

The 4-Step Writing Process: From Brainstorming to Editing

Every writer follows his or her own writing process. Often the process is a routine that comes naturally and is not a step-by-step guide to which writers refer. Being conscious of your own writing process is especially helpful when you find yourself struggling with a particularly tricky piece. Here are five steps towards creating or identifying your personal writing process.

1. Prewriting

You're ready to start writing. So why has that blank page been staring back at you for the past hour? Prewriting identifies everything you need to do before you sit down to start your rough draft.

- Find Your Idea
- Ideas are all around you. You might draw inspiration from a routine, an everyday situation or a childhood memory. Alternatively, keep a notebook specifically devoted to catching your ideas as they come to you. Your own imagination is the only limit to finding your source of inspiration.
- Build On Your Idea
- Two of the most popular methods of fleshing out your idea are free writing and brainstorming. Free writing means writing every idea that comes into your head. Do not stop to edit your mistakes, just let the ideas flow. Or, try brainstorming. If you're on a computer, try a manual process first to help you visualize your narrative: write your idea in the center of the page and work outwards in all of the different directions you can take your story.
- Plan and Structure
- Piecing the puzzle together comes next. It's time to sort through your ideas and choose which ones you will use to form your story. Make sure you keep your notes even after your book is published – there may be the seeds for your next story as well.

2. Writing

Now you have your plan and you're ready to start writing. Remember, this is your first rough draft. Forget about word count and grammar. Don't worry if you stray off topic in places; even the greatest writers produce multiple drafts before they produce their finished manuscript. Think of this stage as a free writing exercise, just with more direction. Identify the best time and location to write and eliminate potential distractions. Make writing a regular part of your day.

3. Revision

Your story can change a great deal during this stage. When revising their work, many writers naturally adopt the A.R.R.R. approach:

- Add: The average novel has between 60,000 and 100,000 words. Does your book have enough words to be considered a novel? Have you given your readers all the information they need to make sense of your story? If not, go back to your notebook that you kept for additional scenes and any additional details.
- Rearrange: Consider the flow, pacing and sequencing of your story. Would the plot be better served if some of the events occur in a different order?
- Remove: After making additions to your story, how is your word count now? Are your readers experiencing information overload? You may need to eliminate passages that don't quite fit.
- Replace: The most effective way to revise your work is to ask for a second opinion. Do you need more vivid details to help clarify your work? Is one scene contradicting another? Ask friends or fellow writers to take a look and give you feedback, and if something isn't working rewrite it and replace it.

4. Editing

You have overhauled your story. It's time to fine tune your manuscript line by line. Check for repetition, clarity, grammar, spelling and punctuation. Editing is an extremely detailed process and its best when performed by a professional. You can hire your own editor or utilized the editing services available through LifeRich Publishing. Nobody wants to read a book that is full of mistakes, and they certainly won't buy a book that is riddled with them.

Revision Strategy #1: Reverse Outlining

A completed reverse outline helps you to get a clear view of several key aspects of your paper. You can use it to determine if:

- every paragraph relates directly to the topic of the paper.
- the purpose each paragraph serves in proving the paper's thesis is clear.
- each body paragraph is focused on one (and only one) main topic.
- the paragraphs are organized to effectively prove your thesis.
- your thesis needs to be revised to better reflect the actual content of the ideas and relevant evidence as they are developed throughout the body paragraphs.

Creating a Reverse Outline – Method 1:

1. On a clean copy of your paper, in the left-hand margin, write down the topic of each paragraph. Use as few words as possible and be sure to write what the topic actually is, not what you intended it to be.
2. In the right-hand margin, write down how the paragraph topic (identified on the left) helps to prove your thesis. If you have a hard time seeing how it helps then it may be information you don't need.
-> Be brief, particularly when rereading your own work. If you can't complete each step in 5-10 words, the paragraph probably needs to be revised. You should be able to summarize the topic and the manner of support quickly; if you can't, revise the paragraph until you can.

Creating a Reverse Outline – Method 2:

A method 2 reverse outline, when finished, will look just like a traditional outline.

1. Number each paragraph of your paper.
2. On a separate sheet of paper, write #1 and the main idea and supporting points of that first paragraph.
3. Continue this process through the second paragraph and all remaining paragraphs in the paper.

Editing Strategy #1: Ctrl -F

In both Microsoft Word and Openoffice Writer the key combination "Ctrl -f" brings up a text search box that can be a powerful editing tool. You can use it to do the following:

1. Find every place you have used the word "**this.**" Check to make sure the word "this" isn't standing alone.
Ex. This shows that Siddhartha is experiencing the effects of karma. (This is standing alone, could refer to anything.)

Ex. This painful event shows that Siddhartha is experiencing the effects of karma. (This is defined; your reader knows what you are referring to.)

2. Make certain you have not used personal pronouns in your essay. **Search for “you,” “your,” “me,” “my,” “mine,” and “I.”** If they appear in your essay and are not within a quote, edit them out. To find “I” in your essay type I into the search box (is a blank space). Including the blank spaces before and after I will keep you from finding every letter “I” in your paper.

3. Check **commonly confused words**. This works for all commonly confused words. Here’s how it works using their/there/they’re as an example:

a. Search for **“there.”** - Check each instance of the word “there” to make certain you have used the correct spelling of the word in that instance.

b. Search for **“their.”** - Check each instance of the word “their” to make certain you have used the correct spelling of the word in that instance.

c. Search for **“they’re.”** - Check each instance of the word “they’re” to make certain you have used the correct spelling of the word in that instance.

d. Other commonly confused words to check for: **Were/where, an/and, our/are, to/too/two, accept/except, affect/effect, threw/through, brake/break, it’s/its, loose/lose, passed/past, than/then, your/you’re.**

4. Quickly **find and replace a repeated error** (like a misspelled name). If you find that you have consistently made the same error, this is the easiest way to fix it. There may be a “find and replace” function that will do this automatically, but if there is not, you simply search for the error and replace it with the correction every place it occurs.

Editing Strategy #2: Connect the Dots

Editing is the very last step in the process of perfecting your paper. It is begun after all revisions have been made. Connect the Dots is actually two very simple editing techniques in one.

The first technique (dots) catches misspellings, verb tense issues, and punctuation errors.

1. Beginning with the very last sentence of your paper, read each word individually.
2. With a pen or pencil place a dot underneath each word as you read it so you don’t lose your place.
3. Read slowly to give yourself time to spot errors.
4. Pencil in corrections for any errors that you find.
5. Move to the beginning of the sentence before the one you just read and repeat the process.

The second technique (connect) catches awkward wording and grammatical errors.

1. Beginning with the very first sentence in your paper, read each sentence individually.
2. Underline each sentence (connecting the dots) as you read.
3. Stop between paragraphs to give yourself time to catch errors. Remember that you are not revising, you are editing. Content issues should have been corrected already.
4. Pencil in corrections for any errors that you find.