



WRITING CENTER

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The Writing Center and Academic Resource Center logo

THE WRITING PROCESS

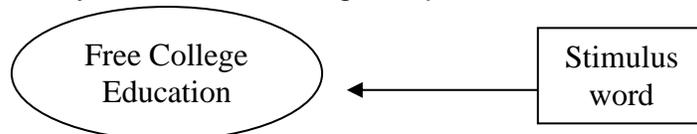
There are four principal steps to the writing process: Prewriting, Drafting, Revising and Editing.

PREWRITING:

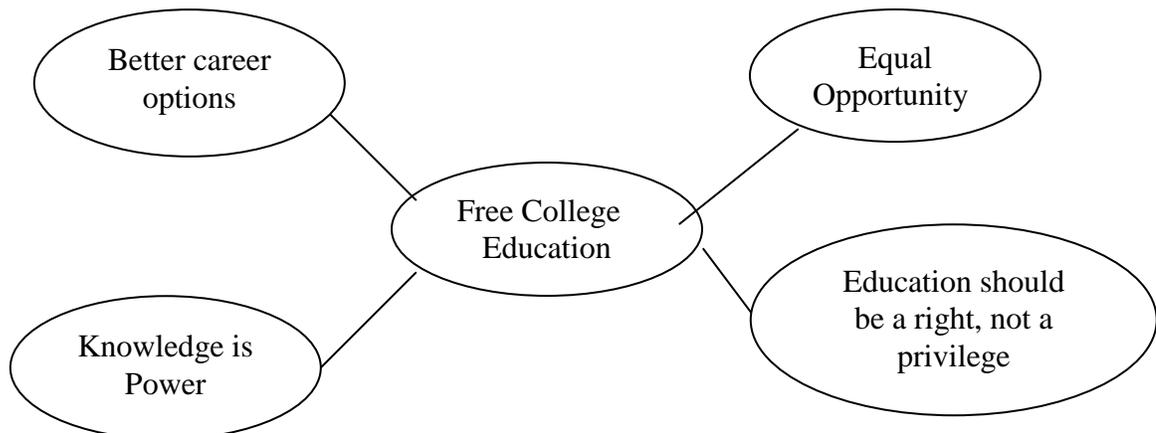
We should get one thing straight right away: If you sit around waiting for inspiration before you write, you may never get anything written. You see, inspiration does not occur often enough for writers to depend on it. In fact, inspiration occurs so rarely that writers must develop other means for getting their ideas. Collectively, the procedures for coming up with ideas in the absence of inspiration are called *prewriting*. The term *prewriting* is used because these procedures come before writing the first draft. Some others may also call these procedures *invention*.

The following are different prewriting options:

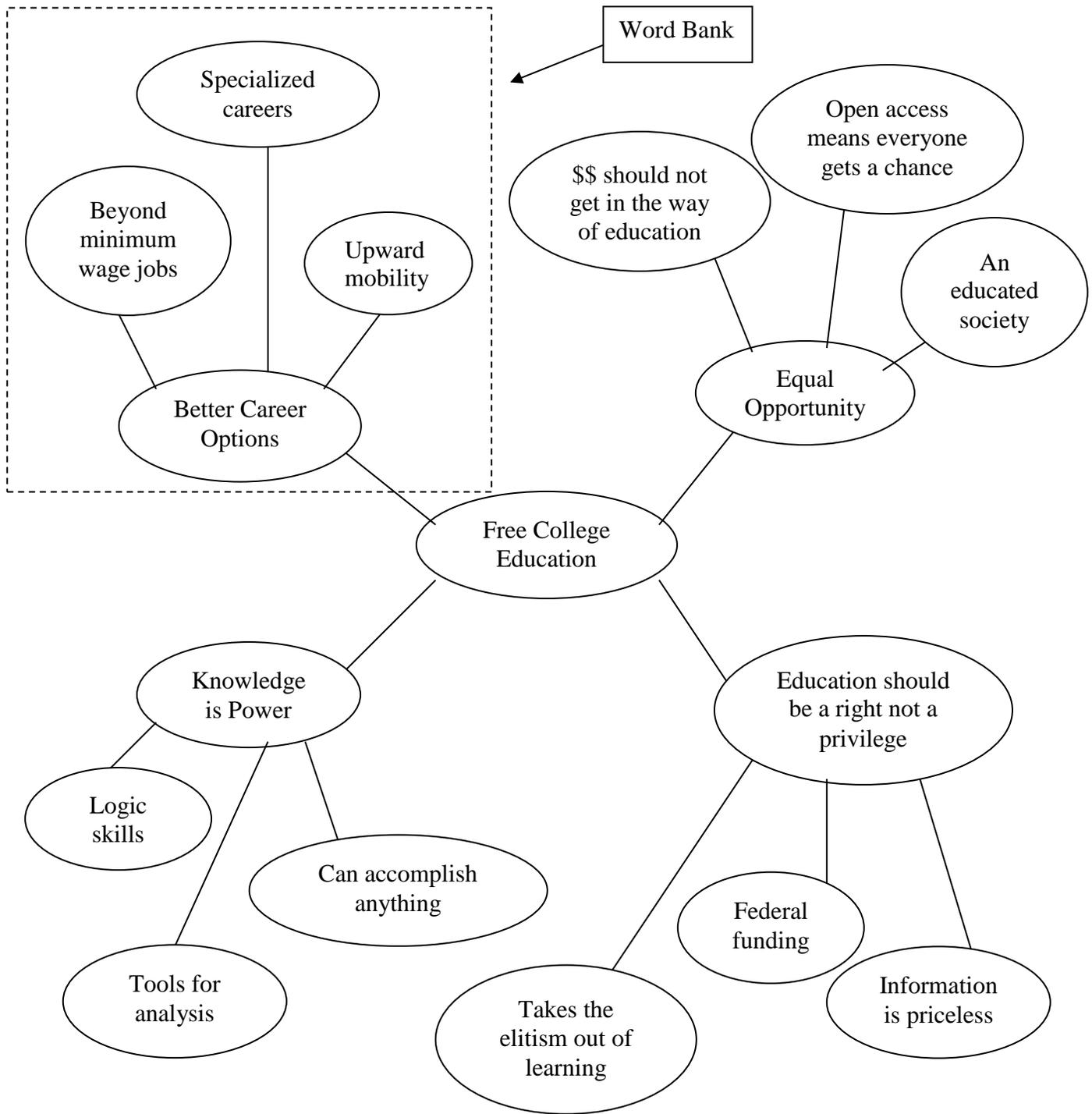
1. **FREEWRITING**: Allows you to generate thoughts that will help you formulate ideas to write about. Put your pen to the paper, and begin to write. Do not stop to think, organize, critique, etc. – Just Write! Write as fast as you can, the faster the better.
2. **CLUSTERING**: This is a good visual aid that shows the connection between thoughts and allows patterns to be seen. In the center of your page, write the main idea or *stimulus word* that you are considering and put a circle around it.



As thoughts about this subject enter your mind, write them down, draw a circle around each and connect the circles.



Continue expanding your thoughts as much as possible.



Continue until you cannot think of anything else to write. When you think you are done, look at what you have written and decide if there is one particular subject or *word bank* that you think you will be able to write a draft about. For instance, maybe you think the *word bank*, "Better Career Options" and the connecting circles are the most interesting and contain the most to write about.

POINTS TO PONDER:

- Do you think you could write an essay based on the ideas clustered here?
- Can you draw additional links between concepts?
- Are there ideas listed above that you'd reject as irrelevant or too much to deal with?
- Can you think of some ideas (or a whole set of ideas) that should have been included but weren't?
- What about the *negative aspects* of free college education? Should they be included in this essay?
- Can you come up with a *Thesis Statement* that would be appropriate for an essay based on this clustering of ideas?

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3. **LISTING**: This is like a shopping list of phrases. On your paper, write down any thought or feeling that comes to mind about a particular topic. This is similar to freewriting in that you should not censor yourself – Just write! This process will help you get all of those mixed up thoughts in your head on paper, so you can sift through them afterwards. Here's an example of a list on the topic "How I felt when I failed my midterm:"

was disappointed
felt defeated
also inspired to do better next time
embarrassed to tell anybody
wanted to blame the teacher
got teased by my brother, the A student
afraid I wouldn't pass the class
went to The Writing Center for extra help

Once you are done, go through the list, choose the ideas that work for you, and cross off the ideas that do not. You may also continue to write ideas down as you go through this process. When you feel you are done, you can go ahead and number the ideas that are left in the order you think they should appear in your draft. This will give you an informal outline that will help in the next step of the writing process, drafting.

4. **BRAINSTORMING**: Ask yourself questions about your topic. *Who, what, when, where, why* and *how* are good questions to start with.

Whose fault is the F?
What happened exactly?
When did I stop studying?/Why did I stop studying?
Where can I go from here?
Why do I think the teacher gave me an F?
How can I improve my grade?

These questions will be helpful in your drafting stage if you are stuck trying to find more to write about. If you are trying to expand your essay but you are unable to come up with another important topic to discuss, consider asking yourself questions like these to generate more ideas.

Exercise:

Pick a topic of your own or one that your instructor has given you, and, for that topic, choose two of the four prewriting techniques to practice. Each prewrite should be at least a page in length.

DRAFTING:

Once writers feel they have generated enough ideas during prewriting to serve as a departure point, they make their first attempt at getting those ideas down. This part of the writing process is *drafting*. Typically, the first draft is very rough, which is why it so often is called the *rough draft*. The rough draft provides raw material that can be shaped and refined in the next stages of the writing process.

Perhaps you know what you want to say but you do not know how to say it in your draft. Here are a few tips to get you started:

- Think about your audience. Who are you telling this information to?
- Speak your thoughts into a tape recorder. Sometimes, we don't write what we want to say. Therefore, speaking into a tape recorder, saying what you want to say and then transcribing your thoughts will help you with word structure.
- Set small goals for yourself. At the beginning of your project, plan to only prewrite. The next time you sit down to work on it, plan on writing an informal outline. Next, plan to write a draft of your introduction and on and on. Breaking the project down into smaller steps makes it less overwhelming.
- Sometimes, we get writer's block because we think we have to write the introduction and thesis statement before we can move on. Remember, you can change the introduction and thesis as you get further along in your paper.
- If you are really stuck, you can write the introduction and thesis last. They might be easier to write once you have the rest of the draft.
- This is only a first draft; you don't need to censor your thoughts. Later on, you will be able to fix whatever needs fixing.

REVISING:

Revising calls on the writer to take the raw material of the draft and rework it to get it in shape for the reader. This reworking is a time-consuming, difficult part of the process. It requires the writer to refine the content so that it is clear, so that points are adequately supported, and so that ideas are expressed in the best way possible and in the best order possible. This step is focused on the content of your draft; spelling, grammar and punctuation will come in the final stage of the writing process.

- Once you have completed your first draft, the first step in revising is to walk away and let the paper sit. We often miss our own mistakes because we think we see something that is not there. Walking away and coming back later allows you to read your paper with a fresh perspective.

- Read your draft out loud to yourself. Our ears can catch problem areas that our eyes cannot.
- After fully examining your draft, identify at least two corrections that will make your draft better.
- Write a second draft without looking at your first draft. This is an effective way of revising because usually you remember the best parts, forget the worst parts, and add new ideas.

EDITING:

Experienced readers will expect your writing to be free of errors. Therefore, you have a responsibility to find and eliminate mistakes so that they do not distract or annoy your reader. Many writers make the mistake of hunting for errors too soon, before they have revised for the larger concerns of content and effective expression. Editing should really be saved for the end of the process.

- The computer is an excellent tool for the editing stage. If you have already typed your essay on the computer, then you will see that certain words, phrases and sentences are underlined either in red or green. Red indicates a spelling or lexical (the meaning of a word) error. Green indicates a grammatical, punctuation or sentence structure error.
- Like the revising stage, reading your paper aloud will help you catch structural errors that may otherwise be missed.
- Edit more than once! After you have completely edited your paper, walk away and return some time later to reedit. Sometimes, we make careless errors because we **think** we wrote it correctly and have actually made an obvious mistake.
- Use an Editing Checklist:
 - ❑ Have you read your work aloud to listen for problems?
 - ❑ Did you check every possible misspelling in a dictionary or with a computer spell checker?
 - ❑ Make sure every comma is being used correctly (comma splices and run-ons).
 - ❑ Do you have any sentence fragments?
 - ❑ Are you using verbs correctly?
 - ❑ Did you check your use of pronouns?
 - ❑ Did you check your use of modifiers?
 - ❑ Are you confident your punctuation is used correctly?
 - ❑ Are your capital letters correct?

This handout is based on the following text:

Fine Clouse, Barbara. Working it Out: A Troubleshooting Guide for Writers. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1997.

For further reference, see the following books:

McDonald, Stephen, and William Salomone. In Brief: A Handbook for Writers. Belmont/Wadsworth, 2000. 3-34.

Reid, Stephen. The Prentice Hall Guide for College Writers. 2nd ed. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1992. 2-43.

All of the above texts are available in The Writing Center.

Revised. 07/25/18