

The Writing Process

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial takes a broad look at the writing process, exploring its different stages and how they work together to produce essays. The specific areas of focus include:

1. Writing as a Process

The skills you use to write well-crafted sentences and paragraphs can in turn be used to develop **essays**. An essay is a short piece of writing on a particular subject.

That means that essays are made up of paragraphs; turning those paragraphs into essays means going through the **writing process**, which is a series of steps that go into writing a successful essay or other writing project.

It's important to remember that writing is a process, not a product, and you won't necessarily move in a line. Instead, you'll start and stop, move forward and back, finish and begin all over again.

That's part of what writing is about, and learning these steps will help you embrace the recursive nature of writing.



TERMS TO KNOW

Essay

A short piece of writing on a particular subject.

Writing Process

A series of steps that go into writing a successful essay or other writing project.

2. Stages of the Writing Process

The series of steps that make up the writing process is going to be a little different for every writer.

However, the overall process will follow the same pattern and go through the same overall progression of steps:

- Prewriting

- Drafting
- Revising
- Editing
- Proofreading

2a. Prewriting

Prewriting is a stage in the writing process during which the writer brainstorms on the topic and generates ideas prior to composing a first draft. In other words, this is the stage where you get to let your mind do its work, generating and organizing a whole host of ideas about your topic.

Letting yourself spend some time thinking through your opinions and interests in a topic is key not just to developing interesting essays, but also to slaying the dragon of writer's block.

There are a few prewriting games that you can play with yourself, such as:

- Listing - writing down any ideas as they come
- Clustering - creating a map connecting your ideas and support
- Free-writing - writing down fully-formed thoughts about the topic

IN CONTEXT

Imagine your essay topic is the effect of pets on psychological well-being, and you decide to do some free-writing. You might start with your initial thoughts on the topic:

The Effect of Pets on Psychological Well-Being

- Pets make people happy, even though they are a big responsibility.
- They provide love and companionship.

Then you might move through a series of connecting thoughts about how this topic could come together:

The Effect of Pets on Psychological Well-Being

- Pets make people happy, even though they are a big responsibility.
- They provide love and companionship.
- Why don't they make people stressed? Do they make people stressed? Is that different from psychological well-being?
- What is psychological well-being? Is there a definition?
- Is there psych research on love and companionship and well-being?

Doing this kind of brainstorming can lead to an outline, which is a crucial element of the prewriting stage. Outlining is like drawing a sketch of your essay where you plot out the images you're going to draw on.

You'll have your main idea, usually in the form of a thesis statement, and then section summaries of what will become the body paragraphs of your essay.



TERM TO KNOW

Prewriting

A stage in the writing process during which the writer brainstorms on the topic and generates ideas prior to composing a first draft.

2b. Drafting

Once you've generated your ideas and outline in the prewriting stage, you're ready to start **drafting**. Drafting is the act of composing a piece of writing; it's where you get to take your sketch and fill in the details.

Remember, just as it might take multiple layers of paint and many tries to get a picture perfect, so too will it likely take multiple drafts before your ideas are ready.

This is ultimately a good thing because every draft you build makes the final draft that much better.



TERM TO KNOW

Drafting

The act of composing a piece of writing.

2c. Revising

Revision is the process of re-envisioning an essay or other writing project; it's the stage where you look at the big picture of the whole essay.

That means you're re-seeing:

- Your ideas
- What kind of evidence and support you use
- The overall organization of your text

You're then evaluating how well each of those things is working, and incorporating changes to form a new draft. This might happen several times as you go back around again and again to get the image perfect. This is because you are rethinking the thoughts that you've already put on paper, reorganizing and reconsidering what you want to say and how you want to say it, and rewriting and refining your words so that the text matches the overall big picture of your piece.



THINK ABOUT IT

Take a moment to read through this short representation of an essay draft, and think about where you should start if you were going to revise it.

Why should we keep pets? Pets positively affect the psychological well-being of their owners through companionship and love.

What is psychological well-being? It is different than just being happy and includes a person's sense of self-acceptance and growth as an individual.

Pets offer companionship and love to their owners, which positively affects psychological well-being. Being loved helps people develop greater self-acceptance.

Owning a pet can be stressful, as pets come with a lot of responsibilities. This stress does not counteract the positive elements of pet ownership. Having and meeting responsibilities shows personal growth, which is an element of well-being. So the potential stress can actually lead to more well-being.

Because they provide love and companionship to their owners, pets positively affect the psychological well-being of their owners.

You should always start at the thesis statement and ask whether it still matches the direction that the essay has taken. This thesis statement specifically references companionship, but there aren't any specific examples or evidence about companionship in the actual essay.

Why should we keep pets? *Pets positively affect the psychological well-being of their owners through companionship and love.*

What is psychological well-being? It is different than just being happy and includes a person's sense of self-acceptance and growth as an individual.

Pets offer companionship and love to their owners, which positively affects psychological well-being. Being loved helps people develop greater self-acceptance.

Owning a pet can be stressful, as pets come with a lot of responsibilities. This stress does not counteract the positive elements of pet ownership. Having and meeting responsibilities shows personal growth, which is an element of well-being. So the potential stress can actually lead to more well-being.

Because they provide love and companionship to their owners, pets positively affect the psychological well-being of their owners.

That means that the essay has taken a different direction than the thesis statement thought it would. Therefore, you'd either need to revise the thesis statement to reflect what's been written, or add in a paragraph about companionship:

Why should we keep pets? *Pets positively affect the psychological well-being of their owners through companionship and love.*

What is psychological well-being? It is different than just being happy and includes a person's sense of self-acceptance and growth as an individual.

Pets offer companionship and love to their owners, which positively affects psychological well-being. Being loved helps people develop greater self-acceptance. Companionship, too, helps self-acceptance.

Owning a pet can be stressful, as pets come with a lot of responsibilities. This stress does not counteract the positive elements of pet ownership. Having and meeting responsibilities shows personal growth, which is an element of well-being. So the potential stress can actually lead to more well-being.

Because they provide love and companionship to their owners, pets positively affect the psychological well-being of their owners.

Either way, you want to make sure that the thesis and the examples reflect one another accurately, and either option will lead to a more successful essay. In other words, the revision stage involves starting at the thesis statement and then looking at each individual paragraph's examples to assess their connection to the main idea.



TERM TO KNOW

Revision

The process of re-envisioning an essay or other writing project.

2d. Editing

After you've revised and generated a draft that you think has all the information it needs, it's time for **editing**. Editing is improving the sentences, word choices, and overall style of an essay or other piece of writing.

In your last step, you looked at the big picture; here you're zeroing in on the brush strokes that make up that picture. You're going to look really closely at the language you use and how clear it is, so you should have already completed the revision of the big picture.

When you edit, you're looking for:

- How well each piece of language is working
- How clear your ideas are
- How precise your language is
- How effective your choice of words is
- How much variety you have in sentence length and structure
- Whether your sentences are all complete



TRY IT

Look at the following paragraph taken from the revised draft in the previous example. Use the above criteria to do some editing.

Owning a pet can be stressful, as pets come with a lot of responsibilities. This stress does not counteract the positive elements of pet ownership. Having and meeting responsibilities shows personal growth, which is an element of well-being. So the potential stress can actually lead to more well-being.

In this paragraph, how precise is the language? Just looking at that first sentence, you can see some of it is pretty vague.

Owning a pet can be stressful, as pets come with a lot of responsibilities. This stress does not counteract the positive elements of pet ownership. Having and meeting responsibilities shows personal growth, which is an element of well-being. So the potential stress can actually lead to more well-being.

What exactly does it mean to “come with a lot of responsibilities?” That’s a pretty broad, imprecise concept that could be made more specific and direct. During the editing process, this might be changed to say:

Owning a pet can cause stress because it requires owners to be responsible for performing many tasks each day, such as walking and feeding their pet, that are necessary for keeping the pet healthy. This stress does not counteract the positive elements of pet ownership. Having and meeting responsibilities shows personal growth, which is an element of well-being. So the potential stress can actually lead to more well-being.

What about sentence variety? This paragraph has four pretty simple sentences, and they don’t use clear transitions to connect each idea to the one that came before. To make this paragraph more interesting, it could be changed to say:

Owning a pet can cause stress because it requires owners to be responsible for performing many tasks each day, such as walking and feeding their pet, that are necessary for keeping the pet healthy. However, this stress does not counteract the positive elements of pet ownership. Having and meeting responsibilities shows personal growth, which is an element of well-being. Therefore, the potential stress can actually lead to more well-being.

Now the movement is a little more lively.



TERM TO KNOW

Editing

The process of improving the sentences, word choices, and overall style of an essay or other piece of writing.

2e. Proofreading

Once you have a draft that you’ve revised and edited so that its language and ideas are the best they can be, it’s time for **proofreading**.

Proofreading means fixing errors in grammar, mechanics, spelling, capitalization, punctuation, commonly confused words, and formatting in an essay or other piece of writing.

This is the step where you clean up your work and make sure that it's ready to be seen by its audience without any smudges or messes left over from when you were creating.



Take a look at the revised and edited paragraph below, and see if you can spot the errors.

Owning a pet can cause stress because it requires owners to be responsible for performing many tasks each day, such as to walk and to feed their pet, that are necessary for keeping the pet healthy. However, this stress does not counteract the positive elements of pet ownership. Having and meeting responsibilities shows personal growth, which is wan element of well-being. Therefore, the potential stress can actually lead to more well-being.

When writing, adding to, and changing a paragraph, you may hit the wrong key and make a typo:

Owning a pet can cause stress because it requires owners to be responsible for performing many tasks each day, such as to walk and to feed their pet, that are necessary for keeping the pet healthy. However, this stress does not counteract the positive elements of pet ownership. Having and meeting responsibilities shows personal growth, which is wan element of well-being. Therefore, the potential stress can actually lead to more well-being. </blockquote>

You might also spot a missing piece of punctuation from where you added a transition word:

Owning a pet can cause stress because it requires owners to be responsible for performing many tasks each day, such as to walk and to feed their pet, that are necessary for keeping the pet healthy. However this stress does not counteract the positive elements of pet ownership. Having and meeting responsibilities shows personal growth, which is *an* element of well-being. Therefore, the potential stress can actually lead to more well-being.

Verb errors are also important to spot during this stage:

Owning a pet can cause stress because it requires owners to be responsible for performing many tasks each day, such as to walk and to feed their pet, that are necessary for keeping the pet healthy. *However*, this stress does not counteract the positive elements of pet ownership. Having and meeting responsibilities shows personal growth, which is *an* element of well-being. Therefore, the potential stress can actually lead to more well-being.

This should read "walking and feeding their pet."

Owning a pet can cause stress because it requires owners to be responsible for performing many tasks each day, such as *walking* and *feeding* their pet, that are necessary for keeping the pet healthy. *However*, this stress does not counteract the positive elements of pet ownership. Having and meeting responsibilities shows personal growth, which is *an* element of well-being. Therefore, the potential stress can actually lead to more well-being.



BIG IDEA

Proofreading helps you catch these last little errors before you're ready to show your masterpiece to the world.



TERM TO KNOW

Proofreading

The process of fixing errors in grammar, mechanics, spelling, capitalization, punctuation, commonly confused words, and formatting in an essay or other piece of writing.

3. Plagiarism

Lastly, it's important to understand **plagiarism**, which is presenting someone else's ideas or writing as your own, whether intentionally or unintentionally.

This can be deliberate cheating when it's intentional or just a careless author forgetting to give credit to the person who came up with an idea or quote when it's unintentional.

Either way, plagiarism is a serious problem that you want to be careful to avoid because not only is this an ethical issue, but it can also lead to serious consequences.

➔ **EXAMPLE** Within academia, plagiarism may cause you to fail a course or an assignment, and outside of the academic community, plagiarism might be considered copyright violation, which is a crime that can lead to a legal challenge.

You want to avoid these consequences at all costs, so the best thing to do is to carefully and consistently give credit where credit is due.



TERM TO KNOW

Plagiarism

Presenting someone else's ideas or writing as your own, whether intentionally or unintentionally.



SUMMARY

In this tutorial, you learned that **writing should be thought of as a process** not a product. Thus, there are several **stages of the writing process** that are important in creating a successful essay: **Prewriting** is the stage in which you lay out all of your ideas on paper in order to create an outline; **drafting** is the stage in which you compose your essay; **revising** is the process of re-envisioning and re-imagining your ideas; **editing** is the process of improving the language, sentences, and overall style of the essay;

proofreading is the process of correcting any errors of grammar or mechanics.

Finally, you learned that **plagiarism** is the intentional or unintentional presentation of another's ideas as your own. Plagiarism has serious consequences, so you should always make sure to credit your sources in any piece of writing.

Good luck!

Source: This work is adapted from Sophia author Martina Shabram.



TERMS TO KNOW

Drafting

The act of composing a piece of writing.

Editing

The process of improving the sentences, word choices, and overall style of an essay or other piece of writing.

Essay

A short piece of writing on a particular subject.

Plagiarism

Presenting someone else's ideas or writing as your own, whether intentionally or unintentionally.

Prewriting

A stage in the writing process during which the writer brainstorms the topic and generates ideas prior to composing a first draft.

Proofreading

The process of fixing errors in grammar, mechanics, spelling, capitalization, punctuation, commonly confused words, and formatting in an essay or other piece of writing.

Revision

The process of re-visioning an essay or other writing project.

Writing Process

A series of steps that go into writing a successful essay or other writing project.