

## What Is Writing?

*Writing gives you a discipline and that in itself is lifesaving. It is character-saving, which for me is the same thing. Very active writing creates character and a sense of will and orders your day. It forces you to find meaning, not only in your own life, but in your life among others. It gives you consciousness, basically. Other people find other ways of doing this, but for me, for one reason or another, it was writing.* –Tobias Wolff

Writing remains the heart of an English class. We are always reading it, doing it, preparing to do it, or revising what we have already done. We use writing to explore, study, and explain the world around us. *You can't write and not think.* To that end, it may be our most fundamental tool. Writing can be broken down into any number of stages.

For our purposes, we'll use six.

### 1. Beginning

The beginning phase includes recognizing or creating the need to write about a subject. You begin to make crucial decisions, such as what form the writing will take and which voice or style best suits your purpose. Much of this may be determined by the nature of the assignment.

### 2. Visualizing

You must visualize what the piece will look like and what it is you wish to say (i.e. your thesis). Analyze the work of others to see how professional writers solve the problem, address the subject, or write in the genre you have been given. Get a sense of what is expected and determine in your mind how you will meet these expectations. You must have an thesis that is substantial.

### 3. Gathering

During this stage you gather ideas and evidence to help give shape to and provide support for your thesis. This is especially true of non-fiction writing. Just as every house needs a good foundation, so does every piece of writing. So, what does gathering look like?

#### Research Papers

- Read a range of books
- Survey the Internet for relevant information
- Talk to classmates and get suggestions
- Take notes

#### Literary Essays

- Annotate your book carefully
- Look for symbols, motifs, and other devices that may help you develop insights
- Look for passages that may serve as support
- Look for passages that may serve as examples
- Brainstorm and sketch out some notes

### 4. Constructing

Now, it's time to start writing. It may involve false starts or failed attempts, though each failure inevitably helps you find your way toward the version that works. The best method for construction is through *recursive writing*—that just means constantly circling back to reflect on what you have already written.

- Reread the opening
- Reread the conclusion
- Read it out loud to catch your mistakes
- Narrow your focus whenever possible through revision/rewriting
- Give it to others to read

### 5. Finishing

This is the stage when you work to make sure you've satisfied the particular requirements of the assignment and addressed the concerns of those who have seen your earlier drafts. Spelling, usage, grammar, punctuation—*editing skills*—are part of a piece of writing, along with organization, diction, clarity, voice, style, and quality of information. This is a good time to visit the Writing Center (keeping in mind you must give yourself enough time to revise before final submission).

### 6. Presenting

This final stage of the writing process involves the debut of the work in its most polished form and to its intended audience.