common heading. Finally, determine what seems to be the best order for the headings.

By giving you a sense of the way your free-form material might fit together, a scratch outline makes the writing process more manageable. You're less likely to feel overwhelmed once you actually start writing because you'll already have some idea about how to shape your material into a meaningful statement. Remember, though, the scratch outline can, and most likely will, be modified along the way.

Harriet Davids's handwritten annotations on her brainstormed list (page 32) illustrate the way Harriet began shaping her raw prewriting material. Note how she started by recording at the top her limited subject as well as her decisions about purpose, audience, tone, and point of view. Next, she crossed out the material she didn't want to use. For instance, Harriet decided that the example of violence, such as terrorism, on TV was too complex to include it in her essay, so she crossed it out. Note how clear supporting points emerged after she grouped together similar ideas.

Purpose: To inform

Audience: Instructor as well as class members, most of whom are 18–20 years old

Tone: Serious and straightforward

Point of view: Third person (mother of two teenage girls)

Limited subject: The special problems that parents face raising children today

① Day Care	Trying to raise kids when both parents work ~~Prices of everything outrageous, even when both parents work~~ ~~Commercials make everyone want more of everything~~ ~~Clothes so important~~ Day care ~~not always the answer--cases of abuse~~ problems—before and after school Day care very expensive
③ Sexual material everywhere	Sex everywheres--Internet, TV, movies, magazines ~~Sexy clothes on little kids. Absurd!~~ ~~Sexual abuse of kids~~
④ Dangers	~~Violence on TV, esp. images of real-life terrorist attacks and school shootings--scary for kids!~~ Violence against kids when parents abuse drugs Acid, Ecstasy, heroin, cocaine, AIDS—also drinking ~~Schools have to teach kids about these things~~ ~~Schools doing too much--not as good as they used to be~~ ~~Not enough homework assigned--kids unprepared~~
② Homework distractions	Distractions from homework--Internet, TV, cellphones, MP3s, computer games, malls

The following scratch outline shows how Harriet began to shape her prewriting into a more organized format. (If you'd like to see Harriet's more formal outline and her first draft, turn to pages 60–61 and 86–87.)

Purpose: To inform

Audience: Instructor as well as class members, most of whom are 18–20 years old

Tone: Serious and straightforward

Point of view: Third person (mother of two teenage girls)

Limited subject: The special problems that parents face raising children today

1. Day care for two-career families
   - Expensive
   - Before-school problems
   - After-school problems
2. Distractions from homework
   - Internet, televisions, MP3s, cellphones
   - Places to go--malls, movies, fast-food restaurants
3. Sexually explicit materials
   - Internet
   - Magazines

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    • Television shows
    • Movies
4. Life-threatening dangers
    • Drugs
    • Drinking
    • AIDS
    • Violence against children (by sitters, in day care, etc.)
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Continues on page 38

The prewriting strategies described in this chapter provide a solid foundation for the next stages of your work. But invention and imaginative exploration don't end when prewriting is completed. As you'll see, remaining open to new ideas is crucial during all phases of the writing process.

ACTIVITIES: GETTING STARTED THROUGH PREWRITING

1. Number the items in each set from 1 (*broadest subject*) to 5 (*most limited subject*):

Set A	**Set B**
Abortion	Business majors
Controversial social issue	Students' majors
Cutting state abortion funds	College students
Federal funding of abortions	Kinds of students on campus
Social issues	Why students major in business

2. Which of the following topics are too broad for an essay of two to five typewritten pages: soap operas' appeal to college students; day care; trying to "kick" junk food; male and female relationships; international terrorism?

3. Assume you're writing essays on two of the topics below. For each one, explain how you might adapt your purpose, tone, and point of view to the audiences indicated in parentheses. (You may find it helpful to work with others on this activity.)

a. Overcoming shyness (ten-year-olds; teachers of ten-year-olds; young singles living in large apartment buildings)

b. Telephone solicitations (people training for a job in this field; homeowners; readers of a humorous magazine)

c. Smoking (people who have quit; smokers; elementary school children)

4. Choose one of the following general topics for a roughly five-hundred-word essay. Then use the prewriting technique indicated in parentheses to identify several limited topics. Next, with the help of one or more patterns of development, generate raw material on the limited subject you consider most interesting.

a. Friendship (*journal writing*)
b. Malls (*mapping*)
c. Leisure (*freewriting*)
d. Television (*brainstorming*)
e. Required courses (*group brainstorming*)
f. Manners (*questioning*)

5. For each set of limited subjects and purposes that follows, determine which pattern(s) of development would be most useful. (Save this material so you can work with it further after reading the next chapter.)

a. The failure of recycling efforts on campus
Purpose: to explain why students and faculty tend to disregard recycling guidelines
b. The worst personality trait that a teacher, parent, boss, or friend can have
Purpose: to poke fun at this personality trait
c. The importance of being knowledgeable about national affairs
Purpose: to convince students to stay informed about current events

6. Select *one* of the following limited subjects. Then, given the purpose and audience indicated, draft a paragraph using the first-, second-, or third-person point of view. Next, rewrite the paragraph two more times, each time using a different point of view. What differences do you see in the three versions? Which version do you prefer? Why?

a. American action movies like *Mission Impossible* and *Oceans Eleven*
Purpose: to defend the enjoyment of such films
Audience: those who like foreign "art" films
b. Senioritis
Purpose: to explain why high school seniors lose interest in school
Audience: parents and teachers
c. Television commercials aimed at teens and young adults
Purpose: to make fun of the commercials' persuasive appeals
Audience: advertising executives

7. Select *one* of the following general subjects. Keeping in mind the indicated purpose, audience, tone, and point of view, use a prewriting technique to limit the subject. Next, by means of another prewriting strategy, generate relevant information about the restricted topic. Finally, shape your raw material into a scratch outline—crossing out, combining, and adding ideas as needed. (Save your scratch outline so you can work with it further after reading the next chapter.)

a. Hip-hop music
Purpose: to explain its attraction
Audience: classical music fans
Tone: playful
Writer's point of view: a hip-hop fan

b. Becoming a volunteer
Purpose: to recruit
Audience: ambitious young professionals
Tone: straightforward
Writer's point of view: head of a volunteer organization

c. Sexist attitudes in music videos
Purpose: to inform
Audience: teenagers of both sexes
Tone: objective but with some emotion
Writer's point of view: a teenage male

d. Major problems in high school education
Purpose: to create awareness of the problems
Audience: teachers
Tone: serious and concerned
Writer's point of view: a former high school student

For additional writing, reading, and research resources, go to **www.mycomplab.com** and choose **Nadell/Langan/Comodromos'** ***The Longman Writer, 7/e***.