



# Success Center Tips for Writing Assignment/Essay Preparation

## Exploring a Writing Assignment Topic

If the topic is assigned:

- What questions does the assignment ask?
- What are your short answers to each question?
- What are your ideas for lengthening your answers?

If the topic is your choice:

- What do you want your writing to accomplish?
- Who is your audience? Are they likely to hold the same or different views?
- What type of voice would appeal to this audience: informal, persuasive, entertaining?
- What is your rhetorical stance (position) on the topic? What factors influenced your position?

## Invention Strategies

With both assigned and student selected topics, try the following invention methods for generating ideas that will lead to a thesis statement and supporting details for the paper:

**Freewriting**—writing non-stop in complete sentences without editing spelling or grammar

**Brainstorming**—jotting down key words and phrases as they enter the writer’s mind

**Looping**—circling the central idea of successive freewrites in which one freewrite forms the basis for the next writing loop until the writer finds a clear stance on the topic

**Clustering**—writing and circling the topic in the center of the paper and repeating the process to develop a visual diagram of subtopics

**Questioning**—applying journalist questions: Who? What? Where? When? Why? How?

**Outlining**—classifies and divides information to show the main points and supporting ideas and organizes them according to Roman numerals, and lettered or numbered subpoints.

## Developing a Working Thesis

To give a paper focus, writers compose a thesis sentence to express a clear, committed position about a belief they hold or an insight they have on a paper topic. A strong thesis statement creates tension or makes a significant point to reflect the writer’s purpose; a weak thesis merely announces the topic or purpose, says the obvious, or is too vague. Consider the following examples of weak and strong thesis statements as you compose a thesis statement for your own paper.

### *Weak thesis statements:*

William Zinsser’s article “Clutter” is humorous. (**Too general**)

The purpose of my paper is to discuss why William Zinsser’s article “Clutter” is an exaggerated discussion about eliminating wordiness from essays. (**An announcement**)

**Strong thesis statement:**

William Zinsser’s article “Clutter” presents exaggerated examples to help students eliminate wordiness from their essays; however, Zinsser’s use of sarcasm and outdated references may prevent some students from comprehending the author’s viewpoint and appreciating his sense of humor. **(Creates tension, makes a significant point, and presents the writer’s purpose)**

**Preparing an Essay**

Every essay needs a beginning, middle, and ending.

- The beginning, or introduction, hooks the reader’s attention and states the thesis (main idea)
- The middle, or body, develops the thesis in a series of paragraphs—each making a point supported by specific details.
- The ending, or conclusion, gives readers a sense of completion, often by offering a final comment on the thesis.

The **purposes** for writing are often specified in the instructor’s wording of the assignment; however, some terms, such as *comment*, *consider*, and *discuss* do not point to a specific purpose. **Writers should decide upon a purpose that fits the assignment even when one is not specified.** Some purposes for writing are explained in the list below. What will be your central purpose as you write your paper?

Words in the Assignment	Purpose	Writer Provides...
<i>classify, illustrate, report, and survey</i>	Inform	Background knowledge about the topic
<i>analyze, compare, explain, and reflect</i>	Interpret	Writing that produces understanding
<i>agree, assess, defend, and refute</i>	Persuade	Arguments on a debatable point that try to change someone’s point of view.

Essays use **rhetorical methods** including narration, description, process, analysis, example, cause and effect, comparison and contrast, analogy, classification, definition, and explanation to add supporting details to back major points.

- Narration tells a story.
- Description gives specific detail.
- Process outlines a series of events.
- Analysis interprets information.
- Example uses instances to support ideas.
- Cause and effect explains the reason behind an event and its consequences.
- Comparison and contrast gives similarities and differences between two things point by point or subject by subject.
- Analogy makes a connection between ideas.
- Classification separates information into different parts.
- Definition explains the meaning of something.
- Explanation gives background information.