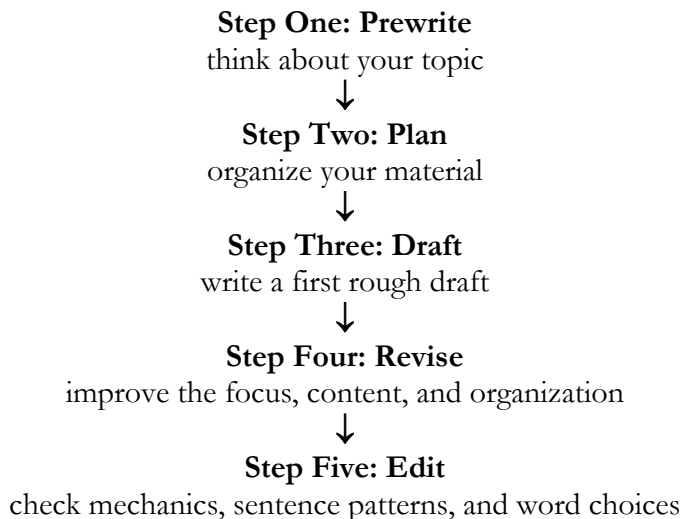


# Preparing to Write

It has been said that a journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step. Essay writing is no different: It begins with the first sentence. However, rather than thinking of writing as a series of sentences, you should think of it as a process involving five steps.



## Step One: Prewrite

Getting started is usually the hardest part of writing for most writers. Many experienced writers use three common techniques to help them generate ideas: brainstorming, clustering, and freewriting. Regardless of which method you choose, the important thing to remember is you are generating ideas, not a perfect essay. So forget worrying about spelling, punctuation, and grammar. When prewriting, you concentrate only on ideas.

### Method 1: Brainstorming

Brainstorming is useful for quick and spontaneous generation of a variety of ideas on a subject. You concentrate on writing down as many ideas as quickly as possible. Your brainstorming list can contain words, phrases, and sentences. Some writers even include questions as they follow the steps below:

1. Start with a general topic.
2. Write down whatever comes into your head for 5-10 minutes.
3. Go back and group together associated items.
4. Eliminate items not associated with any other words.

The example below illustrates brainstorming on the general subject of *Topnotch University*.

Topic: Topnotch University

hectic  
exams  
study all the time  
lots of people at Topnotch  
carefree people at Topnotch  
stressed out people at Topnotch  
one cafeteria at Topnotch  
several cafeterias at Topnotch  
McDonalds at Topnotch  
Class at 8:00

mobiles ringing  
lecture theatres  
seminar rooms  
good and bad teachers  
cleanliness  
not enough parking spaces  
lots of people at Topnotch  
friends at Topnotch University  
Arabic vs. English  
non--Arabs can't understand

After making a list, the author grouped similar items and eliminated ideas that did not relate to any category.

Classes  
student-teacher ratio  
language used

Students  
number  
personality

Cafeterias  
foods  
services

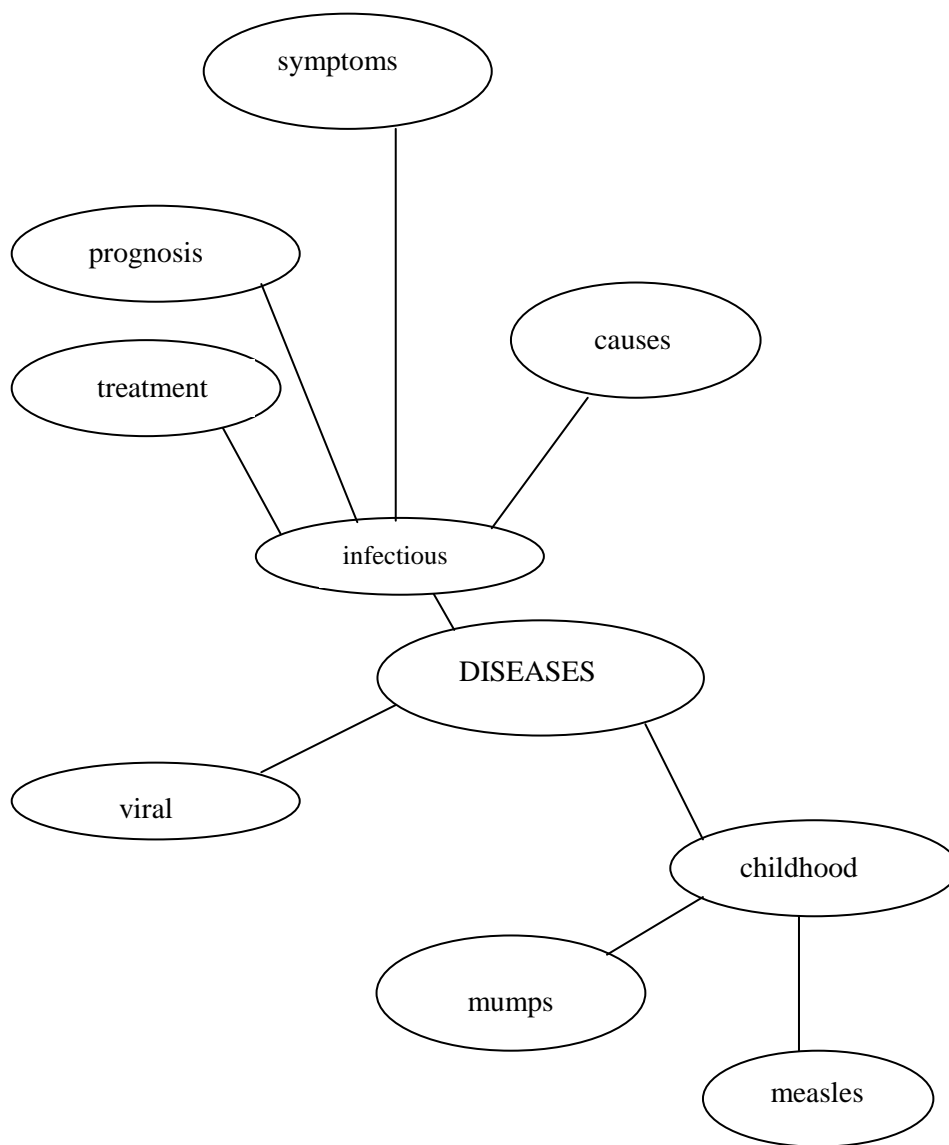
**Directions:** Choose one of the following general topics to brainstorm ideas for: *body systems, shopping, or computers*. After you have brainstormed the topic, group similar ideas. Be sure to eliminate ones that do not relate to any category.

## Method 2: Clustering

Clustering is a visual method of generating ideas. You draw circles and lines to indicate relationships between ideas. When clustering, follow the steps below.

1. Write your general topic in the center of the page, and draw a circle around it.
2. As you think of ideas related to your general topic, write them in circles located around your general topic.
3. Use lines to connect the circled main points (ideas) to the circled general topic.
4. Continue writing and encircling sub-points related to your main points.
5. Use lines to connect the circled sub-points to the circled main points.
6. Choose the topic with the most circles connected to it.

The example on the next page illustrates clustering on the general topic *diseases*.



### Method 3: Freewriting

Freewriting is a third technique for generating ideas. To freewrite, follow the steps below. Write your topic at the top of the page.

1. Begin writing.
2. Write as fast as you can for 10 minutes.
3. Do not stop writing even if your mind wanders. Just allow your ideas to flow.
4. If your mind goes blank, write "I can't think of anything to write, I can't think of anything to write." Continue writing this until a new idea comes into mind.
5. Do not try to write perfectly. Mistakes are fine. You will have time to edit when you actually write your paper.
6. After 10 minutes, read your freewriting to see if there is an idea that you can develop into an essay.

Read the freewriting sample below on the topic of *diseases*.

As a doctor, I'll treat patients with diseases. I can't think of anything to write. I can't think of anything to write. A disease has causes, symptoms and treatments. At least most diseases do. AIDS doesn't. At least not yet. I read an article in a newspaper about a study. I think it was done in the Netherlands or France. These people studied persons with AIDS. The ones who didn't use drugs didn't contract AIDS as much as people who did. I wonder if drugs affect immune systems, or what I know chemotherapy affects systems. That's why some people with cancer refuse chemotherapy. I saw on television about a woman who has cancer. She refused to undergo chemotherapy. Instead she is treating herself with lots of vitamins and healthy foods. This is sort of like some doctor in the United States who had cancer, too. He didn't just take vitamins and change his diet; he also watched lots of funny movies. He said laughing helped him get better and beat cancer.

As you can see, the author's mind wandered as new topics came into it. In the paragraph above, there are several different ideas that could be developed into essays.

## **Step Two: Plan**

Prewriting generates ideas for writing. Once you have your idea, you are ready to plan. At this stage, your goal is organizing your ideas. An informal outline will aid you in organizing your thoughts as you plan your essay. You can use this outline as a guide that you refer to while you are composing.

Below is an example of an outline based on ideas from brainstorming the topic Kuwait University. Notice that the three main points in this outline are the same three categories determined in the brainstorming exercise.

### ***I.* Introduction**

Thesis: Classes, students, and cafeterias are three important aspects that can be used to describe Topnotch University.

### ***II.* Classes**

- A. Student-Teacher Ratio
- B. Language Used

### ***III.* Students**

- A. Number
- B. Personality

### ***IV.* Cafeteria**

- A. Foods
- B. Service

### ***V.* Conclusion**