

# Writing Center

## WOFFORD COLLEGE

### Drafting Guide

#### DRAFTING IS WEIRD

The thing about drafting is that it is a very individual process, and people approach it in different ways – and that’s OK! There are many recommended approaches for planning and revision, but the strange experience of simply getting words on the page can have much more variety. What’s important is experimenting with your drafting process so that you figure out what works best for you. What you might discover is that your quirky ways of writing change over time, and that you need to approach drafting differently for different types of writing. If you are staring at a blank screen and don’t know how to move forward, try to find a different way – a lot of drafting strategy is about getting out of your own head and out of your own way, and sometimes the best way to do that is to mix things up.

#### WHERE SHOULD YOU START?

One important thing to understand about producing a draft is that you do not have to write in order. Many student writers have only ever tried drafting in a linear way from the beginning to the end of an essay. This may give you a sense of “flow” in short pieces of writing, but there is no rule saying you have to begin by writing the first word of the piece! In fact, we often figure out what we’re trying to say as we write. So, especially if you are writing a thesis-based essay, it may not be effective to begin with the introduction, which should set up all the big ideas you plan to argue, if you haven’t fully figured out what those big ideas are yet. Instead, you could try starting with the body paragraph that you are most sure about – what is the idea you have the most evidence to support? Why not start there?

#### HOW PREPARED SHOULD YOU BE BEFORE YOU START?

Just as you do not have to start your draft with the first word, you also do not have to think about drafting as something you only do after you’ve fully planned the essay and before you start revising. Drafting can happen at every stage of a writing process – you can draft before and/or after outlining, or you might stop in the middle of your revision process to write a new paragraph that you’ve discovered is missing, or you might interrupt your drafting process to rearrange paragraphs. This is part of a *recursive* – meaning non-linear – writing process.

In fact, one of the most useful strategies we would recommend is starting to draft before you do anything else with something called a *zero draft*. The zero draft is a stream-of-consciousness freewriting process where you try to get as many ideas about your topic as you can onto the page before you do any other kind of planning. You may discard some or all of your zero draft, but it will be less stressful than writing your later drafts, it will give you a strong sense of your starting point, and you can start to figure out what kinds of ideas you’re working with as you move forward with an outline.

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### WHERE AND WHEN SHOULD IT HAPPEN?

This is where you'll find lots of differences in how people approach the drafting process. Some people work better: in long stretches or in short bursts; in the morning or the evening; in a quiet space or a social space; weeks or days in advance. We recommend experimenting with these elements of the process! Becoming more aware of the times and places for drafting that make you most productive will give you more control over planning your work.

That being said – one word on starting your draft early. All drafting processes are individual, and some people like to utilize the pressure of the deadline. That's OK, and we are often too busy to start working as far in advance as we'd like to – however, we do recommend that you do not leave your drafting process to the last second. If you are just starting to draft the day before a deadline, that will give you no time to revise, and all improving writers invest in their revision process.

Also, keep in mind that for longer pieces of writing, it becomes much less realistic to try to draft the whole thing at one time. As you advance in your studies and work on more complex kinds of research and analysis, we recommend breaking your drafting process up into more manageable chunks of effort and spreading the work out a bit, giving yourself breaks to reset and reflect.

### WHAT TOOLS SHOULD YOU USE?

Our brains produce different kinds of thought when working with different materials. In addition to typing your draft into the final document you will submit, you could experiment with producing ideas in other formats. You might write some of your initial draft material freehand on paper, or you could try talking through your ideas using the voice recording feature on your phone and transcribing the good stuff later. You will need to use a word processor for much of your work, but breaking away from the computer screen can be very useful for some people.