



Illinois Wesleyan's WC | TS Presents: So, You Think You Can't Write?

What makes a “*bad*” writer?

Nothing. *There is no such thing.* You may feel that you’re a bad writer, and your feelings are valid, but here at the WC at IWU, we can assure you, you’re not! You’re actually a good writer, you just haven’t found a writing process that works for you... yet!

What makes a *good writer*, then?

They know their **writing process**:

1. Some writers like to outline
2. Some writers like to think a lot before setting pen to paper
3. Some writers write their ideas out by hand first
4. Some writers type, then edit, then type some more
5. Some writers don’t come up with an introduction or conclusion until they’ve written the body of their paper

So, the first step is to determine your **writing process**:

- Think about what sorts of things you do when you’re *enjoying writing*, even if it’s just posting on social media.
- Consider your *setting*: where is your best area in which to write? Do you need noise? Silence? Other people around?
- Determine what *topics* you like writing about and styles you enjoy writing in.
- Consider how you *start writing*: are you an outliner? A word dumper? A thinker?

Once you know what your **writing process** is, you can start the **drafting stage**:

For some, it will be **outlining**. The easiest way to begin an outline is to follow the **MEAL plan** for your body paragraphs:

- This plan means starting with a MAIN IDEA, looking for EVIDENCE to support that MAIN IDEA, ANALYZING how that EVIDENCE supports the MAIN IDEA and then LINKING to your next idea or to your THESIS¹

You also should outline your introduction and conclusion:

- The introduction should give sufficient BACKGROUND to clue readers into what you’re writing about and why and then end with a strong THESIS STATEMENT.

¹ We have a full handout on the MEAL plan as well as several handouts on outlines on the “[resources](#)” section of our website.

- The conclusion, on the other hand, should open with a REPHRASING of your thesis statement and provide enough SUMMARY of your paper to remind your readers of important points.

For some it will be a **word dump** (part 1):

1. Create a document or write by hand *everything you know about the subject*—all your thoughts, feelings, reactions.
2. Then, look at those ideas to find common *themes*.
3. The common themes can become your *topics* for each body paragraph and will also inform your *thesis statement*.

For some it will involve *thinking* a lot about their idea first.

- What would you want to know more about?
- What do you think of when you think of this topic?
- What appeals or does not appeal to you about your ideas?
 - Then, once they can answer these questions, they’ll move into the outlining or word dump phases.

Once you’ve completed the **drafting stage**, you can move to the **writing stage**:

Style

Now, you’ll have to think about some of the other ideas we’ve mentioned including workspace setting and style. Finding the answers to these questions will help you find the best place in which to compose.

- Do you need noise to work?
- Do you need to have access to things like a library as you work?
- What sorts of seating do you need in which to write?

Then you can choose your *writing style*:

Style	Description	Positives	Negatives	Best for ²
<i>Word Dump Part 2</i>	Allows you to dump in ideas about your themes that you came up with in drafting and then helps you to start formulating paragraphs.	You’ll get a lot of writing done quickly It flows naturally from Word Dump Part 1	You might not have all your evidence and will have to go back later to incorporate it You’ll have a backup file	Writers who have to start with writing to keep on task, not writers who need an outline or to organize their thoughts before

² Note that while these styles do have some writers in common, there are many who might use them even if they’re not described under the “best for” section.

<i>Writing by Hand</i>	Allows you to engage with different parts of your brain as you write. Encourages you to not get distracted by other aps/ websites on your computer.	You'll get a lot of writing done in one setting You'll encounter minimal electronic distractions	You may end up with writer's cramp You won't have a backup file	Writers who are easily distracted by aps/ websites; writers who feel overwhelmed by screens
<i>Editing as You Write</i>	Allows you to write and edit at the same time, helping you avoid small mistakes that you might not otherwise catch before submitting your final draft.	This style is good for shorter assignments Helps you complete those on a tighter deadline	It might interrupt your creative process too much as editing takes a different track than writing	Writers who don't like to write multiple drafts (maybe those who think before they write)

Once you've completed the **writing stage**, you can move to the **editing stage**. As we've shown, there is no one "write" way to write, but we do have a few suggestions and tips from the pros for getting the most out of this final stage of the writing process:

1. Read your thesis and topic sentences: To get a better understanding of whether or not your paper is flowing well, read your thesis statement and then each of your topic sentences in turn.
 - Do they share the overall summary of your paper?
 - Do they connect to one another?
 - Do they make sense?
2. Use Microsoft Word (free for students, staff, and faculty at IWU through ITS) instead of Google Docs or Pages.
 - Microsoft word catches more errors--and offers a better explanation of why they are errors--than either Google or Pages.
 - A note of caution, though, this strategy should be paired with other editing strategies for the strongest essay possible. It is not enough to just run spell check. YOU must be your own editor.
3. Read your essay backwards.
 - Read your essay starting with the last sentence (or paragraph, up to you!) to see how well it flows, is organized, and to catch errors in grammar/ style that you might not otherwise notice.
 - Looking at things from a new perspective is always a good idea!

If you answered "no" to any of these questions listed under step 1, edit the topic sentence (and paragraph) to connect to your thesis; you'll have a better flow.

4. Read your essay out loud.

- We often hear things that we don't see. Reading a text out loud helps us gain a broader familiarity with how it sounds to our audience. It also helps us catch mistakes we might not otherwise notice.
- The writing center tutors are more than happy to read your essays aloud to you which brings us to Step 5...

5. Go to the writing center.

- Even if you think you are the best writer since Shakespeare, you can always benefit from a second opinion. Writing tutors are trained to help with every stage of the writing process including drafting, writing, and editing.
- We've also struggled with writing ourselves at some point or another and may have tips you—and this presentation—never considered.