Chapter 4

Drafting

1. Revisiting Mind Map
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# Revisiting Mind Map

The traditional way of taking notes, whether for a lecture or when reading a book, is to follow the chronological sequence of the author/speaker's thought, and to summarize the content of the book or lecture, often using sentences and phrases instead of just keywords. In previous chapter we have discussed various methods of generating ideas; mind mapping was one of them. Mind mapping is considered one of the most effective methods as it works with both halves of the brain by harnessing its powers of visualization and association, and thereby improves both memory and creative thinking. Mind maps can be used in a wide range of situations, from brainstorming, sorting out family problems, business meetings, making notes from books or lectures, to planning a series of television programs.

We have already learnt that mind mapping is a way of linking key concepts using images, lines and links. A central concept is linked via lines to other concepts which in turn are linked with other associated ideas. It is similar as a technique to concept mapping and spider diagrams, the difference being that true mind mapping involves constructing a hierarchy of ideas instead of pure random association. Therefore, for an effective mind mapping, you need to follow these steps:

Step 1 – Determine your central image or concept.

Step 2 – Create the basic structure for organizing your ideas: these are the main branches and are known as the Basic Organizing Ideas (BOIs), and are represented by branches radiating outwards from the main concept.

Step 3 – Put down keywords associated with the BOIs, which should sit on smaller branches connected to the main branch.

Step 4 – Revisit your mind map, putting things in order, and numbering the branches. If necessary, revise it on another piece of paper.

Before starting the drafting activity, you need to finalize your mind mapping exercise. The quality of your draft will directly depend on your mind map. Here are some guidelines for effective mind mapping:

* Use radiant thinking – start from the centre and radiate outwards.
* Use hierarchy and association – your main BOIs are embodied in thick lines radiating from the centre; the ideas radiating from the individual BOIs have thinner lines. (If you think there are likely to be more BOIs and ideas than you can think of, leave blank lines for future reference.)
* Use as images and colour – they will stimulate your brain's visual and creative capacity and help you have fun along the way!
* Use keywords, rather than phrases – easier to remember.
* Use symbols (e.g. x for not) and codes. You can also annotate your mind map, for example you could write references to other sources in a different colour pen.
* Be clear: have words the same length as lines (a better use of space), and use capitals, which are easier to read and which emphasize keywords.
* Use arrows to denote links between ideas.
* Draw quickly and uncritically on a sheet of A4 or larger paper (perhaps two A4 sheets put together, which also has the advantage that it will be readily distinguishable from other single folios on your desk!), placed landscape.
* Review your mind map after you have completed your first attempt, not immediately, but once your thoughts have had time to "settle".

You are recommended to adopt a personal style and to have fun creating your mind maps, and deliberately attempt to make them as beautiful as possible. In fact, mind maps can often become mini works of art. Here are some examples of using mind map in different scenario.

**Using Mind Map for making notes from books and other secondary sources.**As a student you will need to browse a large number of secondary sources – textbooks, journal articles, websites. Sometime, the amount of material can seem daunting. The benefits of mind maps, however, is that rather than working through the material from beginning to end in a chronological sequence, you proceed in a more "spiral" fashion from firstly having an overview to looking in greater and greater depth.

Before you begin to study, organize the task by:

* Browsing the document, getting an idea of how it is organized, what are its basic organizing ideas etc.
* Determining the amount of time you have to study it.
* Determining your goals – for example, are you reading it as background to your course, or do you want to concentrate on a particular topic, for example for an essay question?
* What is your existing knowledge – on a separate sheet, mind map this which will give your mind "grappling hooks" as it seeks to assimilate new information.

You are then ready to do the mind map of the document, for which you go through the following (spiral) stages:

1. **Overview** – look at the chapter summaries, chapter and other main headings. Note that most text books these days have a very explicit structure with objectives at the beginning of each chapter, as well as chapter summaries. This way, you are searching for the gist of the author's argument before looking at the detail.
2. **Preview** – go a stage beyond the book's "organizing bits" and look at the beginning and end of chapters and sections.
3. **Inview** – look at the rest of the material, but if there is something that you find very difficult, leave it and return to it.
4. **Review** – finish your mind map notes, going back over anything you found difficult.

Note that the above assumes that you are reading a book; journal articles and websites also have their own organizational structure, for example pages or headings. The same principles will apply.

**Using Mind Maps for making notes from lectures.**Lectures lend themselves less easily to the mind mapping technique because their structure is inherently linear. However, you should be able to get a good idea of the "basic organizing ideas" from the scheme of work for the course, or from the notes which the lecturer gives out at the beginning of the lecture. Try and search for the BOIs as the lecture progresses.

Note: if your mind map seems confused, then this may be because the lecture, book or website is confused!



**Using Mind Map for making notes for essays or presentations.** The basic difference here is in the preposition: you are making notes for something rather than from something, so you will need to draw together your existing mind map notes and prepare a new mind map covering what you are going to write or present.

* Start with the central idea or image.
* List the main BOIs.
* Brainstorm as many ideas as possible, and set them down as keywords on the main branches. For a presentation, the keywords will represent themes which you will talk about.
* Edit your mind map, numbering the branches in the order you want to write about or present the topics.
* Do individual mind maps of particular sections.
* Do a first draft, revising your mind map as necessary, and doing a new mind map for difficult parts of the draft or when you get writer's block.
* For a presentation, insert symbols where you want to introduce visuals.

The following diagram shows a mind map of a profit and loss statement, with some branches left blank. Can you complete it?



A free mind mapping software is available <http://mind42.com/>

# Moving from Planning to Drafting

After you have prepared your ideas and written a plan/outline, you are ready to start writing your first draft. Note the word "first". A mistake we often make is thinking that once we have written a draft, the essay is done. Not so; the first draft is only one part of the whole writing process that leads to a finished, presentable, and hopefully excellent essay. The idea of the first draft is to get the ideas out, to flesh out your answer, and to give you some content to shape and change into a finished essay. You may need to write a number of drafts in order to get to that final essay. Or, possibly, if you have really thought through your ideas and planned well, you may only need to write one draft that you then edit. It depends on what happens in the first draft - and it is best not to expect too much or too little from it.

Before you pick you pen for writing your first draft make sure your notes, your plan, and any other resource materials are in-front of you. If you have done your planning and preparing on a computer, it is best to print out those materials or to tile your pages so that you can see them while you are working.

Now that you are ready, sit down and try to write the draft. The first and most terrifying thing you will faces is the blank page or the empty white screen. Do not worry; just start writing. Also do not fuss over any one part of it yet. If you can let yourself get into the flow of writing, your words will come more easily, and you are more likely to find connections between the ideas. Don't rush: Let yourself explore the ideas as you go. Don't worry, either, over any particular paragraph. Try to get the whole essay out of your head and onto the page.

A lot of people get stuck on the introduction. If you are one of them, jump to the first paragraph and going from there.You can go back later and write the intro. Similarly you can skip any of the paragraphs while writing the first draft. If you get stuck, move on then go back to work on it in the second draft/editing stage. The main idea is to write the essay as a flowing whole and to really let the ideas and words splash out onto the paper. At this stage of writing, do not spend time fixing anything. Do not change anything. Do not even consider bothering about your spelling or grammar. You will fix and change in the next stage.

Since staring at that blank page can be exceedingly stressful, you just pour out whatever you feel relevant. It will make you feel feels good. Followings are some useful tips that can help you to make you first draft more effective.

1. **Don’t worry about the language or “writing well,” even for a moment.** Don’t strain after metaphors, don’t worry about symbolism, forget your love of language. Concentrate on what the language is meant to convey: the story itself. One of the biggest mistakes writers make is to begin polishing their first draft even before it’s even finished. The more you polish at this stage, the deeper you’ll fall in love with your words, and the harder it will be to make an effective draft.
2. **Know what your point is before you begin to write.** All stories make a point, and everything in a story – in one way or another – builds toward it. If you know what you’re trying to say, chances are much better your story will actually communicate it. Plus, it will give you a yardstick by which you can gauge what’s relevant, and what might be a more important. Might your point change as you write? Absolutely. It’s a first draft, nothing is written in stone. But even knowing what your point *might be*allows you to focus in on a story that makes it, rather than romping aimlessly.
3. **Don’t expect “the force” to write through you.**You are not a channel for some otherworldly energy, you’re a writer, and everything you write comes from you. You have the power to harness your prose to a story, and you have the power to then shape it, polish it, and change your reader’s worldview by allowing them to experience the hard won change your protagonist (key character) goes through. Take responsibility. This will make writing processes easier for you.
4. **Know the overarching problem your protagonist will face.**A story is about how someone solves a problem they can’t avoid, and what he or she has to overcome, internally, in order to do it. It’s this overarching problem that gives a story context. From the first page of *Gone Girl*we’re wondering, “What’s up with Amy and did Nick have anything to do with her disappearance?” The problem is there front and center, and it’s what hooks readers from the get-go. What’s yours?
5. **Know your ending first.**If you don’t know where your story is going, how will you have the slightest idea whether it’s moving at all? How will you know what turns to take? How will you know what needs to happen next? Or at all? You won’t. Without a target to aim for, chances are high your story will idle in neutral.
6. **Know how your protagonist sees the world.**If the overarching problem is what gives your story context, what gives it meaning is how your protagonist navigates that problem. In other words, how does your protagonist react to what happens? One of the most stubborn brain myths is that our brain is like a camera, recording an exact, objective account of everything we see. Not so. Rather, we record events in bits and pieces, subjectively, depending on what matters most to us. We then evaluate what we’ve “seen” based on what life has taught us thus far. If you don’t know what has shaped your protagonist’s worldview, how will you know how she’ll react to anything that happens? Or why? Your reader will be getting to know your protagonist on the first page, but you need to know her inside and out long before you commit her to paper.
7. **Find your story’s third rail, and make sure everything touches it.**Here is the essence of a story: the protagonist is forced, by circumstances outside her control, to deal with a problem she’d really rather avoid. This forces her to dig deep and overcome the inner issue, wound or misconception that’s holding her back. Everything in the story impacts this quest. Think of it as your story’s third rail – everything must touch it, giving it juice and causing sparks to fly. That means if what happens doesn’t affect it in some way, no matter how well written it is, the story stalls. Find the live rail, it won’t let you down. Once you zero in on it, it becomes a live sensor that beeps madly when the connection is broken.
8. **Concentrate on the “why” and not the “what.”**This is a simple, incredibly useful one, even if you ignore the others. Whenever something is about to happen, ask yourself, “why?” *Why is this happening now? Why is my protagonist reacting the way she does? Why does the reader need to know this?* Stories aren’t about “what” happens, they’re about “why.” Just like life. Watch as your day unfolds. People do things – that’s the what – but aren’t you always wondering *why* they did it, what they really mean by it, so you can figure out whatyou should do in response? In a story the most important initial “why” is why the protagonist wants what he/she wants, and why he/she can’t seem to get it. Figure it out first, and it will be your true direction.
9. **Know your basic theme.** This is much easier than it sounds. Think of theme as what your story is saying about human nature, which is reflected in how people treat each other in the world you’re creating. Characters’ actions – and therefore what’s humanly possible – are going to be very different in the world of a lighthearted romance from that of a dystopian drama. What world will your story unfold in? And are you sure all your characters got the memo?

The beauty of approaching your first draft as a story, rather than as romping words, is that it allows you to really, truly quiet the voice that says you’ll never be a good writer. Because it’s not about the writing. It’s about zeroing in the story that you want to tell.

**What’s more, when you’ve nailed down the specifics we’ve been discussing, very often the story *does* pour out.** **Because you know where it’s going, you can feel the intoxicating rush of your own creative momentum. It’s thrilling.**

Even so, you’ll end up producing the first draft. But the beauty of this kind of draft is that when it’s finished, you won’t have to sift through endless words, hoping to discover the fragments of a story – it will be there. In fact, this is the one and only thing that can cut down on time spent rewriting.

It is true, some writers can sit down and nail a story blindfolded. They have that innate skill, and tend to be successful out of the starting gate. Most of us – and that include most successful writers – don’t have that innate sense of story.But we can develop it by mastering story and committing it to muscle memory — that muscle being the brain. Of course, that still doesn’t make it easy. It just makes us less likely to be up weighing the pros and cons of dental school at two a.m.

## Free writing

When you free write, you let your thoughts flow as they will, putting pen to paper and writing down whatever comes into your mind. You don’t judge the quality of what you write and you don’t worry about style or any surface-level issues, like spelling, grammar, or punctuation. If you can’t think of what to say, you write that down—really. The advantage of this technique is that you free up your internal critic and allow yourself to write things you might not write if you were being too self-conscious.

When you freewrite you can set a time limit (“I’ll write for 15 minutes!”) and even use a kitchen timer or alarm clock or you can set a space limit (“I’ll write until I fill four full notebook pages, no matter what tries to interrupt me!”) and just write until you reach that goal. You might do this on the computer or on paper, and you can even try it with your eyes shut or the monitor off, which encourages speed and freedom of thought.

The crucial point is that you keep on writing even if you believe you are saying nothing. Word must follow word, no matter the relevance. Your freewriting might even look like this:

“This paper is supposed to be on the politics of tobacco production but even though I went to all the lectures and read the book I can’t think of what to say and I’ve felt this way for four minutes now and I have 11 minutes left and I wonder if I’ll keep thinking nothing during every minute but I’m not sure if it matters that I am babbling and I don’t know what else to say about this topic and it is rainy today and I never noticed the number of cracks in that wall before and those cracks remind me of the walls in my grandfather’s study and he smoked and he farmed and I wonder why he didn’t farm tobacco…”

When you’re done with your set number of minutes or have reached your page goal, read back over the text. Yes, there will be a lot of filler and unusable thoughts but there also will be little gems, discoveries, and insights. When you find these gems, highlight them or cut and paste them into your draft or onto an “ideas” sheet so you can use them in your paper. Even if you don’t find any diamonds in there, you will have either quieted some of the noisy chaos or greased the writing gears so that you can now face the assigned paper topic.

### Break down the topic into levels

Once you have a course assignment in front of you, you might brainstorm:

* *the general topic*, like “The relationship between tropical fruits and colonial powers”
* *a specific subtopic or required question*, like “How did the availability of multiple tropical fruits influence competition amongst colonial powers trading from the larger Caribbean islands during the 19th century?”
* *a single term or phrase that you sense you’re overusing in the paper*. For example: If you see that you’ve written “increased the competition” about a dozen times in your “tropical fruits” paper, you could brainstorm variations on the phrase itself or on each of the main terms: “increased” and “competition.”

### Listing/bulleting

In this technique you jot down lists of words or phrases under a particular topic. Try this one by basing your list either

* on the general topic
* on one or more words from your particular thesis claim, or
* on a word or idea that is the complete opposite of your original word or idea.

For example, if your general assignment is to write about the changes in inventions over time, and your specific thesis claims that “the 20th century presented a large number of inventions to advance US society by improving upon the status of 19th-century society,” you could brainstorm two different lists to ensure you are covering the topic thoroughly and that your thesis will be easy to prove.

The first list might be based on your thesis; you would jot down as many 20th-century inventions as you could, as long as you know of their positive effects on society. The second list might be based on the opposite claim and you would instead jot down inventions that you associate with a decline in that society’s quality. You could do the same two lists for 19th-century inventions and then compare the evidence from all four lists.

Using multiple lists will help you to gather more perspective on the topic and ensure that, sure enough, your thesis is solid as a rock, or, …uh oh, your thesis is full of holes and you’d better alter your claim to one you can prove.

### 3 Perspectives

Looking at something from different perspectives helps you see it more completely—or at least in a completely different way, sort of like laying on the floor makes your desk look very different to you. To use this strategy, answer the questions for **each** of the three perspectives, then look for interesting relationships or mismatches you can explore.

1. Describe it: Describe your subject in detail. What is your topic? What are its components? What are its interesting and distinguishing features? What are its puzzles? Distinguish your subject from those that are similar to it. How is your subject unlike others?
2. Trace it: What is the history of your subject? How has it changed over time? Why? What are the significant events that have influenced your subject?
3. Map it: What is your subject related to? What is it influenced by? How? What does it influence? How? Who has a stake in your topic? Why? What fields do you draw on for the study of your subject? Why? How has your subject been approached by others? How is their work related to yours?

### Cubing

Cubing enables you to consider your topic from six different directions; just as a cube is six-sided, your cubing brainstorming will result in six “sides” or approaches to the topic. Take a sheet of paper, consider your topic, and respond to these six commands.

1. Describe it.
2. Compare it.
3. Associate it.
4. Analyze it.
5. Apply it.
6. Argue for and against it.

Look over what you’ve written. Do any of the responses suggest anything new about your topic? What interactions do you notice among the “sides”? That is, do you see patterns repeating, or a theme emerging that you could use to approach the topic or draft a thesis? Does one side seem particularly fruitful in getting your brain moving? Could that one side help you draft your thesis statement? Use this technique in a way that serves your topic. It should, at least, give you a broader awareness of the topic’s complexities, if not a sharper focus on what you will do with it.

### Similes

In this technique, complete the following sentence:

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ is/was/are/were like \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

In the first blank put one of the terms or concepts your paper centers on. Then try to brainstorm as many answers as possible for the second blank, writing them down as you come up with them.

After you have produced a list of options, look over your ideas. What kinds of ideas come forward? What patterns or associations do you find?

### Clustering/mapping/webbing:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Whole |  | Parts |
| Part | Parts of Parts |
| Part | Parts of Parts |
| Part | Parts of Parts |

 **The general idea:**

This technique has three (or more) different names, according to how you describe the activity itself or what the end product looks like. In short, you will write a lot of different terms and phrases onto a sheet of paper in a random fashion and later go back to link the words together into a sort of “map” or “web” that forms groups from the separate parts. Allow yourself to start with chaos. After the chaos subsides, you will be able to create some order out of it.

To really let yourself go in this brainstorming technique, use a large piece of paper or tape two pieces together. You could also use a blackboard if you are working with a group of people. This big vertical space allows all members room to “storm” at the same time, but you might have to copy down the results onto paper later. If you don’t have big paper at the moment, don’t worry. You can do this on an 8 ½ by 11 as well.

**How to do it:**

1. Take your sheet(s) of paper and write your main topic in the center, using a word or two or three.
2. Moving out from the center and filling in the open space any way you are driven to fill it, start to write down, fast, as many related concepts or terms as you can associate with the central topic. Jot them quickly, move into another space, jot some more down, move to another blank, and just keep moving around and jotting. If you run out of similar concepts, jot down opposites, jot down things that are only slightly related, or jot down your grandpa’s name, but try to keep moving and associating. Don’t worry about the (lack of) sense of what you write, for you can chose to keep or toss out these ideas when the activity is over.
3. Once the storm has subsided and you are faced with a hail of terms and phrases, you can start to cluster. Circle terms that seem related and then draw a line connecting the circles. Find some more and circle them and draw more lines to connect them with what you think is closely related. When you run out of terms that associate, start with another term. Look for concepts and terms that might relate to that term. Circle them and then link them with a connecting line. Continue this process until you have found all the associated terms. Some of the terms might end up uncircled, but these “loners” can also be useful to you. (Note: You can use different colored pens/pencils/chalk for this part, if you like. If that’s not possible, try to vary the kind of line you use to encircle the topics; use a wavy line, a straight line, a dashed line, a dotted line, a zigzaggy line, etc. in order to see what goes with what.)
4. There! When you stand back and survey your work, you should see a set of clusters, or a big web, or a sort of map: hence the names for this activity. At this point you can start to form conclusions about how to approach your topic. There are about as many possible results to this activity as there are stars in the night sky, so what you do from here will depend on your particular results. Let’s take an example or two in order to illustrate how you might form some logical relationships between the clusters and loners you’ve decided to keep. At the end of the day, what you do with the particular “map” or “cluster set” or “web” that you produce depends on what you need. What does this map or web tell you to do? Explore an option or two and get your draft going!

### Relationship between the parts

In this technique, begin by writing the following pairs of terms on opposite margins of one sheet of paper:

Looking over these four groups of pairs, start to fill in your ideas below each heading. Keep going down through as many levels as you can. Now, look at the various parts that comprise the parts of your whole concept. What sorts of conclusions can you draw according to the patterns, or lack of patterns, that you see?

### Journalistic questions

In this technique you would use the “big six” questions that journalists rely on to thoroughly research a story. The six are: Who?, What?, When?, Where?, Why?, and How?. Write each question word on a sheet of paper, leaving space between them. Then, write out some sentences or phrases in answer, as they fit your particular topic. You might also answer into a tape recorder if you’d rather talk out your ideas.

Now look over your batch of responses. Do you see that you have more to say about one or two of the questions? Or, are your answers for each question pretty well balanced in depth and content? Was there one question that you had absolutely no answer for? How might this awareness help you to decide how to frame your thesis claim or to organize your paper? Or, how might it reveal what you must work on further, doing library research or interviews or further note-taking?

For example, if your answers reveal that you know a lot more about “where” and “why” something happened than you know about “what” and “when,” how could you use this lack of balance to direct your research or to shape your paper? How might you organize your paper so that it emphasizes the known versus the unknown aspects of evidence in the field of study? What else might you do with your results?

### Thinking outside the box

Even when you are writing within a particular academic discipline, you can take advantage of your semesters of experience in other courses from other departments. Let’s say you are writing a paper for an English course. You could ask yourself, “Hmmm, if I were writing about this very same topic in a biology course or using this term in a history course, how might I see or understand it differently? Are there varying definitions for this concept within, say, philosophy or physics, that might encourage me to think about this term from a new, richer point of view?”

For example, when discussing “culture” in your English 101, communications, or cultural studies course, you could incorporate the definition of “culture” that is frequently used in the biological sciences. Remember those little Petri dishes from your lab experiments in high school? Those dishes are used to “culture” substances for bacterial growth and analysis, right? How might it help you write your paper if you thought of “culture” as a medium upon which certain things will grow, will develop in new ways or will even flourish beyond expectations, but upon which the growth of other things might be retarded, significantly altered, or stopped altogether?

### Using charts or shapes

If you are more visually inclined, you might create charts, graphs, or tables in lieu of word lists or phrases as you try to shape or explore an idea. You could use the same phrases or words that are central to your topic and try different ways to arrange them spatially, say in a graph, on a grid, or in a table or chart. You might even try the trusty old flow chart. The important thing here is to get out of the realm of words alone and see how different spatial representations might help you see the relationships among your ideas. If you can’t imagine the shape of a chart at first, just put down the words on the page and then draw lines between or around them. Or think of a shape. Do your ideas most easily form a triangle? square? umbrella? Can you put some ideas in parallel formation? In a line?

### Consider purpose and audience

Think about the parts of communication involved in any writing or speaking event act: purpose

and audience.

What is your purpose? What are you trying to do? What verb captures your intent? Are you trying to inform? Convince? Describe? Each purpose will lead you to a different set of information and help you shape material to include and exclude in a draft. Write about why you are writing this draft in this form.

Who is your audience? Who are you communicating with beyond the grader? What does that audience need to know? What do they already know? What information does that audience need first, second, third? Write about who you are writing to and what they need.

### Dictionaries, thesauruses, encyclopedias

When all else fails…this is a tried and true method, loved for centuries by writers of all stripe. Visit the library reference areas or stop by the Writing Center to browse various dictionaries, thesauruses (or other guide books and reference texts), encyclopedias or surf their online counterparts. Sometimes these basic steps are the best ones. It is almost guaranteed that you’ll learn several things you did not know.

If you’re looking at a hard copy reference, turn to your most important terms and see what sort of variety you find in the definitions. The obscure or archaic definition might help you to appreciate the term’s breadth or realize how much its meaning has changed as the language changed. Could that realization be built into your paper somehow?

If you go to online sources, use their own search functions to find your key terms and see what suggestions they offer. For example, if you plug “good” into a thesaurus search, you will be given 14 different entries. Whew! If you were analyzing the film Good Will Hunting, imagine how you could enrich your paper by addressed the six or seven ways that “good” could be interpreted according to how the scenes, lighting, editing, music, etc., emphasized various aspects of “good.”

An encyclopedia is sometimes a valuable resource if you need to clarify facts, get quick background, or get a broader context for an event or item. If you are stuck because you have a vague sense of a seemingly important issue, do a quick check with this reference and you may be able to move forward with your ideas.

**Closing**

Armed with a full quiver of brainstorming techniques and facing sheets of jotted ideas, bulleted subtopics, or spidery webs relating to your paper, what do you do now?

Take the next step and start to write your first draft, or fill in those gaps you’ve been brainstorming about to complete your “almost ready” paper. If you’re a fan of outlining, prepare one that incorporates as much of your brainstorming data as seems logical to you. If you’re not a fan, don’t make one. Instead, start to write out some larger chunks (large groups of sentences or full paragraphs) to expand upon your smaller clusters and phrases. Keep building from there into larger sections of your paper. You don’t have to start at the beginning of the draft. Start writing the section that comes together most easily. You can always go back to write the introduction later.

Remember, once you’ve begun the paper, you can stop and try another brainstorming technique whenever you feel stuck. Keep the energy moving and try several techniques to find what suits you or the particular project you are working on.

# Drafting Collaboratively[[1]](#footnote-2)

# http://writingcenter.web.unc.edu/files/2011/12/writingingroupsspectrum.jpgWhether in the academic world or the business world, all of us are likely to participate in some form of group writing—an undergraduate group project for a class, a collaborative research paper or grant proposal, or a report produced by a business team. Writing in a group can have many benefits: multiple brains are better than one, both for generating ideas and for getting a job done. However, working in a group can sometimes be stressful because there are various opinions and writing styles to incorporate into one final product that pleases everyone. This handout will offer an overview of the collaborative process, strategies for writing successfully together, and tips for avoiding common pitfalls. It will also include links to some other handouts that may be especially helpful as your group moves through the writing process.

# The Spectrum of Collaboration in Group Writing

All writing can be considered collaborative in a sense, though we often don’t think of it that way. It would be truly surprising to find an author whose writing, even if it was completed independently, had not been influenced at some point by discussions with friends or colleagues. The range of possible collaboration varies from a group of co-authors who go through each portion of the writing process together, writing as a group with one voice, to a group with a primary author who does the majority of the work and then receives comments or edits from the co-authors.

Group projects for classes should usually fall towards the middle to left side of this diagram, with group members contributing roughly equally. However, in collaborations on research projects, the level of involvement of the various group members may vary widely. The key to success in either case is to be clear about group member responsibilities and expectations and to give credit (authorship) to members who contribute an appropriate amount. It may be useful to credit each group member for his or her various contributions.

# Overview of Steps of the Collaborative Process

Here we outline the steps of the collaborative process. You can use these questions to focus your thinking at each stage.

1. **Pre-writing process**
	1. Share ideas and brainstorm together.
	2. Formulate a draft thesis or argument.
	3. Think about your assignment and the final product. What should it look like? What is its purpose? Who is the intendedaudience?

**2…Planning and logistics**

* 1. Decide together who will write which parts of the paper/project.
	2. What will the final product look like?
	3. Arrange meetings: How often will the group or subsets of the group meet? When and where will the group meet? If the group doesn’t meet in person, how will information be shared?
	4. Scheduling: What is the deadline for the final product? What are the deadlines for drafts?

**3…Research/data collection**

* 1. How will the group find appropriate sources (books, journal articles, newspaper articles, visual media, trustworthy websites, interviews)? If the group will be creating data by conducting research, how will that process work?
	2. Who will read and process the information found? This task again may be done by all members or divided up amongst members so that each person becomes the expert in one area and then teaches the rest of the group.
	3. Think critically about the sources and their contributions to your topic. Which evidence should you include or exclude? Do you need more sources?
	4. Analyze the data. How will you interpret your findings? What is the best way to present any relevant information to your readers-should you include pictures, graphs, tables, and charts, or just written text?

**4…Drafting/writing**

* 1. Separately (each group member has his/her own portion of writing to do)
		+ Note that brainstorming the main points of your paper as a group is helpful, even if separate parts of the writing are assigned to individuals. You’ll want to be sure that everyone agrees on the central ideas.
		+ Where does your individual writing fit into the whole document?
	2. Together (the group actually meets to compose text collaboratively)
		+ Writing together may not be feasible for longer assignments or papers with coauthors at different universities, and it can be time-consuming. However, writing together does ensure that the finished document has one cohesive voice.
		+ Talk about how the writing session should go BEFORE you get started. What goals do you have? How will you approach the writing task at hand?
		+ Many people find it helpful to get all of the ideas down on paper in a rough form before discussing exact phrasing.
		+ Remember that everyone has a different writing style! The most important thing is that your sentences be clear to readers.

**5…Revising, editing, and proofreading**

* 1. If your group has drafted parts of the document separately, merge your ideas together into a single document first, then focus on meshing the styles. The first concern is to create a coherent product with a logical flow of ideas. Then the stylistic differences of the individual portions must be smoothed over.
	2. Revise the ideas and structure of the paper before worrying about smaller, sentence-level errors (like problems with punctuation, grammar, or word choice). Is the argument clear? Is the evidence presented in a logical order? Do the transitions connect the ideas effectively?
1. **Proofreading-:**Check for typos, spelling errors, punctuation problems, formatting issues, and grammatical mistakes.Reading the paper aloud is a very helpful strategy at this point.

# Helpful Collaborative Writing Strategies

**Attitude counts for a lot!**

Group work can be challenging at times, but a little enthusiasm can go a long way to helping the momentum of the group. Keep in mind that working in a group provides a unique opportunity to see how other people write; as you learn about their writing processes and strategies, you can reflect on your own. Working in a group inherently involves some level of negotiation, which will also facilitate your ability to skillfully work with others in the future.

In addition to an appreciation for the collaboration of the group-work process, it is worth mentioning that a little respect goes along way! Group members will bring different skill sets and various amounts and types of background knowledge to the table. Show your fellow writers respect by listening carefully, talking to share your ideas, showing up on time for meetings, sending out drafts on schedule, providing positive feedback, and taking responsibility for an appropriate share of the work.

**Start early and allow plenty of time for revising.**

Getting started early is important in individual projects; however, it is absolutely essential in group work. Because of the multiple people involved in researching and writing the paper, there are aspects of group projects that take additional time, such as deciding and agreeing upon a topic. Group projects should be approached in a structured way because there is simply less scheduling flexibility than when you are working alone. The final product should reflect a unified, cohesive voice and argument, and the only way of accomplishing this is by producing multiple drafts and revising them multiple times.

**Plan a strategy for scheduling.**

One of the difficult aspects of collaborative writing is finding times when everyone can meet. Much of the group’s work may be completed individually, but face-to-face meetings are useful for ensuring that everyone is on the same page. Doodle.com, whenisgood.net, andmeetingwizard.com are free websites that can make scheduling easier. Using these sites, an organizer suggests multiple dates and times for a meeting, and then each group member can indicate whether he or she is able to meet at the specified times.

It is very important to set deadlines for drafts; people are busy, and not everyone will have time to read and respond at the last minute. It may help to assign a group facilitator who can send out reminders of the deadlines. If the writing is for a co-authored research paper, the lead author can take responsibility for reminding others that comments on a given draft are due by a specific date.

Submitting drafts at least one day ahead of the meeting allows other authors the opportunity to read over them before the meeting and arrive ready for a productive discussion.

**Find a convenient and effective way to share files.**

There are many different ways to share drafts, research materials, and other files. Here we describe a few of the potential options we have explored and found to be functional. We do not advocate any one option, and we realize there are other equally useful options—this list is just a possible starting point for you.

* **Email attachments**. People often share files by email; however, especially when there are many group members or there is a flurry of writing activity, this can lead to a deluge of emails in everyone’s inboxes and significant confusion about which file version is current.
* **Google documents.** Files can be shared between group members and are instantaneously updated, even if two members are working at once. Changes made by one member will automatically appear on the document seen by all members. However, to use this option, every group member must have a Gmail account (which is free), and there are often formatting issues when converting Google documents back to Microsoft Word.
* **Dropbox**. Dropbox.com is free to join. It allows you to share up to 2GB of files, which can then be synched and accessible from multiple computers. The downside of this approach is that everyone has to join, and someone must install the software on at least one personal computer. Dropbox can then be accessed from any computer online by logging onto the website.
* **Common server space**.If all group members have access to a shared server space, this is often an ideal solution. Members of a lab group or a lab course with available server space typically have these resources. Just be sure to make a folder for your project and clearly label your files.

Note that even when you are sharing or storing files for group writing projects in a common location, it is still essential to periodically make back-up copies and store them on your own computer! It is never fun to lose your (or your group’s) hard work.

**Try separating the tasks of revising and editing/proofreading.**

It may be helpful to assign giving feedback on specific items to particular group members. First, group members should provide general feedback and comments on content. Only after revising and solidifying the main ideas and structure of the paper should you move on to editing and proofreading. After all, there is no point in spending your time making a certain sentence as beautiful and correct as possible when that sentence may later be cut out. When completing your final revisions, it may be helpful to assign various concerns (for example, grammar, organization, flow, transitions, and format) to individual group members to focus this process. This is an excellent time to let group members play to their strengths; if you know that you are good at transitions, offer to take care of that editing task.

Your group project is an opportunity to become experts on your topic. Go to the library (in actuality or online), collect relevant books, articles, and data sources, and consult a reference librarian if you have any issues. Talk to your professor or TA early in the process to ensure that the group is on the right track. Find experts in the field to interview if it is appropriate. If you have data to analyze, meet with a statistician. If you are having issues with the writing, use the online handouts at the Writing Center or come in for a face-to-face meeting: a tutor can meet with you as a group or one-on-one.

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# Pitfalls

**Immediately dividing the writing into pieces.**

While this may initially seem to be the best way to approach a group writing process, it can also generate more work later on, when the parts written separately must be put together into a unified document. The different pieces must first be edited to generate a logical flow of ideas, without repetition. Once the pieces have been stuck together, the entire paper must be edited to eliminate differences in style and any inconsistencies between the individual authors’ various chunks. Thus, while it may take more time up-front to write together, in the end a closer collaboration can save you from the difficulties of combining pieces of writing and may create a stronger, more cohesive document.

**Procrastination.** Although this is solid advice for any project, it is even more essential to start working on group projects in a timely manner. In group writing, there are more people to help with the work-but there are also multiple schedules to juggle and more opinions to seek.

**Being a solo group member.** Not everyone enjoys working in groups. You may truly desire to go solo on this project, and you may even be capable of doing a great job on your own. However, if this is a group assignment, then the prompt is asking for everyone to participate. If you are feeling the need to take over everything, try discussing expectations with your fellow group members as well as the teaching assistant or professor. However, always address your concerns with group members first. Try to approach the group project as a learning experiment: you are learning not only about the project material but also about how to motivate others and work together.

**Waiting for other group members to do all of the work**. If this is a project for a class, you are leaving your grade in the control of others. Leaving the work to everyone else is not fair to your group mates. And in the end, if you do not contribute, then you are taking credit for work that you did not do; this is a form of academic dishonesty. To ensure that you can do your share, try to volunteer early for a portion of the work that you are interested in or feel you can manage.

**Leaving all the end work to one person.** It may be tempting to leave all merging, editing, and/or presentation work to one person. Be careful. There are several reasons why this may be ill-advised.

* + - 1. The editor/presenter may not completely understand every idea, sentence, or word that another author wrote, leading to ambiguity or even mistakes in the end paper or presentation.
			2. Editing is tough, time-consuming work. The editor often finds himself or herself doing more work than was expected as he or she tries to decipher and merge the original contributions under the time pressure of an approaching deadline. If you decide to follow this path and have one person combine the separate writings of many people, be sure to leave plenty of time for a final review by all of the writers. Ask the editor to send out the final draft of the completed work to each of the authors and let every contributor review and respond to the final product. Ideally, there should also be a test run of any live presentations that the group or a representative may make.

**Entirely negative critiques.** When giving feedback or commenting on the work of other group members, focusing only on “problems” can be overwhelming and put your colleagues on the defensive. Try to highlight the positive parts of the project in addition to pointing out things that need work. Remember that this is constructive feedback, so don’t forget to add concrete, specific suggestions on how to proceed. It can also be helpful to remind yourself that many of your comments are your own opinions or reactions, not absolute, unquestionable truths, and then phrase what you say accordingly. It is much easier and more helpful to hear “I had trouble understanding this paragraph because I couldn’t see how it tied back to our main argument” than to hear “this paragraph is unclear and irrelevant.”

Writing in a group can be challenging, but it is also a wonderful opportunity to learn about your topic, the writing process, and the best strategies for collaboration. We hope that our tips will help you and your group members have a great experience.

# Writing in Digital Environments

In today's world of texting, tweeting, blogging, and social networking, young people are writing more than ever. Computers are not “just tools” for writing. Networked computers create a new kind of writing space known as “Digital Environment”. Digital environment has changes the writing process and the basic rhetorical dynamic between writers and readers. Computer technologies have changed the processes, products, and contexts for writing in dramatic ways—and rhetoric theory, composition practice, and writing instruction all need to change to suit how writing is produced in digital spaces. Therefore, Digital writing is more than just a skill; it is a means of interfacing with ideas and with the world, a mode of thinking and expressing in all grades and disciplines. It can help students develop critical thinking skills and support learning across all subject areas.

Today, an increasing number of people are using the Internet. The internet has provided a digital environment which has changed writing. Today, there are more people writing every day — e-mails, text messages, blog posts — and more self-published authors than ever before. Written communication is popular in a way it hasn’t been in a century, and everyone’s doing it. But unlike when writing between two people was quiet and private, much of today’s writing is loud and public, connected through a web of hyperlinks to every other piece of writing out there. With the old masters like Shakespeare, Milton, Melville, Hemingway, and Shelley being translated into code and uploaded onto the web, your blog posts exist right alongside their greatest works.

So, not only are we writing a lot more, but now our writing is in communication with other writing (which is in communication with other writing, and more writing, and even more writing… from all around the world!), and what we write doesn’t just say a lot about us, it says a lot about our community, our society, our culture. Never before has writing been more influential, more dispersed, and more abundant than right now!

Writing in a digital environment can be anything. It can be a blog post, an e-mail, a text message. It can be a tweet, or a Facebook update, or a conversation on Tumblr. It can be comments on blog posts, responses to news articles, book reviews shared on GoodReads, or fan fiction. It can also look a lot more traditional: poems posted on the web, self-published novels on Amazon and iBooks, or short stories uploaded to an online ‘zine.

Hypertext allows us to link what we write to what others have written. Google Docs allow for simultaneous collaborative writing. Multi-site blogs allow many authors to work together toward a common goal. The internet allows us to communicate through our text in new ways; it frees us to join our words with others’, to innovate, and to let our words become our actions. We can live spontaneously through our words, or vicariously, or cooperatively. Our words can form communities, can take a stand, can create at the same time as we create them. Therefore:

1. Conventional, print rhetoric theory is not adequate for computer-based writing—what we are calling "digital writing".
2. It is no longer possible to teach writing responsibly or effectively in traditional classrooms.
3. Teaching writing in digitally mediated spaces requires that we shift our approaches.

In the digital world, written information must take into account certain techniques and Webwriting concepts. The goal of online writing is to say more with less.According to Rodrigues, there are four basic principles for online writing:

* + - * **Persuasion**: Create interest mechanisms for the information that is being produced, and think far beyond "well written," which is a condition *sine qua non*;
			* **Objectivity**: Give users the aspects of information that readers want, without "dismissing" unnecessary details;
			* **Visibility**: Try to work with different "layers" in the website, giving out information little by little, but not creating a structure that is too deep.
			* **Navigability**: Use the information as a directional resource in a website, helping the user to navigate through data and produce knowledge.

**Guidelines for Writing a Blog**

1. **Choosing a Topic** – take a little extra time defining your topic and the post will flow better and you’ll develop something that matters to readers.
2. **Crafting Your Post’s Title** – perhaps the most crucial part of actually getting readers to start reading your post when they see it in an RSS reader or search engine results page.
3. **The Opening Line** – first impressions matter. Once you’ve got someone past your post’s title your opening line draws them deeper into your post.
4. **Your ‘point/s’ (making your posts matter)**- a post needs to have a point. If it’s just an intriguing title and opening you’ll get people to read – but if the post doesn’t ‘matter’ to them it’ll never get traction.
5. **Call to Action** – driving readers to **do** something cements a post in their mind and helps them to apply it and helps you to make a deeper connection with them.
6. **Adding Depth** – before publishing your post – ask yourself how you could add depth to it and make it even more useful and memorable to readers?
7. **Quality Control and Polishing of Posts** – small mistakes can be barriers to engagement for some readers. Spending time fixing errors and making a post ‘look’ good can take it to the next level.
8. **Timing of Publishing Your Post** – timing can be everything – strategic timing of posts can ensure the right people see it at the right time.
9. **Post Promotion** – having hit publish – don’t just leave it to chance that your post will be read by people. Giving it a few strategic ‘nudges’ can increase the exposure it gets exponentially.
10. **Conversation** – often the real action happens once your post is published and being interacted with by readers and other bloggers. Taking time to dialogue can be very fruitful.

Writing for blog is different from traditional writing. You must keep following points in your mind when writing for a blog.

1. **Put the reader first**. The purpose of writing is clear, sometimes persuasive, communication. It is not about you or your clever ideas. If you write to impress, you willdistract the reader from the content. Good writing is like a store window. It should be clean and clear, providing an unobstructed view of the contents within.
2. **Organize your thoughts**. You don’t need a detailed outline for most writing. But you do need to know what you want to say before you say it. If you’re comfortable with the sort of outline you learned in school, use it. Otherwise, simply jot down the important points you want to make and arrange them in the order you want to make them. Eliminate any ideas that are not directly related to these points.
3. **Use short paragraphs**. Look at any newspaper and notice how short the paragraphs are. That’s done to make reading easier since our brains take in information better when ideas are broken into small chunks. In ordinary writing, each paragraph develops one idea and includes many sentences. But in blogging, the style is less formal and paragraphs may be as short as a single sentence or even a single word.
4. **Use short sentences**. You should keep sentences short for the same reason you keep paragraphs short: they’re easier to read and understand. Each sentence should have one simple thought. More than that creates complexity and invites confusion.
5. **Use simple words**. Since your purpose is to communicate and not impress, simple words work better than big ones. Write “get” instead of “procure.” Write “use” rather than “utilize.” Use the longer words only if your meaning is so precise there is no simpler word to use.
6. **Be specific**. Don’t write “Many doctors recommend Brand X.” Write “97% of doctors recommend Brand X.” Don’t write “The Big Widget is offered in many colors.” Write “The Big Widget comes in red, green, blue, and white.” Get to the point. Say what you mean. Use specific nouns.
7. **Write in a conversational style**. There is a road sign often posted near construction sites that always irritates me. It reads, “Maintain present lane.” Why so formal? A more conversational style would be better: “Stay in your lane” or “Do not change lanes.” If you write as if you’re wearing a top hat and spats, you distance yourself from the reader and muddle the message.
8. **Be clear.** This may be the most important rule of all. Without clarity, your writing fails on every level. You achieve clarity when you accurately communicate the meaning in your head to the head of your reader. That’s difficult. Look at your writing with an objective eye. Consider what might be misunderstood and rewrite it. Find what is irrelevant and delete it. Notice what is missing and insert it.

**Writing forTwitter**

Twitter is an online social networking and microblogging service that enables users to send and read "tweets", which are text messages limited to 140 characters.Ever since the inception of Twitter on July 15, 2006, there have been many notable uses for the service, in a variety of environments like education, business, emergencies, survey opinion, campaigning, fundraising, etc.

Like any community there are a lot of un-written laws to how you tweet on Twitter. Most of it is just plain common courtesy and some of it is specific to the platform. Below given guidelines will help you write a good tweet.

1. Fill out your profile and upload a picture. Before you start Tweeting let people know who they’re listening to. When someone discovers your carefully written and deeply valuable first Tweets, they’re going to come to our profile to learn more and decide if they want to follow you. If you’ve got the default icon and no info they may wait until later. There is no later. They’ll forget you.
2. Choose your Twitter friends carefully for the value they add to you and your network. You’re looking to build relationships to strengthen your cause.
3. Avoid auto-follow. If you auto-follow you could be suddenly following a bunch of people you don’t want to talk to and have nothing in common with. Then you have to un-follow them and that takes time too.
4. Only direct message when absolutely necessary and do not auto DM for any reason. Nothing will turn new followers off faster than getting an automated response.
5. Share your Tweet-stream with people you admire (If you don’t have any find some.) Send out links to blogs, web sites or Tweets from people that are just as smart as you. Better yet, even smarter.
6. Add value. Share information through links. You can’t keep all the good stuff to yourself. Share links with a very short and clear description so other people know what to expect when they get there.
7. When you write a Tweet make sure there is room for it to get re-tweeted. That means leave at least 20-40 characters at the end so when someone re-tweets it to their network they don’t have to shorten your Tweet.
8. Say please and thank you. If you want a post re-tweeted that’s more likely to happen if you say “[Please RT](http://danzarrella.com/introducing-the-retweetability-metric.html)”. Of course this means your post has to be that much shorter. Always thank people for re-tweeting or mentioning you. It doesn’t have to be a reply, it can be a direct message or even an e-mail or a phone call. Let them know you appreciate their time and sharing your Tweet with their network.
9. Give credit to the source. If you found a great blogger find their name on Twitter and say something like “Awesome post from [@jfouts](http://twitter.com/jfouts)on Twitter: to give credit to the author and simultaneously let them know you liked it. Same thing with re-tweets. Don’t steal somebody else’s Tweet without giving them credit. Either say RT [@jfouts](http://www.twitter.com/jfouts) and then quote the tweet verbatim (don’t edit somebody else’s Tweet unless you have to to make it short enough) or give the title and then (via [@jfouts](http://twitter.com/jfouts)) as a credit. The only exception to this is if the Tweet has been re-tweeted several times, and then you can credit the original tweeter.
10. Be personal, but remember you’re in public. Don’t say things you’ll be ashamed of later and don’t be mean. You can’t really take it back even if you erase it. Why? Because your enemies (and some of your friends) will have re-tweeted it to the heavens before you can delete it. This is why Tweeting while drunk is a bad idea.
11. Be transparent. If your Twitter persona is for a corporation or your looking for a job, let people know either in your profile or by your tweets. The more open you are about who you are and why you’re on Twitter the better.
12. Put the flamethrower away. There are certain individuals on Twitter who have become quite high-profile by attacking the social media bigwigs at every opportunity. Do we laugh occasionally? Well sometimes, but in the end we don’t respect them and we don’t trust them. Is that who you want to be friends with?
13. Be open minded. When you create your new Twitter network of pals think out of the box. Listen carefully for people talking about things that interest you in other niches. If you only talk about one subject with people they get bored with you. Branch out. Talk about your hobbies and follow people doing things you always wanted to do. Someday you might get the opportunity to do something through one of your new buddies.

**Writing Email**

Many people now use email as a primary way of communicating with friends, family, co-workers and others who are important to each of us for different reasons. You may be contacting someone about employment, a business venture, following up with customer service or emailing instead of using the telephone.

Personal emails sent between friends and family should be treated differently than professional email correspondence. Understand the audience you’re communicating with will determine how casual you can be. Keep the reason for your email clear and concise, especially when using this medium to contact businesses and your co-workers. Forwarding emails to show perceived productivity is never a good idea. Reason for your email clear and concise, especially when using this medium to contact businesses and your co-workers. Forwarding emails to show perceived productivity is never a good idea.

Don’t turn business emails into a chat. If you go back and forth with the same person twice, pick up the phone or open a chat window. Email is admissible evidence in court. Do not write anything that you would be afraid to be released to the public

From a business perspective many of us have little or no experience as authors or writers. Those who write well are often pressed for time and tend to exclude information from the email enabling them to quickly proceed to the next task. As a result, emails are often sent that exhibit poor use of grammar or punctuation; incorrect spelling; and incomplete, outdated, or conflicting information. There’s an expectation that emails are read, understood and action is taken based on the information contained in the email.

Emails are legal documents. An unedited email is not only a reflection of your professionalism; it can also be used against you in court. For example, if you were turning down a proposal and instead of saying you will not be accepting it, you said you will be accepting it (forgetting the not) — you could be held accountable. Everything that comes out of your computer is something that can come back to haunt you if you don’t take care and attention to really mean what you say and say what you mean.

A good email is consisted of following sections:

1. **Subject Line**
* Provide clear, specific subject lines that help the sender identify what he or she must do. For example, if you want someone to approve a funding request, try this: "Please approve SLM spectrophotometer purchase." Put key information at the beginning, limiting text to five words when possible.
* Modify the subject line when appropriate; do not continue using the original subject in your reply (or replies) if the subject has changed. Alternately, start a new e-mail if the subject/recipients have changed and/or if the e-mail string is unmanageably long.

1. **Greeting/Salutation**
* Use "Dear," title, and last name. For example, use "Dear Dr. Smith," but NOT "Dear Dr. Rhonda Smith," "Dear Rhonda Smith," "Dear Smith," or "Dear Dr. Rhonda."  At the NIH, use "Dr." if you are unsure how the person should be addressed.
* If someone signs an e-mail with his or her first name, you have permission to address that person by first name in subsequent e-mails.
1. **Body of E-Mail**
* Be clear about whether you need something from the recipient. Is this e-mail just to give someone information, or do you need a reply?
* Limit the message to one subject. If you need to raise multiple issues, clearly state this in the first line or in the Subject line. Example (in the body of the e-mail): "Please see below for two questions about our proposal." You may also wish to number a series of questions or issues to make it easier for the recipient to read and respond.
* Keep it short. People may be reading e-mails on mobile devices and may not scroll past the first screen.
1. **Closing**
* Include a friendly closing. "Sincerely" may be too formal for a regular business communication, so consider other closings, such as the following: Regards, Best regards, Best wishes, Thanks, and Have a great weekend (if the weekend is coming!)

**Miscellaneous Suggestions**

Read and edit your e-mails before sending them. Spell-check is not always enough. Sometimes, reading them aloud can help you see what you may have forgotten or what is hard to understand.

* Send messages TO the individuals you want to take action; CC those who just need to know what is going on.
* Use "BCC" when you are writing to a large group and don't need all the recipients to see everyone else who received the message.
* Use "reply all" carefully and remove those from the list who don't need to see the reply.
* When naming attachments, be sure the name is professional and meaningful. Re-save a file with a different name, if necessary, for the purposes of e-mailing it.
* Avoid religious comments in both signatures and in the body of the e-mail.
* For urgent matters, respond within 24 hours or apologize for the delay. If you are out of the office or inaccessible, create an "out of office" message.
* Reserve "urgent" (urgent e-mails are marked by an "!"in Microsoft Outlook) for truly urgent or time-sensitive matters. De-select "!" when replying to an urgent request if the situation is no longer urgent.
* Return emails within the same timeframe you return phone calls. This may not always be realistic but people want to know you’ve received their correspondence. Include the action you require of the recipient in the email subject line. For example, “response required or fyi only’
* Use an appropriate font and point size.
* Write in a positive tone. Avoid negative words and blaming statements as much as possible.
* When sending an attachment mention what’s being attached and make sure it’s sent. If you realize you forgot to send it, re-send with an apology
* Deliver the news upfront, whether in a subject line or within the first sentence if possible. Very few people have time to read stories.
* Think about what you’re writing before you hit the ‘send’ button. Read your message twice and see if the email makes sense. Calm down before responding to a message that offends you.
* As much as possible avoid ‘reply all’ when emailing.
* Do not send huge attachments with emails. It’s better to upload on a shared network resource and send people a link. That way messages don’t get stuck or clog up business systems
* Make sure the proper recipients are on the email and make sure you get the names right (don’t write keith when you mean kenneth).
* If things become heated, misunderstandings will probably occur. There are times a phone call may be needed to smooth things over.
* Everyone has received an email which has angered them. Write your responses and save them as drafts. Let some time go by and open the message again and read it carefully and edit it. This does two things. You get to vent, even if it only to yourself. By sending out a revised and calmer email, things are kept on a professional and constructive level.
* It’s important to respect everyone’s time. Never send an email that you wouldn’t expect your entire professional and personal network to see. Just because you think something’s important, doesn’t necessarily mean that your email has the same sense of urgency for the person you’re emailing.
* It’s also important to not include text messaging emoticons and phrases like ‘lol’ as they can make your message too personal. You never know who will see the email you send.

Writing for the Web Environment

A website is not static like a book, magazine or brochure. It is a dynamic and organic environment, in which users expect change and expect to read information that is current and accurate.

Before you write a website, you must keep following things in your mind:

* People read differently online.
* They won't necessarily read from left to right.
* They will scan pages rather than read every word.
* They will focus on headings, subheadings, bold text and links.
* They may not scroll down and therefore could miss text at the bottom of a page.

Writers and editors need to embrace these unique features of the web:

* **Linking:** Perhaps the most unique feature of the web as a publishing medium is hyperlinking – the act of linking pages and documents within the same website to each other and to other websites and online resources. Hyperlinking is very liberating for writers and readers. It means information can be presented in layers. Non-essential information can be referred to and access provided with a hyperlink. When writing, always consider any other web pages and online documents to which users could be referred.
* **Search engines and websites:** Most web users find most of their information via search engines. Search engines like google, index web pages, not websites. Links from search engines, therefore, usually take users to a page within a website, rather than to the home page. So each web page needs to stand on its own and make sense to the user who has just landed on the page from a search engine or other link.

Do not assume readers have seen the home page, or any other page of the site. There is no before or after on the web as there is in a book. Realize when writing a page of text that the reader may not:

* + Read all of the text
	+ Scroll down to reveal all the text
	+ Have read any other page on the website.

Writers therefore need to avoid using phrases such as, as we saw above, or as mentioned earlier.

**Users’ expectations**

Users’ expectations of your website are formed by their experience using everyone else’s website – so understand the prevailing conventions and obey them. Where relevant, the advice provided in this guide is based on the prevailing conventions.

It is important for writers and editors to consider the range of website content their intended audiences are exposed to in a normal web session. Prior to visiting your website, a typical user in a typical session on the web, may well navigate from a bank website, to booking a flight, to viewing a blog. They will naturally compare their experience on those sites with yours. Therefore, your content needs to be as persuasive, professional and dynamic as the competition’s.

**Guideline for Web Writing:**

Writing for the web can be a daunting task. Following guidelines can help you to be an effective web writer.

* Use short paragraphs. Large blocks of text can look like walls, and act as such to the user. Research has shown that short, concise paragraphs and bulleted lists work best for web use.
* Your first paragraph is the most important one. As such, it should be brief, clear, and to the point in order to quickly engage the user. One sentence paragraphs are encouraged.
* Write in an inverted pyramid style. Place the most important information at the top, extra info toward the bottom.
* In most cases, it’s best to use subheadings to clarify the subject of various sections on a page. Users want to skim and scan for information. Headings help this process exponentially.
* Don’t waste space welcoming people to the page. There is no need, and most users ignore any welcome text as filler. Get to the meat - that is what they came for.
* Just when you think you are done, look again. Cut, cut, and cut your text until it is the most essential message.
* Name your page clearly. The page title and the navigation title should match as closely as possible. They should also clearly articulate the subject of the page. Do not use “Welcome to Communications!” Instead, say “Communications Office.”
* Do not tell users to “use the links on the left.” Put the information or links you are referring to right there instead.
* Use bold and italics sparingly. Bold should be used for headings and then sparingly for any other emphasis. Too much bold makes text harder, not easier, to read and differentiate.
* Italics should also be used sparingly. Italics on the web are also hard to read. Try to avoid making long paragraphs italic – you are making the text harder to read, not giving it emphasis. Exceptions are book titles and other grammar stylings as [outlined in our editorial style guide](http://www.hampshire.edu/7108.htm).
* Do not underline text. On the web underline = link. Giving a sentence an underline for emphasis is misleading. And again, you don’t really need it.
* Use all caps very sparingly. Research shows all caps are harder to read than mixed case.
* Don’t try to emphasize too much. If you use bolded headings, short paragraphs, and bulleted lists, you should not need to rely on italics, all caps, or underlining for emphasis. These styles can make the page look messy and compete for the user’s attention.
* Avoid exclamation points. We know Hampshire is awesome! We love it! But exclamation points on websites make can make it look unprofessional! Let the content speak for itself.

**Banner Ads**

* Use banner ads exceedingly sparingly. They are tangential. If you use too many, they draw focus away from the content of the page and prove distracting.
* Don’t use banner ads on a page where there is not space on the left side to fit one in. If use of a banner ad pushes down the content area to give an extra gap of white space at the bottom, then we need to find another way to display the information.
* Keep the title of the banner ad short and concise. Put the main message in the text box section. Too many of our banner ads are top heavy. This was not how they were designed and does not look as good.
* Contact the communications office to help you make custom banner ads or determine if a banner ad is really the best way to display the information. We are here to help.

**Headers and other images**

* Use a header image that is relevant to the subject matter.
* Avoid pictures of buildings without people. You may know that a picture of the exterior of FPH fits well for a page, but to most people, and especially to those who are not familiar with our campus, it is meaningless. Remember your users do not have your insider knowledge. Give them pictures of people interacting instead of abstract building pics whenever possible. (We are working at the communications office to supply more header images).
* Make sure you have accurate copyright permissions to use any picture. Just because it is on the internet does not mean it is free to use.

**Miscellaneous**

* Link, link, and link to relevant information. If you mention the DART program, link to it. If you include an email address, make it an email link. If you mention a faculty member, link to their bio page. Don’t make people go and search for something that you mention if it already has a page somewhere.
* Make your links contextual. Avoid “Click here.” Use part of the actual referencing sentence as the link. Research shows that users like them to be 4-8 words in length.
For example,

Do not use:For commencement information for graduating students [click here](http://www.hampshire.edu/studentlife/6283.htm).

**Do use:**Commencement information for graduating students is now available.

* Avoid jump (anchor) links except on long pages such as FAQs. Research shows that today’s web users don’t mind scrolling if the content is useful and easy to scan. Anchor points just make pages longer, and are used too often on pages that are already a reasonable length. If you do want to use anchor links, then there are best practices that should be followed.
* Keep your content up to date. Out-of-date content reflects poorly on the user’s overall opinion of the website and the College. It also degrades the trust of the user to later find information on the website. If you put up info that needs to be updated later, mark it on your Zimbra calendar so you don’t forget. Give yourself the time necessary for the page to get through workflow (2-5 days).

**Books**

* Cross, Geoffrey A. 1994. Collaboration and conflict: a contextual exploration of group writing and positive emphasis. Hampton Press, Inc.: Cresskill, New Jersey.
* Ede, Lisa and Andrea Lunsford. 1990. Singular Texts/Plural Authors: Perspectives on Collaborative Writing. Southern Illinois University Press: Carbondale & Edwardsville.
* Speck, Bruce W. 2002. Facilitating Students’ Collaborative Writing. ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report 28(6). Jossey-Bass A Wiley Company: San Francisco.
* Tony and Barry Buzan, *The Mind Map Book*, BBC Worldwide, 1993.
* Tony Buzan, *Use Your Head*, BBC Worldwide, 2000.

**Websites**

<http://www.jcu.edu.au/office/tld/learningskills/mindmap/index.html>
<http://www.peterussell.com/mindmaps/mindmap.html>
<http://www.mind-mapping.co.uk/>
<http://www.sis.pitt.edu/~spring/cas/node2.html>

<http://janetfouts.com/twitter-manners-how-to-write-good-tweets-be-good-twittizen/>

<http://www.websitecriteria.com/Website_writing_guide_writing_for_the_web/Understand_the_Web_as_a_writer.html>

1. <https://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/group-writing/> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)