

CRITICAL WRITING PROCESS

BEFORE	DURING	AFTER
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Remove distractions (check email, turn off cell phone, etc.)• Set up your writing space (clear desk, arrange music, fix lighting, etc.)• Gather materials (assignment, pen & paper or computer, books, notes, etc.)• Re-read assignment for clarity (make sure you fully understand what the assignment asks you to do)• Decide who your audience is• Brainstorm• Outline (make sure to note in your outline exact page numbers of quotes and/or text sections you plan to use)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Create first draft from outline	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Revise: make sure you have a thesis, make sure your paper fully supports that thesis, make sure that the paper fulfills the assignment requirements, reconsider the paper's organizational structure, make sure you've made all the connections clear to the reader, be sure the quotes you use support your argument, make sure your paragraphs have topic sentences, and that the paragraphs themselves are unified and coherent, remove any writing that doesn't clearly relate to the topic, consider whether you need to add any additional information, make sure your language and tone are appropriate for your target audience, read aloud to get a feel for the flow of the language, make adjustments where necessary• Edit: proofread for grammar and typos, make sure you adhere to correct format, make sure you include all citations, make sure you've properly formatted your "works cited" page

Audience

It seems like this should be an easy one, but it really isn't. You always have to decide to/for whom you are writing. As an academic writer, you have the difficult task of writing both for your professor and for a wider audience of academic readers. Ask yourself: what can you reasonably expect your audience to already know? What do you need to explain in more detail for them? How can you best grab their interest? What do you have to say that will make them want to read your words? What word choices will best reach this group of people? Writing for a particular audience will determine what tone you use (formal, informal, humorous, impassioned, etc.)

Purpose

Ask yourself: Why am I writing this essay? What's my goal? The easy answers, of course, are that you're writing because someone gave you an assignment, and your goal is to get a high grade. These are not answers that will help you write the essay. Is the assignment asking you to compare, analyze, critique, or argue? When you finish comparing, analyzing, critiquing or arguing, what conclusion do you reach? That conclusion is your **thesis**, the central argument that your paper aims to prove.

Rhetoric

Rhetoric refers to the word choices you make. The words you choose will help establish tone in your essay. You'll want to be careful with this; there are several traps you should try to avoid. Avoid using every word you learned in preparation for the SAT's. When you read a text in which every other word is obscure and multi-syllabic, first you try to understand, and then you lose interest. Your readers will do the same. Avoid using jargon. Jargon just means language that's specific to professionals in a field. Anyone who is not in that field will have difficulty understanding. For example, if I say that many secondary English instructors employ Socratic pedagogical methods in order to facilitate subject-empowered learning, you may not know or care what I mean by that. If I say that high-school English teachers ask a lot of questions to make you realize what you already know, you're more likely to understand. Jargon is useful when your target audience only includes people in your field. Avoid passive sentences. Passive sentences are like little children, in that they don't take any responsibility for the action. For example: "The vase got broken." That sentence neatly avoids telling us who did the breaking, who is responsible for what happened. Active sentences tell you in a straightforward way who did what: "I broke the vase." Passive sentences make the writer sound unsure, as though she lacks confidence in the claims she is making. Instead of "it was said in the essay", tell us "the author says . . ."