

Prewriting



Anything you do before you start writing is prewriting. You should always start your writing process by making sure you understand the assignment. Other activities you may do in this stage are brainstorming, choosing a focus, and outlining.

Understand the assignment

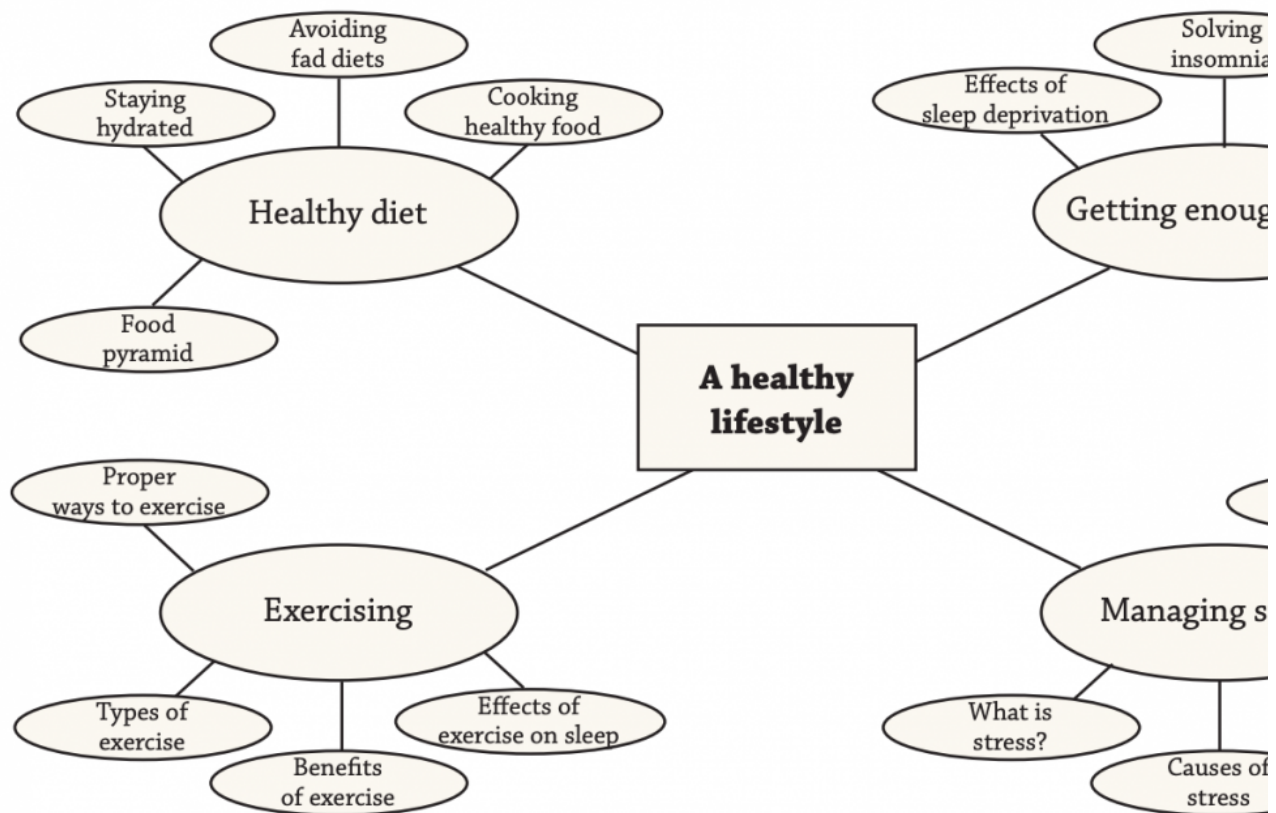
Make sure that you understand the requirements of the task. If there is a specific prompt you are supposed to use, make sure your writing addresses the prompt. Always clarify any requirements that you do not understand with your teacher.

Brainstorm

Sometimes you are given a specific prompt (e.g., Should colleges use online textbooks?), but sometimes you can choose your topic. If you can choose your topic, then brainstorming can help you generate ideas to write about.

There are many methods you can use for brainstorming.

- Discuss the topic with a partner - This is a good way to get your brain engaged. You may want to try recording the conversation so you can type up your ideas after.
- Do a free write - Open a new document or find a fresh piece of paper. Then just start writing what you are thinking. It doesn't matter at this point how related it is to the topic! You can then look through and underline what is useful or delete anything that is not.
- Make a list of ideas - Start making a list of every word or phrase that comes to your mind when you read the prompt. Do not worry about writing something that is not relevant. You can go through after and mark what you like best.
- Make an idea map (also known as an idea web) - An idea map starts with a word or phrase at the center. Draw lines out from that phrase to connect to related words and phrases. This will end with an image similar to a spider web that gives you an idea of connections and relationships you see between your ideas.
- Do a search on Google - Often one of the early steps in brainstorming is to do an internet search to see what other people have to say about the topic.



Choose a focus

If your topic is too broad, you need to narrow the topic down to a more specific focus.

For example, if you choose to write about the problems students face, you will probably need to focus on a few specific types of problems (e.g., financial problems). Repeating a brainstorming activity with a broad topic may help you choose your focus.

If you don't have a narrow focus, your writing may end up too general as you try to "cover" the entire topic. Without specific details and examples in your writing, your reader will not be able to understand your main idea clearly.

Tip: Choosing a Focus

It's often best to choose a topic you are most excited about. Drafted essays mean that you will spend weeks working on the same writing. This means you want to avoid getting tired of your topic over the weeks of working on it. Even a timed writing assignment will be easier to write if you start by choosing something you are invested in.

Being invested in a topic looks different for everyone. Here are some examples of what it might look like for different students writing about a process:

- I love sports. I will write about the process of the World Cup. I will explain how the location of the event is decided, how teams are selected, and how the countries can advance or be eliminated.
- My favorite thing to talk about is K-Pop! I will write about the process that idols and groups follow to become part of the industry. I will explain the audition, trainee, and debut steps.
- It is important to me to be healthy while I'm living in the United States. I will write about the process of maintaining a healthy diet as a student. I will explain the process of meal planning and preparing lunches for the week.
- I think that influencers on social media are interesting. I will write my essay about how to become an influencer. I will explain the process of choosing a focus for your account, building an audience, and promoting brands.

Outline

Making an outline is a prewriting activity you should do for everything you write. An outline is a plan that will make your essay easier to write and understand.

Not all outlines are the same. If you are writing a timed essay, your outline will be very simple. If you are writing a drafted essay, your outline may be more detailed.

To create your outline, think about the question that your essay answers (e.g., why is exercise important?). Answer the question. The supporting points in your answer will become your topic sentences (abbreviated TS). Write the main idea of your essay, your thesis (abbreviated TH), by summarizing your supporting points into one sentence.

The following outline is a simple outline for the example essay in this chapter. Look at the outline. How does it show the writer's plan to answer the question why is exercise important?

Example

I. Introduction

TH: Exercise is essential because it improves overall physical and mental health.

II. Body Paragraph 1

TS: Because it makes your body healthier, exercise is extremely important.

III. Body Paragraph 2

TS: Another compelling reason that exercise is crucial is that it improves mental health.

The basic outlines you have practiced in this section are the type of outline you can use when you are writing a timed essay (like the independent task on the TOEFL). Other essays may require a more detailed outline.

The amount of detail required in the outline depends on the purpose of the essay as well as the purpose of your outline. Your teacher may ask you for a very detailed outline of your essays so that you can show your whole plan. When you need to make an outline, be sure to ask how much detail your teacher expects you to include.

The following outline is a detailed outline for an example essay you will see later in this chapter.

Example

I. Introduction

Hook: It can be difficult to find time for exercise.

TH: Exercise is essential because it improves overall physical and mental health.

II. Body Paragraph 1

TS: Because it makes your body healthier, exercise is extremely important.

SS: Exercise > stronger muscles

EX: crunches, squats, push-ups

Exercise > lower heart rate

Exercise > lower blood pressure

CS: These are just some of the incredible health benefits of exercise.

III. Body Paragraph 2

TS: Another compelling reason that exercise is crucial is that it improves your mental health.

SS: Exercise is the healthiest way to deal with stress (which affects mental health)

Exercise > balanced chemicals

EX: Endorphins

Exercise > clear thoughts

More oxygen

CS: If you watch how you feel when you exercise, you will notice that your mood and mental clarity improve.

IV. Conclusion

TH: The mental and physical health benefits of exercise prove that exercise is absolutely crucial for our bodies.

Exercises

Exercise 1: Choose a focus

Choose a more specific topic for each general essay topic.

1. General topic: America vs. Japan
 1. Specific topic:
2. General topic: Hobbies
 1. Specific topic:
3. General topic: Robots
 1. Specific topic:

Exercise 2: Identify topic sentences and thesis statements

Which sentences are the topic sentences? Which sentence is the thesis? Label them TH or TS.

1. _____ Taco Bell is a popular place for students to eat on campus because it is healthy.
2. _____ Taco Bell is both inexpensive and healthy which makes it a popular restaurant on campus.
3. _____ Because of its inexpensive menu items, many students on campus choose to eat at Taco Bell.

Exercise 3: Evaluate and revise outlines

Evaluate and revise each of the outlines. Make sure the topic sentences support the thesis.

1. Prompt: What are some advantages of living in the city?
 1. TH: Living in the city makes it easier to get medical help and go to school.
 2. TS: Many people know that it is nice to live in the city.
 3. TS: A lot of teachers live in major cities.
2. Prompt: How has technology changed our lives?
 1. TH: Technology has many advantages in our modern lives.
 2. TS: Technology has made our modern lives easier.
 3. TS: Unfortunately, technology has also made our modern lives busier.
3. Prompt: Should schools require students to take tests?
 1. TH: Many students take tests.
 2. TS: Tests should be required because they hold students accountable for learning.
 3. TS: Another reason tests should be required is that they help measure improvement.
4. Prompt: What animals make the best kind of pet?
 1. TH: Dogs make the best pet because their owners are happier and healthier.
 2. TS: Having a pet makes people happy.
 3. TS: Dogs are very healthy pets.

Exercise 4: Create an outline

Use the templates below to create a basic outline to answer the prompt. Take 1-2 minutes to brainstorm after you read each prompt.

1. Prompt: What place in your country would you recommend that visitors see?

1. TH:

2. TS:

3. TS:

2. Prompt: What makes the ELC a good place to learn English?

1. TH:

2. TS:

3. TS:

3. Prompt: What is the best type of housing for students?

1. TH:

2. TS:

3. TS:



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