

30 Practices for Better Writing, Part I

[GSEP Writing Support](#)

Before You Begin Writing

1. **Understand the Writing Process:** The more that writers reflect on their writing and their writing process, the stronger a writer they become. Consider the diagram to help explore this (Drown, 2016).
 - **Task:** Reflect on your writing process by writing a paragraph about it after completing each writing assignment. What part of the writing process worked well for you and why? Where did you struggle in this piece, and what would you do differently next time you write?



2. **Try Mindfulness:** Before beginning to write, take a few minutes to meditate, focusing on your breath and body.
 - **Task:** Straighten your back, feet flat on the floor, arms resting on your lap. Now, close your eyes, slowly inhaling for a count of ten, allowing your chest and diaphragm to expand. Next, slowly exhale to the count of ten. Repeat this practice for 5 minutes, emptying your mind of everything but the counting of each breath.

3. **Write Every Day:** Every morning, hand-write 3 pages of anything without stopping (Cameron, 2023). You can write grocery lists, tasks for the day, poetry, song lyrics, or anything—and it's for your eyes only. Go [here](#) to learn more.
 - **Task:** Find a quiet place first thing in the morning and write without stopping for 15-20 minutes. If you usually type when you write, try writing by hand, and vice versa.

4. **Reframe Your Mindset:** Be aware of what might be holding you back. What negative thoughts could you reframe when you begin a writing project? Instead of: "This is impossible," "I'm a terrible writer," focus on the process and growth: "What will I learn through this process?" "How will I grow?"
 - **Task:** Pretend you were just assigned a major writing task. What is your initial response to this assignment? Write for 15-20 minutes, exploring your attitudes about writing. Do you have certain "rules" about writing that you create for yourself that may not be working for you? Are there thoughts holding you back from starting? After identifying some of these rules, reflect on how you could reframe them.

Reading like a Writer

5. **Read Every Day:** Research has shown that recreational reading among college students has been associated with increased coping skills for mental health (Levine et al., 2020). Also, reading and writing have a reciprocal beneficial effect on each other (Graham, 2020). More reading = better writing. More writing = better reading.
 - **Task:** Challenge yourself to read something you're curious about for 15-20 minutes today. For more challenge, take notes and write about what you learned for another 15 minutes.

6. **Avoid Media Multitasking While Studying or Reading:** Research suggests that reading/studying while media multitasking leads to difficulty recalling information from memory (Edwards & Shin, 2017). Instead of reading from a computer, use a hard copy to focus your attention on your task so that you can remember better.
 - **Task:** Today, choose a text you need to read or study. Print it or use a digital device without notifications. Read with focus for 15-20 min. Then, write for 5 minutes to reflect on what you remember from this reading. Does it feel different than writing while media multitasking?

7. **Read by Genre:** If you want to write scholarly work, read effectively written scholarly work. If you want to write a dissertation, read effectively written dissertations.
 - **Task:** Identify a genre of writing in which you'd like to improve. What type of writing are you trying to master? Find a piece of writing in that genre and read it for 15-20 minutes without an agenda.
8. **Identify Patterns in Written Material:** As you read, identify principles of writing, such as scholarly tone, integration of research, or APA use.
 - **Task:** With the same piece of writing you read (in tip #7), identify elements that stand out to you. What is the tone? Describe the vocabulary. How do the writers integrate research (if applicable)? Write for 10-15 min.

Researching

9. **Navigate the Databases:** Utilize library resources ([databases](#)) to access research. Here is a [video](#) to learn strategies for navigating the databases.
 - **Task:** After viewing the video, use the Pepperdine Libraries Database to find 3 sources about a research topic you are interested in. Think about the concepts from the topic, any variables, and target population as search terms for your investigation.
10. **Get the Gist of a Journal Article:** To get the gist of an article, read the following sections: 1. Abstract; 2. First few paragraphs; 3. Last paragraph before the Methods section (includes research questions, purpose statement, hypotheses); 4. Discussion section.
 - **Task:** Choose one of the sources that you found on the Pepp library website and complete the steps listed and take some notes to get the gist of the article.

Pre-Writing Activities

11. **Understand the Prompt/Rubric:** Read the instructions carefully. To understand the prompt, separate each step and highlight the verbs.
 - **Task:** Practice using the steps to break the assignment down into smaller parts.
12. **Brainstorming:** Brainstorming is a low-stakes strategy that can keep you from staring at the dreaded blank page. Here, you do not stop to think about what may work or not. Simply explore and create. Some approaches could be: listing/bulletting; clustering; mind-mapping.

- **Task:** On your next writing assignment, make a list of all topics that interest you. Don't censor yourself or erase. Be outrageous! Be curious! Now, choose the topic that most interests you. Write that idea on the center of a blank page and jot down any related ideas. Draw lines to indicate connections between ideas.
13. **Try Freewriting and Looping:** Using a timer, freewrite for 10 minutes on your chosen topic (tip #12) without stopping, correcting, or censoring. After time is up, read what you've written and circle or loop any ideas that fascinate you. Next, free-write about those ideas for 10 minutes. Repeat this process as often as is helpful for you.
- **Task:** Revisit your brainstorming writing (tip #12) and circle any ideas that interest you. Next, do another free write about those ideas.
14. **Do Some Outlining:** Outlining can help with structuring your writing even before you begin. You can use Roman numerals and a formal approach; however, often bullet pointing ideas can be a better first step.
- **Task:** Identify some of the key points of the brainstorming, looping, and freewriting activities (tips #12-13) and begin to divide up the sections of the paper into an outline.

Writing Activities

15. **Write a Crummy First Draft:** First drafts *should* be crummy (Lamott, 1995) because you then have something on the page to work with instead of merely an idealized, perfect version of what you want to say but aren't actually saying.
- **Task:** Start where you are. Select a writing project you need to work on, and choose anywhere in the document to write something—anything—down. On paper, on the computer, at home, at school, in a coffee shop. It doesn't matter. Just sit down today, right now, and write for 20 minutes.

Writing Prompt 1: Identify a past writing project and consider the steps that you took to complete it. Were the steps similar or different from the writing process described in tip #1? How does reflecting on this help you to consider future writing tasks?

Writing Prompt 2: Think about a new/current writing project. With some of the tips in mind (writing a crummy first draft, brainstorming, freewriting, looping), would this approach help you to change your mindset before starting to write? In other words, if you tell yourself your first

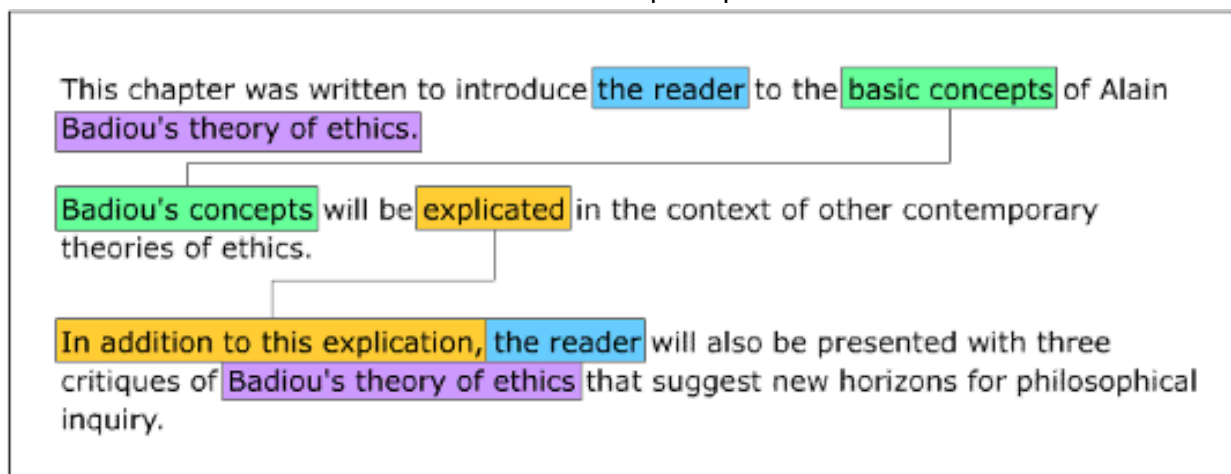
draft should be lousy, how does that make you approach the writing task? Write about this for 5 minutes.

30 Practices for Better Writing, Part 2

16. **“I Can Do Better Than That!”** While using Generative AI tools, such as ChatGPT, may be useful in generating ideas, there are some significant limitations. For instance, responses may be incorrect and/or biased, provided without credibility, missing human insight through critical thinking and personal experience, and are often overly wordy and redundant (George, 2023).

- **Task:** Use a prompt from a previous or current course syllabus and review the assignment requirements and rubric criteria. Submit the prompt to the ChatGPT site: <https://chat.openai.com/> and analyze the response. Does the response fully meet the assignment requirements and rubric criteria? Are there credible, peer-reviewed sources included? Has critical thinking been clearly represented in the response? How will you check the accuracy of the response? What are you gaining (or losing) in terms of your own education by relying on the tool?

17. **Use the Known-New Principle:** Try to link all ideas by referring back to the last idea mentioned (the known) and adding new information about it (the new). See the image below to understand how the known-new principle looks:



- **Task:** After writing a draft, go back and check on each paragraph and each sentence. Do they mention the last idea in the preceding paragraph/sentence and do they then introduce the new idea?

18. **Substantiate:** Ensure that every claim you make is supported by factual evidence (as well

as a citation). Global claims that lack substantiation are typically overgeneralizations. Ex: Women earn only a fraction of what men earn.

- **Task 1:** Using the example above, substantiate the claim about women’s earnings by including evidence from at least one reliable source.
- **Task 2:** Ask a colleague to read your paper and say, “Prove it” for every generalization you make in your paper.

19. **Summarize:** Summarizing means that a large amount of text is condensed. To do this effectively, the writer must first carefully read and understand the text. Then, after identifying the main points, the writer paraphrases them into a shorter version. The last step is to check the summary against the original, ensuring that all of the key points were summarized well.

- **Task:** Read a longer piece of writing, and write three summaries in various lengths to practice your skills. First, write a paragraph of 5-7 sentences summarizing the longer text. Second, write a 3-sentence summary of the text. Next, write a 1-sentence summary. The last challenge is to write a 1-2 word summary.

Revising and Editing Activities

20. **Use Precise Language:** Vague language can confuse readers and create questions in their minds. Instead, use precise and operationalized language to provide specificity. **Instead of writing:** Before Title IX, women were not taken seriously. **Write:** Before Title IX, women did not have equal access to educational resources, programs, or financial aid (cite).

- **Task:** Choose a text (either your own or another) and find a few words or sentences that express broad, vague, or unclear information. Revise by adding precise, operationalized details.

21. **Let It Rest:** An important element of the writing process is to allow distance between yourself and your writing. This usually means that you give yourself time to let your paper rest for 24-48 hours or more. Time away from your work will provide you with a fresh perspective. This will help you to read your paper as a reader would see it for the first time. Go [here](#) to use it.

- **Task:** Give yourself two or three extra days in the writing process with your next piece of writing. When you finish a first draft, close the file and ignore it for at least 48 hours. You did it! You finished your rough draft, so rest your paper and yourself. After 48 hours, open the paper again and allow your fresh perspective to revise with the reader in mind.

22. **Use Grammarly:** Grammarly is a proofreading tool that can help you avoid spelling and punctuation errors. Use it as a tool either during your writing or after finishing a first draft. Through your Pepperdine email, you can get a premium version!

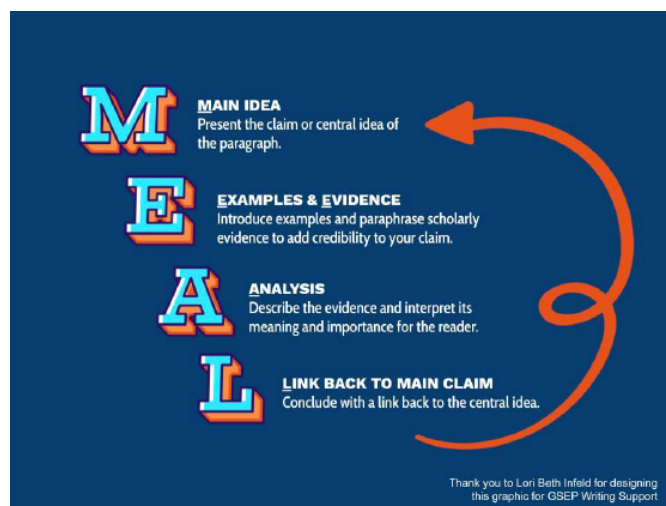
- **Task:** When you use Grammarly the next time, analyze the suggestions to see if

you can identify a pattern. Is Grammarly pointing out sentence fragments? Misplaced commas? Spelling errors? Try to look for patterns and learn from them.

23. **Hedging or Softening Claims:** Your choice of verb can convey your stance and the extent to which you believe the explanation to be correct (Swales & Feak, 2017). With research of human subjects, we may be able to show correlation, but rarely causation. Use auxiliary verbs (may, might, seem); add distance (it is likely that...); add qualifiers (definite possibility, strong possibility, likely possibility). Go to this [academic phrasebank](#) to learn more (The University of Manchester, 2023).
- **Practice:** Choose the strongest verb for these statements (A, B, or C).
 - Studies have concluded that excessive credit growth (**A-contributed to / B-likely caused / C-may have contributed to**) the global financial crisis.
 - The survey results (**A-suggest / B-show**) that reusing sections from one’s previously published papers is a questionable practice.
 - The latest series of studies (**A-demonstrate / B-question**) the value of including consumer expectations in the assessment of service quality. Go here for answers.
 - **Task:** Soften these statements: (1) Health education has a positive impact on a patient’s quality of life. (2) There is a definite possibility that word-of-mouth advertising influences a consumer’s incentive to purchase a product.
24. **Use Transitions:** Using [transitional words and phrases](#) helps to connect ideas throughout a piece of writing, particularly when the relationship between ideas is not readily apparent.
- **Task:** Using a recent paper, identify some places in your writing where a transitional word or phrase could explain a relationship between two ideas. For example, using “however” or “nonetheless” signifies that you’re introducing a
25. **Read Your Paper Aloud:** Reading your paper aloud, especially from a hard copy, allows you to hear your writing more objectively, so you’ll be more likely to hear and see your writing as your audience sees it.
- **Task:** After completing your paper, read it aloud to yourself, noting the following:
 - Unity: Did you provide your reader with a roadmap at the beginning, and did the paper follow that roadmap?
 - Flow: Do the sentences and ideas blend well, or are there abrupt shifts in them?
 - Clarity: Are the sentences clear or are they lengthy and challenging to read?
26. **Reverse Outline:** If you’ve written your paper but sense that it’s not well-organized, try using a reverse outline to determine if it needs to be restructured.
- **Task:** Follow these steps to reverse outline:

- Identify the main idea of each paragraph and write it at the beginning of each, making it the topic sentence.
- Delete repetitive ideas/paragraphs if they're not adding anything new to your paper.
- Organize these paragraphs so that they make logical sense.
- Link paragraphs that are related to each other and determine if there's enough information to assign a heading level to that set of paragraphs.

27. **Try the MEAL Plan:** Well-organized paragraphs guide readers logically through an essay's development, adding to the effectiveness of the argument and the credibility of the writer.



- **Task:** Choose a paragraph from a previous or current writing assignment and analyze the parts to assess its structure. Does it follow the MEAL plan? What is missing? Do any sentences/ideas need to be added, reorganized or moved to another paragraph?

28. **Use Turnitin:** The Turnitin Project Site on Courses/Sakai allows students to submit drafts of their work to check for inadvertent plagiarism before submitting the final version of the assignment to their official class site. [Go here to try it.](#)

- **Task:** Follow the instructions for accessing the [Turnitin Project Site](#). Submit a previous or current writing assignment to view the Turnitin similarity report and check for instances of inadvertent plagiarism. Are there some highlights that need to be paraphrased or quoted according to APA guidelines?

29. **Paraphrase:** A paraphrase restates another's idea (or your own previously published idea) in your own words. "Paraphrasing is an effective writing strategy because it allows authors to summarize and synthesize information from one or more sources, focus on significant information, and compare and contrast relevant details" (APA, 2020, p. 269).

- **Task:** Watch Julie's Video on [How to Paraphrase Correctly](#). Using a quoted passage from your reading or a previous/current assignment, follow the steps outlined in the video to paraphrase the text: (a) read and fully understand the passage, (b) avoid language too similar, (c) restructure the sentence, and (d) quote any borrowed words or terminology.

30. Reflect on the Writing Process: Reflective practice is the ability to reflect on one's actions so as to engage in a process of continuous learning (Schon, 1983). Writing reflectively involves critically analyzing an experience, recording how it has impacted you and what you plan to do with your new knowledge. It can help you reflect on a deeper level as the act of getting something down on paper often helps people to think of an experience through (Cambridge University Libraries, n.d.).

- **Task:** Browse the [Reflective Practice Toolkit](#) and use a writing prompt from the site or your own previous writing to practice a [Reflective Writing Exercise](#) and gain some experience with the process. The more you reflect, in your writing and practice, the easier the process will become.

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Answers for #23: 1 - B; 2 - B; 3 - A