

An Introduction to the Writing Process: the Five Paragraph Academic Essay

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Introduction

Some Basic Assumptions about My Readers' Knowledge of English:

1. You can speak, read, and write in English comfortably. You even dream in it.
2. You learned English grammar, even if it was “way back when” and even if you can't exactly remember all the rules. But, for the most part, you can feel what a good English sentence or paragraph is when you write one so that when you write a shopping list, a letter, a note, or an email message, people can understand you.
3. You have access to a good grammar source, like a grammar book or grammar website.

Some Basic Assumptions about My Readers in General:

1. You weren't born yesterday, so you've lived a life full of experiences that are in your memory and you are living a life now that will become memories in the future.
2. You have strong beliefs and opinions in at least a couple of things; this assumption even includes the “laid back” types in my readership.
3. You use all kinds of patterns of communications in your thinking, speaking, and writing, even if you aren't aware of it.
4. Everything in your mind is meaningful and therefore is a great source of writing ideas. If the stuff in your mind wasn't meaningful, then why would you remember it (that even includes the “stupid trivia” stuff – it's not so stupid when you suddenly need it for some reason).
5. You like hearing about meaningful stuff from people. Likewise, people will like hearing about meaningful stuff from you.
6. You may not like writing essays nor have much experience in it. That's okay.

Writing essays is a learned skill, just like driving a car or washing your laundry. Nobody is born knowing how to do these things. Also, you may not always like doing it (like washing your laundry), but you know how to do it – it's no big deal. Likewise, the goal of this handbook is to make you more comfortable in the skill of writing essays so that you don't have to stress out about it.

First Stage of the Writing Process: Invention/ Prewriting

In the Invention/ Prewriting stage, you look at the topic, think about all the things that come to mind when you think about the topic, and **VOMIT THOSE THINGS THAT'RE IN YOUR MIND ONTO A SHEET OF PAPER!**

I'm sorry for shouting, but this is really important. Get those ideas out of your head and onto a sheet of paper as quickly as possible before they scurry away like an army of cockroaches when the lights turn on. Real life is distracting: the phone rings, you have to use the bathroom, your cat wants scratches, your significant other gives you that "Hey, baby" look.

You get the picture.

Once you get distracted, your mind shifts away from the topic. Any ideas you had before goes bye-bye, unless you pin them down on a sheet of paper so that you can look at them later.

Invention is coming up with those ideas. In most personal essays, those ideas come out of your own brain. In essays calling for research, some of those ideas come out of places that aren't your own brain: interviews, radio, TV, movies, magazines, books, websites, music albums, for examples. Either way, in Invention you go to the place or places where ideas come from; those places of ideas are called "sources." Remember, YOU are your most important source, even with research.

Prewriting is grabbing at those ideas and slapping 'em down on a sheet of paper. You can slap 'em down on a sheet of paper in several ways. I'll mention three forms of Prewriting that you've probably heard of before (at least the concepts, if not the names). From least organized to most organized, they are Freewriting, Cluster/Mapping, and Brainstorm.

Three Forms of Prewriting

1. Freewriting: the most natural but also least organized of Prewriting

Now, I know that some of you write like this: You stare at a sheet of blank paper or a blank screen for an agonizing amount of time, wondering how to begin that damnable first paragraph. Then, in a flurry of fits and starts, you churn out what you believe are sentences and paragraphs until you run out of ideas. If you don't make the assigned essay length, you stare some more, try to write more, and end up repeating yourself somewhere. Then you stop, sick of the whole thing, declaring that you wrote a rough draft of your essay.

Well, you didn't. What you just did was a form of Prewriting called Freewriting. Freewriting is writing down, as quickly as possible, your ideas down, filling up the page. Grammar? Fuggedaboutit. Spelling? Punctuation? Who needs it? In Freewriting, you're free from the rules of correct English. Write EXACTLY what's in your head, as much as you can, as fast as you can. Turn off your mental critic! Be free! Here's a short example of Freewriting, on the topic of "ice cream" that I've come up with:

Ice cream, ice cream, ice cream, yumyumyum. Like ice cream, gives me a brain freeze, though. Probably need a better toothpaste for sensitive teeth. But – what was I trying to say? Right, ice cream. Makes me fat but tastes so good, like on a summer day, but it melts too fast, wonder if there's such thing as non-melty ice cream? YUCK! Probably would have all sorts of bleahy chemicals in it so that it wouldn't melt YUCK YUCK YUCK ☹ >-P Anyways – what was I saying? Right, ice cream. Vanilla's always a

good standby, but kinda boring, ya think? Same with chocolate, though my chocolate addict friends would probably kill me for saying that. Oh well. What I REALLY like is pistachio ice cream with real whole pistachios in them. MMM – good. Hrm . . . I'm hungry. Think I'll buy ice cream now . . .

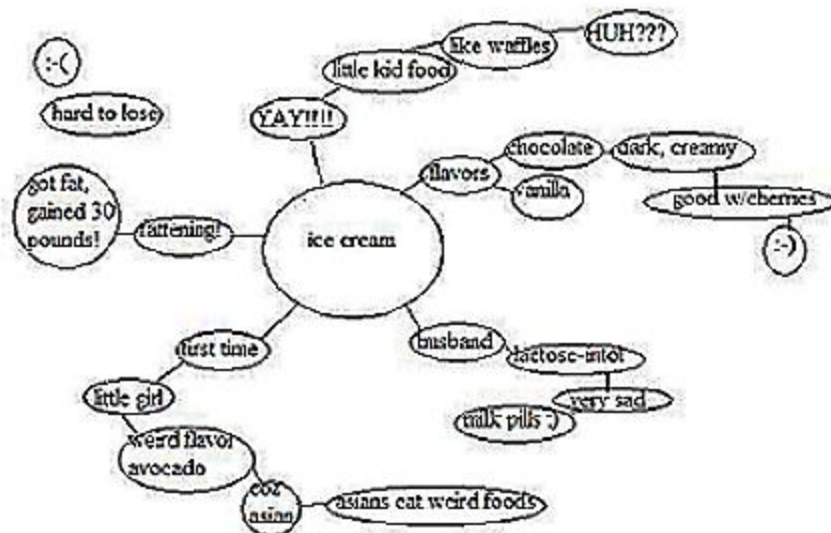
You've probably noticed that my Freewriting has very few spelling and punctuation mistakes, but most folks' Freewriting likely don't look this nice. An omigosh-this-is-illegible-messy-only-I-can-understand-it Freewriting is actually normal. As an English teacher, I've internalized a lot of spelling and grammar stuff (after all, it's part of my job). So I don't make many grammar mistakes these days, and, actually, this is how I think and talk in real life. As a result, my Freewriting will reflect my current communications skill. Similarly, your Freewriting will reflect your current communications skill.

Freewriting is like talking – you're free to express what's on your mind. You do it when you email and write casual letters to your friends and family. You ramble. That's okay, because you're free.

UNFORTUNATELY, since you're free, you have a lot of work, trying to organize these thoughts into something that looks like an essay. What you end up is a Freewriting with circles, cross-outs, arrows, added sentences or chunks of paragraphs here and there, making your Freewriting look like a complicated football play-book. Futzing with a super-messy Freewriting can get time-consuming, which isn't good when you have a looming deadline or during an essay exam, when you have a time limit. So you might want to use a more organized form of Prewriting than Freewriting. Or you might want to use Freewriting in addition to a more organized form of Prewriting.

2. Cluster: still feels natural but more organized than Freewriting

In Cluster, you draw a big circle in the center of your paper and label it with your topic. Then, jot down your ideas that branch out of that big circle. When you run out of ideas on one branch, go back to the big circle, look at the topic again, and make a new branch of ideas. Do this at least one more time, but you can make more branches. Each branch becomes an idea map of where your ideas are going and how they are connected to the Big Picture, that is, the topic. Here's an example I've come up with, using the "ice cream" topic again.



With a Cluster, you can easily prune away parts of the branches or even whole branches that don't seem to fit what you want to say, much more easily than Freewriting, since there aren't sentence parts in the way to wade through. You can easily see when you don't have enough branches, reminding you to come up with more ideas to slap down. Notice that I used words, phrases, and even little drawings (the happy and sad faces). Whatever you need to get those ideas out is all good; just get them out.

SUPER BIG TIP: You probably realize by now that a "cleaned up" Freewriting, will all those cross-outs, circles, and arrows, is just a Freewriting with a Cluster done to it. Unless you're really really in love with Freewriting as a Prewriting tool, why don't you save yourself some time and just skip to a Cluster?

3. Brainstorm: making a list

In a Brainstorm, you make a list of ideas that come to mind when you think about the topic. Like Freewriting and Cluster, don't censor yourself; whatever pops into your head, list it as quickly as you can. The longer the list, the more ideas you can work with. Here's an example, using the "ice cream" topic again:

ice cream
yummy
sweet
cold, but if too cold, can't get scoop through
soft-serve invented 'cause of this?
don't like soft-serve, prefer REAL ice cream
frozen yogurt – bleah!
feel sorry for lactose-intolerant
soy substitute invented because of it?
is there goat-milk ice cream?
☹ bleah!
think I'll stop now

TIME OUT: Finding Your Thesis

Whatever you chose as your Prewriting strategy, you can use Freewriting, Cluster, or Brainstorm to explore your beliefs and opinions as a way of coming up with your thesis, if you don't have one already. A thesis is simply your topic plus your opinion of the topic. You must be able to make it into a sentence. For instance, out of one topic "ice cream," I can create three different theses:

Ice cream is unhealthy.

Ice cream has a weird history.

Ice cream has great flavors.

Each of these theses would produce a different essay from each other because the details supporting each thesis would be different from each other.

But I Have a Thesis!

You can develop a thesis, either from your Freewriting, Cluster, or Brainstorm. But if you have a thesis in your mind even before you put pen to paper or cursor on computer screen, then you might want to skip these less organized forms of Prewriting and move to the next stage of the Writing Process: Arrangement. There, you arrange your ideas using more organized forms than what you find in Prewriting: Spider Cluster and Outline. A Spider Cluster is a more organized Cluster, and an Outline is a more organized Brainstorm.

Many writers choose either Spider Cluster or Outline as their ONLY form of Prewriting, thereby combining Prewriting and Arrangement in one step, when they plan their formal essays. My advice is to develop this habit as well. (I myself bounce between Spider Cluster and Outline.) The quicker you can arrange the ideas in your Prewriting, the quicker you can move on to the next stage of the Writing Process, that is, Drafting.

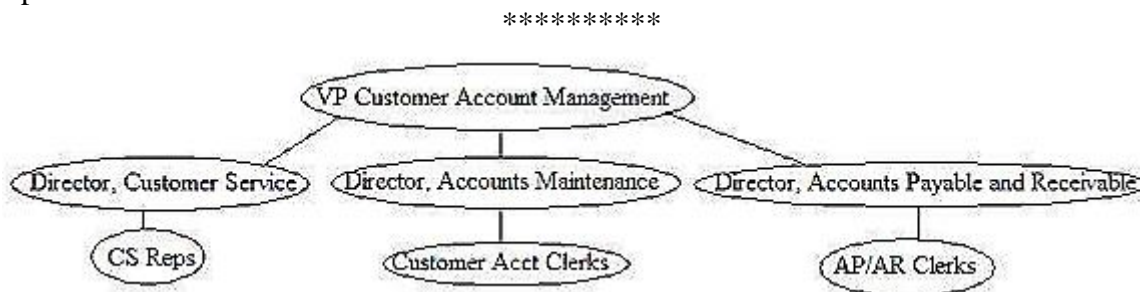
But I'm getting ahead of myself. So you have a thesis. Here's what you can do with it in the second stage of the Writing Process: Arrangement.

Second Stage of the Writing Process: Arrangement

In Arrangement, you organize your ideas into a plan that you can use as a roadmap for your Drafting. This stage is an important bridge between Prewriting and Drafting, and the two forms you can use to organize your Prewriting are Spider Cluster and an Outline.

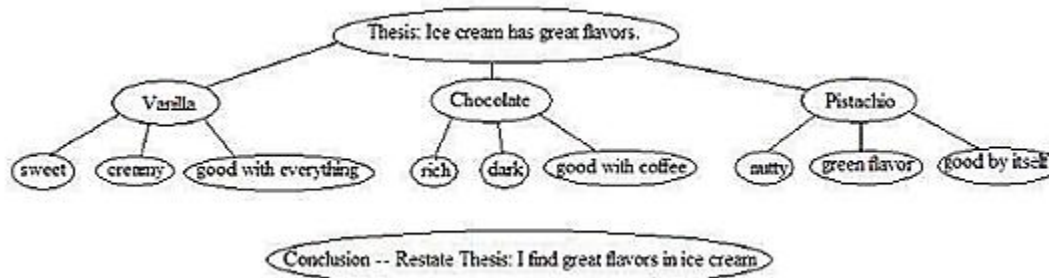
1. Spider Cluster: it's an organizational chart!

A Spider Cluster is a hierarchical organizational chart of ideas, similar in logic to an organizational chart in the employment world. For instance, here's an organizational chart from a corporation that I used to work at:



The VP calls all the shots, the Directors are under the VP but equal in rank to each other, and the Reps/ Clerks are under their own Directors but are also equal in rank to each other.

Similarly, in a Spider Cluster, the VP is the thesis, the Directors are the sub-topics, and the Reps/ Clerks are the supporting details for each sub-topic. Here's an example, using the "ice cream" topic again, but with the specific thesis, "Ice cream has great flavors."



If you notice, I drew a big circle on which the Spider Cluster rests, like a weird three-legged bug floating above the ground. That "Conclusion" circle only serves as a reminder that the last body paragraph "Pistachio" is NOT the last paragraph in the essay that comes out of this Spider Cluster.

What's great about a Spider Cluster is that you can use it as an empty but organized form that you can fill out, just like a job application form. You are slapping your ideas down on a sheet of paper (Prewriting) AND organizing those ideas (Arrangement), all on one tool, which cuts down on time in the pre-drafting stages of the Writing Process.

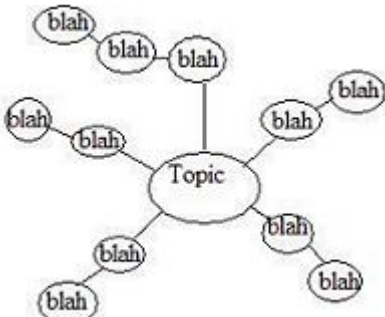
2. Outline: a hierarchical, organized list

An outline does exactly what a Spider Cluster does, but in list form; here's an example:

- I. Thesis: Ice cream has great flavors.
- II. Vanilla
 - a. Sweet
 - b. Creamy
 - c. Good with everything
- III. Chocolate
 - a. Varieties – milk or dark
 - b. Dark – rich and bitter
 - c. Good with coffee
- IV. Pistachio
 - a. Green
 - b. Nutty
 - c. Good by itself
- V. Conclusion

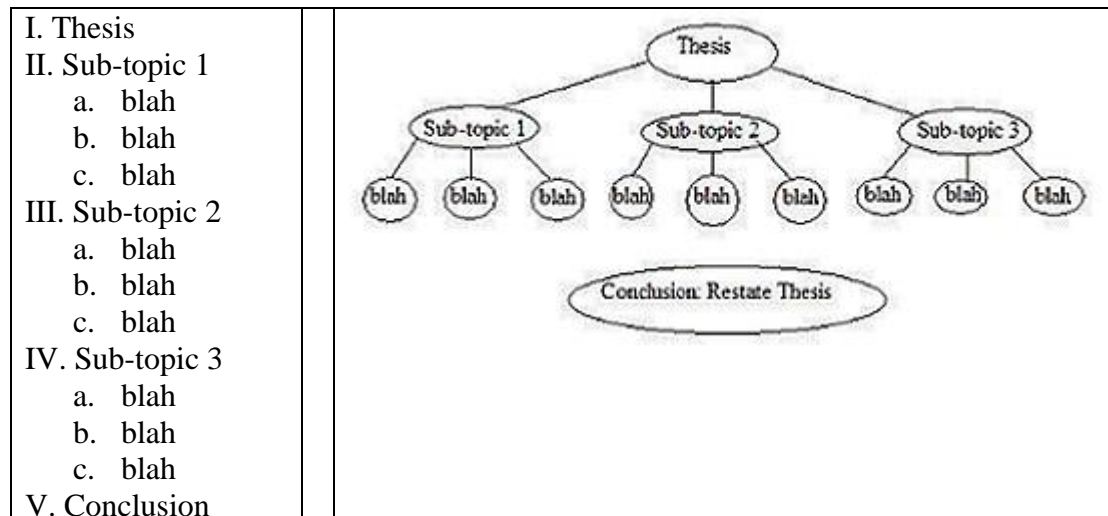
A Brainstorm that's been organized becomes an Outline. Also, a lot of students get taught the outline in their English classes. But the downside to an Outline is that some beginner writers forget that sub-topics II, III, and IV are equal to each other in rank and are equally under the command of the thesis. If you can remember, however, the hierarchical nature of ideas in the Outline, then feel free to use the Outline. The upside to an Outline is that it is the closest thing to a literal map of what a draft looks like.

Recap: The Three Prewriting Strategies:

Freewriting	Brainstorm	Cluster
Topic blah	Topic Blah Blah Blah Blah Blah Blah Blah Blah	

The Two Arrangement Strategies:

Outline	Spider Cluster
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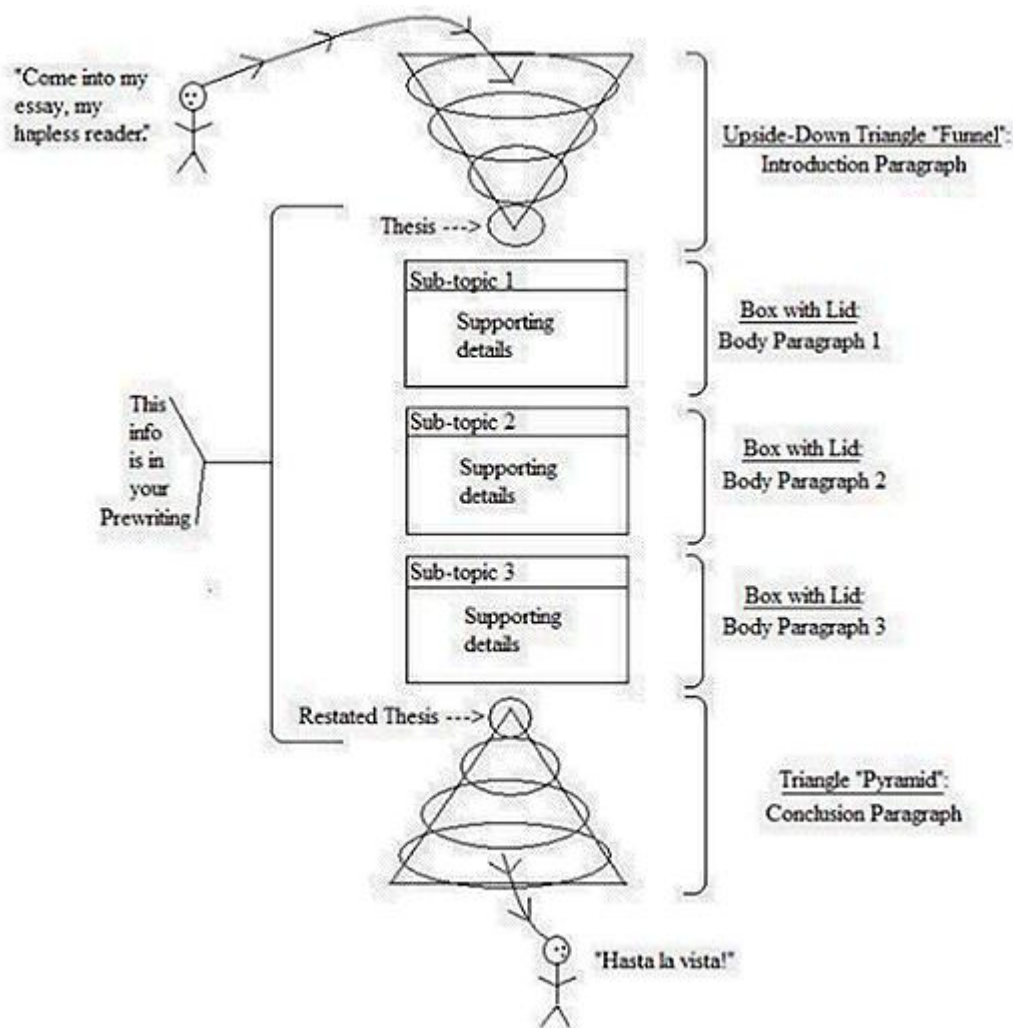


It really doesn't matter what Prewriting strategy you choose and what Arrangement strategy you use. But the most important thing is DO NOT SKIP these pre-drafting stages of the Writing Process. Unless you are a writing genius and can do the Outline or Spider Cluster IN YOUR HEAD (and believe me, I myself am NOT a writing genius), skipping these two early stages will result in you staring at a blank sheet of paper or a blank screen for way too long, going through unnecessary writer's block, and writing something that is incoherent, repetitious, off-topic, and/or often too short.

Slap down those ideas, organize them, and move on to the third stage of the Writing Process: Drafting.

Third Stage of the Writing Process: Drafting

Now that you got your ideas nicely organized into thesis, sub-topics, and supporting details, you can use your Arrangement as a checklist to write your Rough Draft, which is the end-product of the Drafting stage of the Writing Process. In the Drafting stage, you turn your Arrangement into sentences and paragraphs, following the organization in your Prewriting. At this stage, don't worry about grammar yet; that's a later step. Here's a pictorial representation of a Rough Draft of a five-paragraph essay:



Notice that your Prewriting provides all the information you'll need for 1) the LAST sentence of your Introduction Paragraph (the Thesis), 2) all of your Body Paragraphs, and 3) the first sentence of your Conclusion Paragraph (the Restated Thesis). **YOUR THESIS DOES NOT START YOUR DRAFT!** I'm sorry for shouting again, but it's true. Your thesis statement isn't the first sentence of your draft. It's the last sentence in the Introduction Paragraph, which is the first paragraph of your draft.

"So how the heck do I start my draft?" you ask.

The Introduction

Notice that the shape of the Introduction is an upside-down triangle. It's supposed to be a funnel, in which the first sentence sucks your reader into the draft, the reader spirals down the rest of the sentences of your Introduction, and he/she lands on top of your thesis statement like he/she has discovered a hidden treasure chest. There are many strategies to write that first sentence, but you **MUST** have a thesis statement ready and waiting before you write that first sentence. When you have that thesis, then you can use any of the eight strategies below to write that first sentence. For instance, my thesis is "Ice cream has great flavors." Here are possible first sentences that could lead into my thesis:

1. Historical background: You give a brief history of the topic.
Example: According to some historians, ice cream was once a dessert only eaten by the very rich in eighteenth century France.
2. Anecdote/ personal story: You give a brief personal story.
Example: When I was four years old, I had my first taste of ice cream.
3. Question: You ask a question.
Example: Why is ice cream so popular?
4. Quotation: You quote somebody.
Example: My mother always said, "Ice cream is the best invention in the world."
5. Definition: You define an important word.
Example: Ice cream is a frozen dessert made of cream, sugar, and eggs.
6. Contradiction: You state the opposite (the contradiction) of your thesis.
Example: Some people think ice cream is disgusting.
7. Fact/statistic: You give an important fact about the topic.
Example: Some ice cream prices range from \$2.00 a pint to as much as \$8.00 a pint.
8. Surprising trivia: You give a piece of trivia.
Example: Believe it or not, ice cream can be of any flavor, including jalapeño pepper and yam.

Pick one of these strategies, and write your first sentence. Write as many sentences as you need to connect logically this first sentence with your thesis statement. **Feel free to use the other strategies to make those connecting sentences if you get stuck.** But be careful not to have a tiny Introduction. A two-sentence Introduction is too short. Aim for AT LEAST four sentences.

Body Paragraphs

Follow your Arrangement closely. If you have three sub-topics with their supporting details, then you'll have three body paragraphs. Each sub-topic label is a topic sentence. The rest of the body paragraphs is made of your supporting details in as many sentences as needed. If the topic sentence is the box lid, then the rest of the sentences are the stuff in the box.

Again, be careful not to have tiny body paragraphs. Five to ten sentences per body paragraph is a good goal to reach in a short, two-page essay, depending on how long your sentences are.

Conclusion

Notice that the shape of the Conclusion is a triangle, the opposite shape of the Introduction. While the Introduction sucks in the reader, the Conclusion spits the reader out. The first sentence of the Conclusion is your thesis again, restated using different words. The rest of the sentences after this first sentence can be any, some, or all of these six concluding strategies:

1. Restate an important idea
Example: As you've probably noticed, pistachio is my favorite flavor.
2. Give advice/ call to action
Example: You should go and buy ice cream.
3. Make a prediction
Example: Ice cream will continue to be a popular dessert for a very long time.
4. Give a quotation
Example: As my mother always said, "I cannot live without ice cream!"
5. Ask a question
Example: Who doesn't like ice cream?
6. Restate part of your Introduction
Example: I've had many opportunities to eat all kinds of ice cream.

As with the other paragraphs in your Rough Draft, make sure not to have a tiny Conclusion. A two-sentence Conclusion is too short. Aim for AT LEAST four sentences.

Sample Rough Draft: "My Favorite Ice Cream Flavors"

Putting all the parts together in the Drafting stage, I have here are two examples of a Rough Draft, on the topic "ice cream," using the "Example" pattern of body paragraph development. (We'll go over the different patterns later in this handbook.) The first is a scanned image of my pencil-on-paper Rough Draft. The second is a typed-directly-on-the-screen Rough Draft.

10/14/05

(14)

My Favorite Ice Cream Flavors

When I was four years old, I had my first taste of ice cream. I think it was an odd flavor, sweetened avocado, which my mom made from scratch from an old Filipino recipe. I loved it then, and I still love avocado ice cream, although you can't find it in stores. But over the years, I've tasted many different kinds of ice cream, different brands, in many places. There's an ice cream shop not too far away from where I live, and I know the ice cream section of my local grocery store as if it were my own personal freezer. With all my years of eating ice cream, my favorite ice cream flavors remain pretty normal: They are vanilla, chocolate, and pistachio.

Some of my friends are surprised that I like vanilla. After all, I've had exotic flavors like avocado, green tea, and mango, while vanilla seems so boring in comparison. But what they call "boring," I call "basic." It's this basic quality that I love. It's in vanilla that the sweetness of ice cream in general really comes through. There's no weird flavor getting in the way. Also, the creaminess of vanilla ice cream comes through as well. No weird bits and pieces of stuff getting in the way. Gourmet people call the texture of a food in a person's mouth "mouth feel." To me, vanilla ice cream has a good mouth feel, with that creaminess. All of these qualities make vanilla ice cream the perfect foundation or companion to other foods, like muffins, blueberry cobbler, or chocolate cake. It's just good with everything.

Like most people who like ice cream, I really like chocolate ice cream. Chocolate ice cream comes in different varieties, from the really milky chocolate to the dark bitterness of dark chocolate. I prefer dark chocolate myself; the darker, the better. It's not that I'm lactose-intolerant, that I like

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dark chocolate over milk chocolate. It's just the darker it is, the more chocolatey the ice cream is: richly bittersweet, without the cloying sweetness of vanilla when I'm not in the mood for ice cream that sweet. Not surprisingly, when I'm in a chocolate ice cream mood, my favorite way to eat ice cream is with dark coffee. The bitterness of the ^{chocolate} ice cream ^{so} complements the bitterness of my coffee that sometimes I put the ice cream into my coffee mug, making myself a cheap mocha drink.

Finally, my most favorite ice cream flavor is pistachio. It's not as common a flavor as vanilla and chocolate, and sometimes I have to search for it, going to several grocery stores. But the search is worth it. The basic flavor is sweet cream, but mixed in it is a delicate pistachio flavor that gives pistachio ice cream a taste that I call "green." Pistachio ice cream doesn't have to green in color to have this green flavor, a refreshing taste that reminds me of a late spring picnic on a grassy lawn. Also, mixed in the smooth, green-tasting ice cream are pistachio nuts, giving the ice cream a sweet yet ^{into contrasting texture} dusty nuttiness. Because the green flavor is so delicate and the pistachio nuts give the ice cream a complex mouth feel, I eat pistachio ice cream all by itself. I might have a glass of water to wash it all down, but that's about it. Pistachio ice cream needs no accompaniment.

Thus, my top three ice cream flavors are vanilla, chocolate, and pistachio. Even though I've had many opportunities to eat all kinds of ice creams, I've returned to these three flavors again and again. But of the three, as you've probably noticed, pistachio is my favorite flavor. It is just that good. If you've never had it before, I recommend you should go and buy pistachio ice cream. ^{However,} If you don't like pistachio, that's okay. Any ice cream flavor is good, I believe, and ice cream will continue to be a popular dessert for a very long time. After all, who doesn't like ice cream?

My Favorite Ice Cream Flavors

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But even with my English teacher training and experience, I can spot three mistakes: In the second paragraph, I have a fragment. In the third paragraph, "chocolatey" is a misspelling. And in the fourth paragraph I'm missing a word between the words "to green". Fixing those mistakes on a Rough Draft moves me into the fourth part of the Writing Process, which is Revision and Editing. But before we go here, here's a brief note about using a word processor.

Use a Word Processor

You can draft with pen and paper or with keyboard and word processing software. But for those who compose with pen and paper, type your draft into a word processor. Word processing is a skill you'll need to know in the twenty-first century work world anyway, and Revision and Editing will be easier with an electronic version of your Rough Draft as opposed to a paper version. Trust me on this.

Also, don't forget to save your file often and to make a print-out of your word-processed Rough Draft just in case your word processor file gets lost, corrupted, or infected with an electronic virus. You wouldn't want to start your Rough Draft from scratch if something goes wrong with your file. Therein lie insanity and much anger. Trust me on this.

A brief word about file formats: Microsoft Word automatically saves its files as .doc files. Microsoft Works automatically saves its files as .wps files. Most schools and libraries run Microsoft Word, which CANNOT read .wps files, even though Microsoft makes both Word and Works. So if you don't have MS Word, then make sure you "Save As" your Rough Draft as a .rtf (Rich Text Format) file.

Okay, now that you have your Rough Draft complete, you can now move on to the fourth and last stage of the Writing Process: Revision and Editing.

Fourth Stage of the Writing Process: Revision and Editing

Now that you have a Rough Draft, you can move to the fourth and last stage of the Writing Process: Revision and Editing.

In Revision, you look again to your organized Prewriting and then back to your Rough Draft, making sure that you followed the organization of your Prewriting and aren't missing any important parts. Also, if your paper is too short, add any additional details to the body paragraph or body paragraphs. You might even add whole body paragraphs, but be careful not to repeat yourself. If you find details that digress, that is, get off the point of your thesis, then you might want to delete those details and replace them with details that do relate to your thesis.

In Editing, you correct any stylistic and grammatical errors, like improper MLA style, confused words, misspelled words, bad punctuation, sentence errors (like fragments and run-ons), and deficient transition words. In regards to MLA style, make sure you have a title that's centered, proper paragraph breaks (indenting the first sentence of each paragraph, and no additional spaces between the paragraphs), the margins are one-inch all around, the font is Times New Roman 12, and EVERYTHING is double-spaced. Run the spell-checker and grammar-checker of your word processor, but don't do this blindly. YOU need to check the electronic checkers to make sure that you agree with their suggestions or not. Consult your personal grammar source, whether it's a grammar book, a grammar website, or a person who just knows a lot of grammar.

It's also in this stage that another person reading your Rough Draft can spot errors or problems that you may have overlooked. This "second opinion" is called Peer Review, and all experienced writers submit their drafts to a Peer Review. You should, too.

By the way, if your teacher wants a cover sheet or a name header, provide it, according to his/her specifications.

Save again your file. It is now a polished draft. If you print it out and submit it to your teacher, then this draft is called the Final Draft. The Final Draft is the end product of the Writing Process. You're done!

Here's a sample Final Draft, which is a polished version of the "ice cream" Rough Draft:

Mary Student

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My Favorite Ice Cream Flavors

When I was four years old, I had my first taste of ice cream. I think it was an odd flavor, sweetened avocado, which my mom made from scratch from an old Filipino recipe. I loved it then, and I still love avocado ice cream, although you can't find it in stores. But over the years, I've tasted many different kinds of ice cream, different brands, in many places. There's an ice cream shop not too far away from where I live, and I know the ice cream section of my local grocery store as if it were my own personal freezer. With all my year of eating ice cream, my favorite ice cream flavors remain pretty normal: They are vanilla, chocolate, and pistachio.

Some of my friends are surprised that I like vanilla. After all, I've had exotic flavors like avocado, green tea, and mango, while vanilla seems so boring in comparison. But what they call "boring" I call "basic." It's this basic quality that I love. It's in vanilla that the sweetness of ice cream in general really comes through. There's no weird flavor getting in the way. Also, the creaminess of vanilla ice cream comes through as well. There are no weird bits and pieces of stuff getting in the way. Gourmet people call the texture of a food in a person's mouth "mouth feel." To me, vanilla ice cream has a good mouth feel, with that creaminess. All of these qualities make vanilla ice cream the perfect foundation or companion to other foods, like muffins, blueberry cobbler, or chocolate cake. It's just good with everything.

Like most people who like ice cream, I really like chocolate ice cream. Chocolate ice cream comes in different varieties, from the really milky chocolate to the dark bitterness of dark

chocolate. I prefer dark chocolate myself; the darker, the better. It's not that I'm lactose-intolerant, that I like dark chocolate over milk chocolate. It's just the darker it is, the more chocolaty the ice cream is: richly bittersweet, without the cloying sweetness of vanilla when I'm not in the mood for ice cream that sweet. Not surprisingly, when I'm in a chocolate ice cream mood, my favorite way to eat ice cream is with dark coffee. The bitterness of the chocolate so complements the bitterness of my coffee that sometimes I put the ice cream into my coffee mug, making myself a cheap mocha drink.

Finally, my most favorite ice cream flavor is pistachio. It's not as common a flavor as vanilla and chocolate, and sometimes I have to search for it, going to several grocery stores. But the search is worth it. The basic flavor is sweet cream, but mixed in it is a delicate pistachio flavor that gives pistachio ice cream a taste that I call "green." Pistachio ice cream doesn't have to be green in color to have this green flavor, a refreshing taste that reminds me of a late spring picnic on a grassy lawn. Also, mixed in the smooth, green-tasting ice cream are pistachio nuts, giving the ice cream a sweet yet dusty nuttiness and nice contrasting texture. Because the green flavor is so delicate and the pistachio nuts give the ice cream a complex mouth feel, I eat pistachio ice cream all by itself. I might have a glass of water to wash it all down, but that's about it. Pistachio ice cream needs no accompaniment.

Thus, my top three ice cream flavors are vanilla, chocolate, and pistachio. Even though I've had many opportunities to eat all kinds of ice cream, I've returned to these three flavors again and again. But of the three, as you've probably noticed, pistachio is my favorite flavor. It is just that good. If you've never had it before, I recommend you should go and buy pistachio ice cream. However, if you don't like pistachio, that's okay. Any ice cream flavor is good, I

believe, and ice cream will continue to be a popular dessert for a very long time. After all, who doesn't like ice cream?

So there you have it: the Writing Process – Invention/Prewriting, Arrangement, Drafting, and Revision/ Editing – from beginning to end. As you can see from the essay “My Favorite Ice Cream Flavors”, the end-product of the Writing Process is an essay that is unified, focused, coherent, well-supported with details, and error-free. If you follow the Writing Process, you should be able to get the same result.

Epilogue: Where Do You Go From Here

As you can tell, my “ice cream” essay above answered the question, “What kinds of ice cream flavors do you like?” My body paragraphs answered that question, listing and explaining in depth three kinds of ice cream flavors. But let’s say you change the question to “When did you first taste ice cream, and what was it like” or “How is ice cream made?” or “Why should I give up ice cream in order to lose weight?” You won’t have the same body paragraphs as the essay that I wrote. The body paragraphs for those other questions will be VERY different because you’ll be giving DIFFERENT answers.

This is why Invention/Prewriting is CRUCIAL. Depending on the question that you’re trying to answer and the thesis statement that you develop as a quick answer to that question, you’ll end up with material for body paragraphs that will explore in depth one question but not another. It’s only in the pre-drafting stages (Prewriting and Arrangement) where you can spot whether you’ve stuck to the question or accidentally wandered off into Digression Land, answering different questions that your essay wasn’t supposed to answer.

Different questions (also called “the essay’s purpose”) calls for different body paragraphs and, therefore, different kinds of essays. For instance:

- If the question is “What happened?” you’ll answer with a **Narrative** essay.
- If the question is “What does it look, hear, smell, feel, or taste like?” you’ll answer with a **Descriptive** essay.
- If the question is “How do I do that?” you’ll answer with a **Process** essay.
- If the question is “What are the different kinds of that person, place, thing, or idea?” you’ll answer with a **Classification/Division** essay – which my Ice Cream Flavors essay sample happens to be.
- If the question is “What examples are there of that person, place, thing, or idea?” you’ll answer with an **Exemplification** essay.
- If the question is “What causes that? What are the consequences of that?” you’ll answer with a **Cause and Effect** essay.
- If the question is “What are the similarities between these two persons, places, things, or ideas? What are the differences?” you’ll answer with a **Comparison and Contrast** essay.
- If the question is “Why is this wrong? Why is this right? What proof do I have to defend my belief?” you’ll answer with an **Argument** essay.

Many Composition textbooks explain these different kinds of essays in depth.

But no matter what kind of essay you end up writing, ALL essays follow the Writing Process. If you remember this and apply it to all of your writing needs, you’ll produce a good essay. Really. **So... happy writing!** 😊