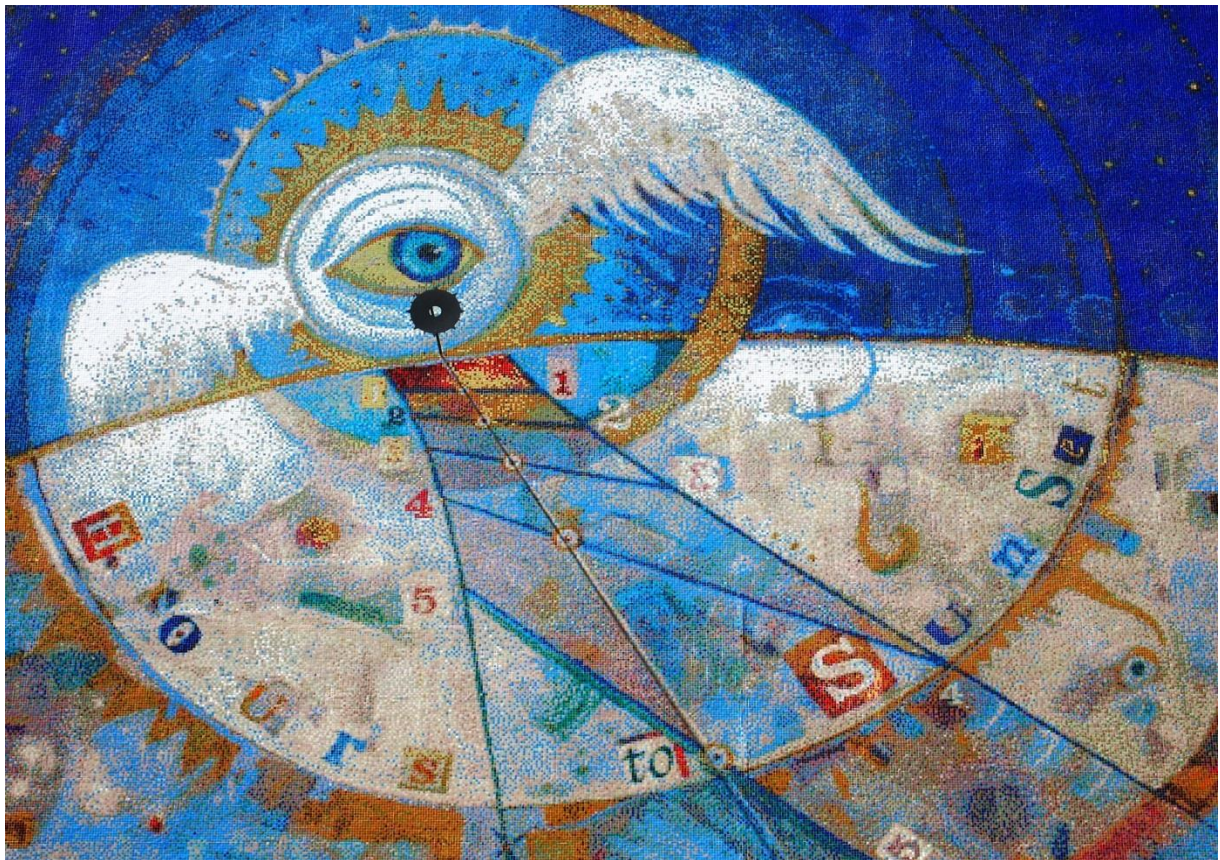


ACADEMIC WRITING IN PRACTICE: DRAFTING

GRS Academic Writing Workshop 26th February 2018

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THE UNIVERSITY OF
**WESTERN
AUSTRALIA**

DRAFTING TECHNIQUES FOR ACADEMIC WRITING

The Writing Process

Drafting is an important part of the writing process. Drafting allows you to put your ideas on paper so you can rethink and rewrite them. By doing this you will be able to ask yourself whether the ideas you are presenting seem logical, whether your argument is clear, and where additional information and evidence is required. Drafting is critical in terms of thinking the topic through; in fact there are all sorts of questions you can ask yourself once you have written an initial draft. A draft also gives you something to show to others to get feedback on your ideas.

Writing is a process that consists of a series of steps. Below is a diagram which attempts to summarise the process, although you may find yourself revisiting each step perhaps several times in the process of producing one publication. It is common to write many drafts of one research paper to ensure you are communicating your ideas clearly, logically and with sufficient evidence.



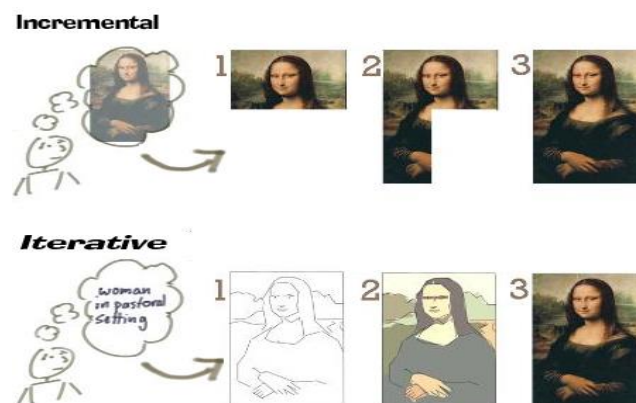
Document and Version Management

One of the challenges in writing multiple drafts of the same document is to manage the versions you are producing. Writing is an iterative process (see below) and text develops over time with the refinement of ideas and clarity. Devising a way to impose order on the process so that you can identify the latest version is important, especially as you will probably be getting feedback from different people on different drafts and at different times. Here are some suggestions to help you manage your drafts:

1. Frequently save the document you are working on (editors often have a feature for automatically saving work to a hard-drive every five minutes).
2. Back up your work and don't rely on one form of storage to do so. Consider storage technology and use what is most suitable and convenient for you. Universities now offer web-based storage for researchers (UWA has 'cloudstore' and the Institutional Research Data Store' (IRDS) for researchers) and commercial providers are available.
3. As a kind of insurance policy, print your work every now and then.

4. Decide if you want to overwrite previous versions of the work or if you want to keep earlier versions. If you decide to only work on a master document it will be easier for you to manage because you will be overwriting old versions. You will always know you are working on the most recent version. If you want to keep earlier versions, however, you may like to create a directory with an explicit format that will help you identify the latest and previous versions. For example you might decide to date each version according to the following: JoPS Paper 01_04_2017 (*Journal of Peasant Studies* 1st April 2017).
5. If you decide on a directory style, such as the date method above, then be absolutely consistent with it. Do not change it or you will lose track of the versions.

Academic writing is iterative and incremental. That is, it is written and rewritten numerous times in a number of stages.



Pre-writing: approaches for getting the ideas down

The first step in writing new material is to get your ideas down without attempting to impose any order on them. This process is often called ‘free-writing’. In “timed writing” (Goldberg 1986) or “free writing” (Elbow 1973), you just keep your hand moving. If you cannot think of anything to say, write “I can’t think what to write.” Repeat the question, or as I prefer “blah, blah, blah.” Eventually this gets boring, and another idea comes. Do not edit, do not cross out, and do not re-read. Keep your hand moving. This stops you beginning to edit and judge, and jamming up. Free-writing is a method used by many of the most productive academics. The aim is to get all your ideas around a topic down on paper so that you can begin to evaluate or make sense of them; re-order them and begin the process of shaping the paper. Free-writing is most effective when you have a focused topic to write on. For instance you may like to do some free-writing around your argument or claim, the significance of your research, or how it extends knowledge in the field.

There are several free writing techniques that you might like to experiment with:

Free-falling

For this variation you need a computer screen – to switch off! “Tactile writing”(Akers 2002) or “free-falling” (Turner-Vesselago n.d.) avoids the censor by making it impossible to re-read or edit. Some people just make the font tiny, or white on white, while others turn off the screen completely.

Brainstorming

This involves drawing or listing ideas, writing anything that comes into your head about a topic, without analysis or censoring. It is also useful when you know what you want to say, but don't have an order yet. Scribble!

“What I really want to say is...”

This is a good way to get to the heart of your own voice in the thesis. Do it as part of a free writing exercise, and just keep going back to “What I really want to say is...” If you are just beginning and still finding your topic, try “What really interests me here is....”

Change Genres

Avoid blocking yourself with expectations of perfect high-academic prose by switching style and genre. A good one here is a letter to someone you like and trust, telling them what the next part of your thesis is actually trying to say.

Organizing your Ideas

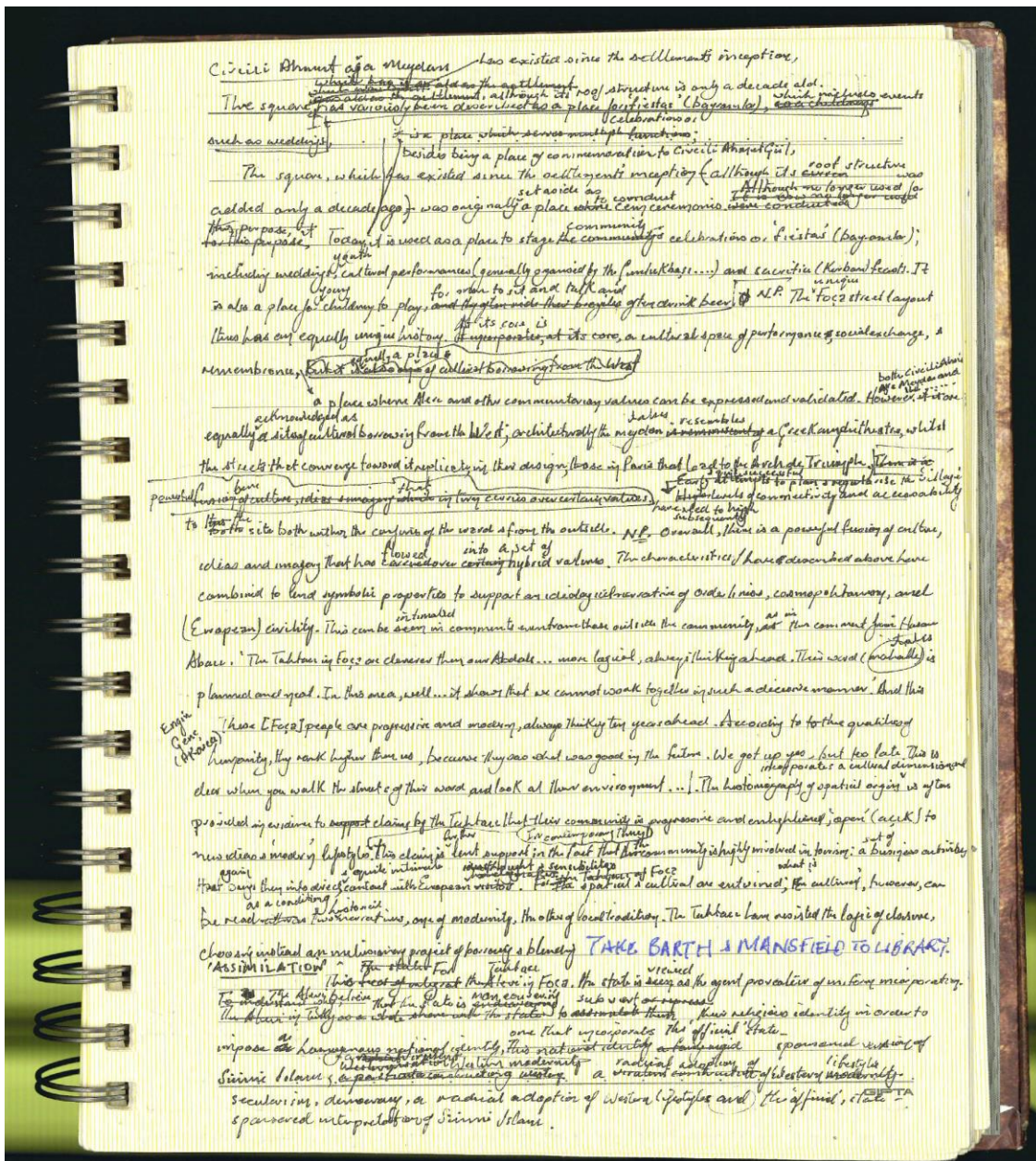
Once you have generated your ideas around a topic, issue or claim the next step is to evaluate those ideas, deciding which ideas to use and how to organise them. You need to create a plan (or mind-map) of the main ideas and the supporting information – perhaps for each of your paragraphs (that is you may even be able to develop a series of topic sentences). Regardless your plan can be anything from a rough list of ideas to a more detailed outline populated with headings and sub-headings.

- I. Introduction: Value of classroom computers is uncertain
- II. Different uses have different effects
 - A. All uses increase number of words produced
 1. Study One: 950 vs 780
 2. Study Two: 1,103 vs 922
 - B. Labs allow students to interact
- III. Studies show limited benefits in revision
 - A. Study A: Writers on computers are more wordy
 1. Average of 2.3 more words per sentence
 2. Average of 20% more words per essay
 - B. Study B: Writers need hardcopy to revise effectively
 1. 22% fewer typos when done on hard copy vs computer screen
 2. 2.26% fewer spelling errors
- IV. Conclusion: Too soon to tell how much computers improve learning
 - A. Few reliable empirical Studies
 - B. Little history because many programs are in transition

(Example of paper plan taken from Turabian, K.L. 2013 8th edition, A manual for Writers of research papers, theses, and dissertations: Chicago style for students and researchers, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago).

Writing the First Draft

The next step is to follow your plan and write a first draft. As you write, it is important that you focus on making your ideas clear. There is no need at this stage to worry too much about grammar, punctuation or spelling. The aim in this draft is to establish coherence through the arranging of your ideas in a logical manner, supported by evidence, towards a stated goal in the introduction. Try to imagine yourself in a conversation with an imagined reader; predict their responses to your claim, test their hypothetical objections, imagine their opinion of the evidence you are using to support your argument. Always remember, however, that a first draft is always meant to be an exercise in 'low-stakes writing'. That is, writing which you will show to your peers, colleagues or supervisor but only for feedback about the persuasiveness of your ideas. Editing can come later.



Reviewing: getting feedback

Once you have written the first draft you have a document that you can give to others to read. Their feedback can then be incorporated in to subsequent drafts. At this stage it is helpful to have another person's perspective on your writing. You can ask them to read, ask questions, and comment on what is good and what might be changed or made clearer. Once you have their feedback you can make further revisions. It is common to write multiple drafts at this stage of the writing process to improve the structure of the document, and refine the ideas and argument to make them more convincing.

Editing & Proofreading

Many writers edit each draft, especially if they plan to give the text to reviewers for feedback. That is useful, but don't waste time checking for mistakes in grammar, punctuation, spelling and sentence structure, especially early in the writing process, if it is likely more substantial changes will be made to the document. When you are happy with the content then think seriously about editing, the final stage in the writing process. Our subsequent workshop on editing and proofreading will provide you with techniques to effectively edit your work.

DRAFTING EXERCISE I

Freewriting (10-15 minutes)

Although you start with a topic related to your research, you do not need to write continuously about that one topic. You can change topics. You can approach topics from different angles. You can go back to where you started, if you want. Many writers say this is like brainstorming in sentences. The only requirement is that you continue writing. Do not stop to revise, edit, score out. Keep going for the full 10-15 minutes and stop when that is up.'

Free - writing is:

- Writing for a short, defined burst of time
- In sentences
- Without stopping
- Without editing
- No structure needed
- Private writing (for your eyes only)

Possible prompts for free-writing

1. How does your research question differ from other research in the field?
2. What is your particular project attempting to find out or rethink? In other words, what is your research problem?
3. What are you not attempting to cover in this thesis?
4. Does your thesis tell a story?
5. What is it that needs rethinking (or finding out) in this area?

The task:

1. The best way to begin free writing is to pose a question, such as; 'what am I trying to say in this thesis, chapter, article, conference paper?'
2. Write quickly to answer the question in an easy style (colloquial, first person) for a limited period of time – we will take **15 minutes**.

3. Write without worrying about grammar, spelling etc. Just keep up with your thoughts
4. When finished, read what you have written and underline the best ideas.

The next step: using feedback to improve your writing:

In this part of the workshop you may work in pairs to give feedback on actual writing you have done. You will then use this feedback to improve the structure of your writing. For the purpose of this workshop I suggest you limit your discussion to 2 or 3 paragraphs and a total piece of writing that is no longer than a single A4 page.

Pair off and tell your partner exactly what it is you are trying to achieve in your current work (aims, argument, significance of the research). You have 5 minutes to communicate this to them. After 5 minutes the listener will have the opportunity to give you some feedback. Take notes in preparation for rewriting. Each person takes their turn at presenting to their partner.

Pay particular attention to feedback that indicates your reader is confused about, or misunderstands, the key messages you wish to convey. Discuss with your partner how you may restructure your paragraphs so that your key messages are more clearly understood.

Then:

Organize your ideas in the form of a 'mind-map'. Create a visual model of how you intend to order or link these ideas.

Finally:

Once you have mapped out the section so that you have a plan to present its parts in a logical sequence, return to your original work and rewrite it. Remember to incorporate the principles of good academic writing we have discussed in our workshops.

Now you can:

1. Rewrite your work so that the paragraphs have a topic sentence located in the first sentence (unless there's a good reason not to).
2. Read out the first sentence of the first 3 paragraphs and check to see that you now have 3 steps in an argument. Now that you have a piece of writing that is well structured, you can move on to the revising, editing and proofreading phases. It's often useful to start by reading each paragraph out aloud.

DRAFTING TECHNIQUES FOR ACADEMIC WRITING

Michael Azariadis

The Writing Process



Drafting is important because it:

- Allows you to get your ideas down on paper,
- So that you can think more deeply about them and rewrite them
- Gives you something to show to others,
- So that you can get feedback from them
- Helps you to arrange your ideas in a logical way
- Lets you see more clearly where more information and evidence is required
- Is critical in shaping or focusing your argument

Academic writing is iterative and incremental. That is, it is written and rewritten numerous times in a number of stages.

Incremental



Iterative



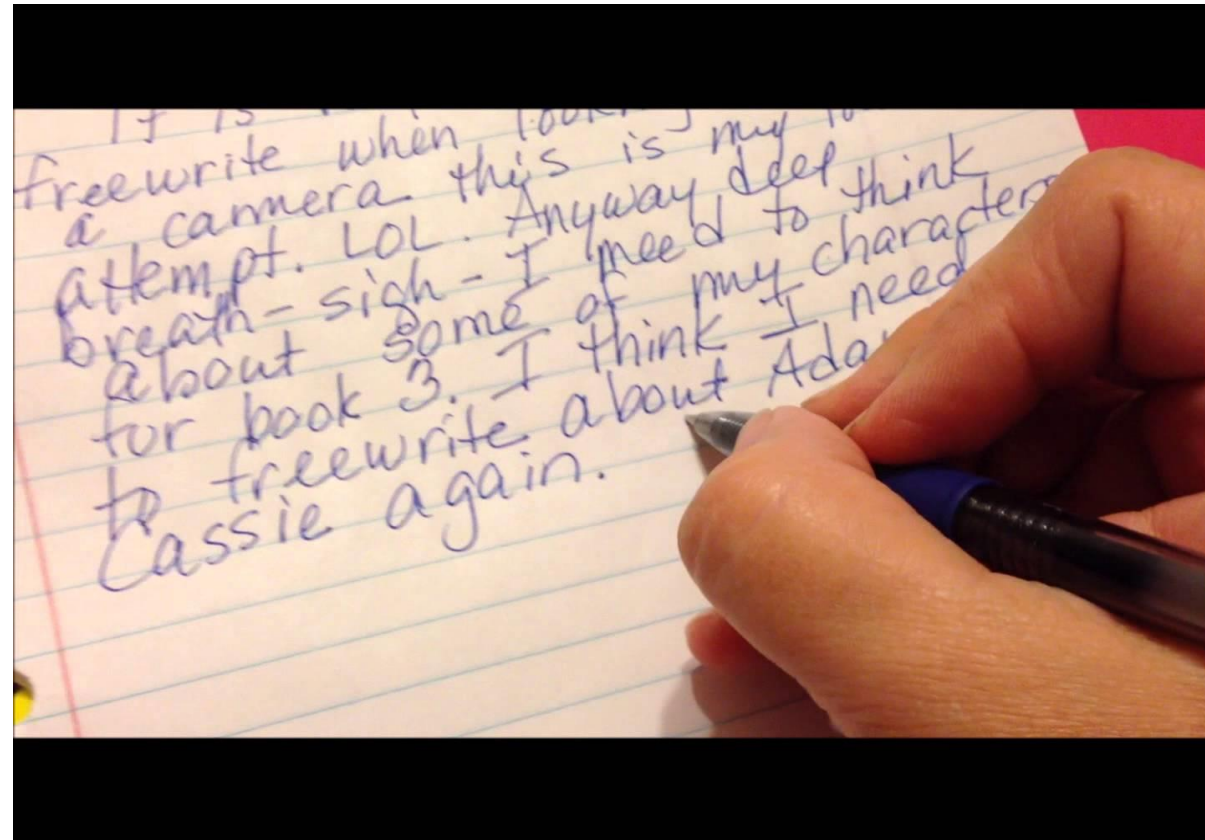
Document and Version Management

- Frequently save the document you are working on
- Back-up your work and don't rely on one form of storage
- Print your work every now and then
- Decide on a version control system
- Be meticulous in using it

Techniques for Pre-writing

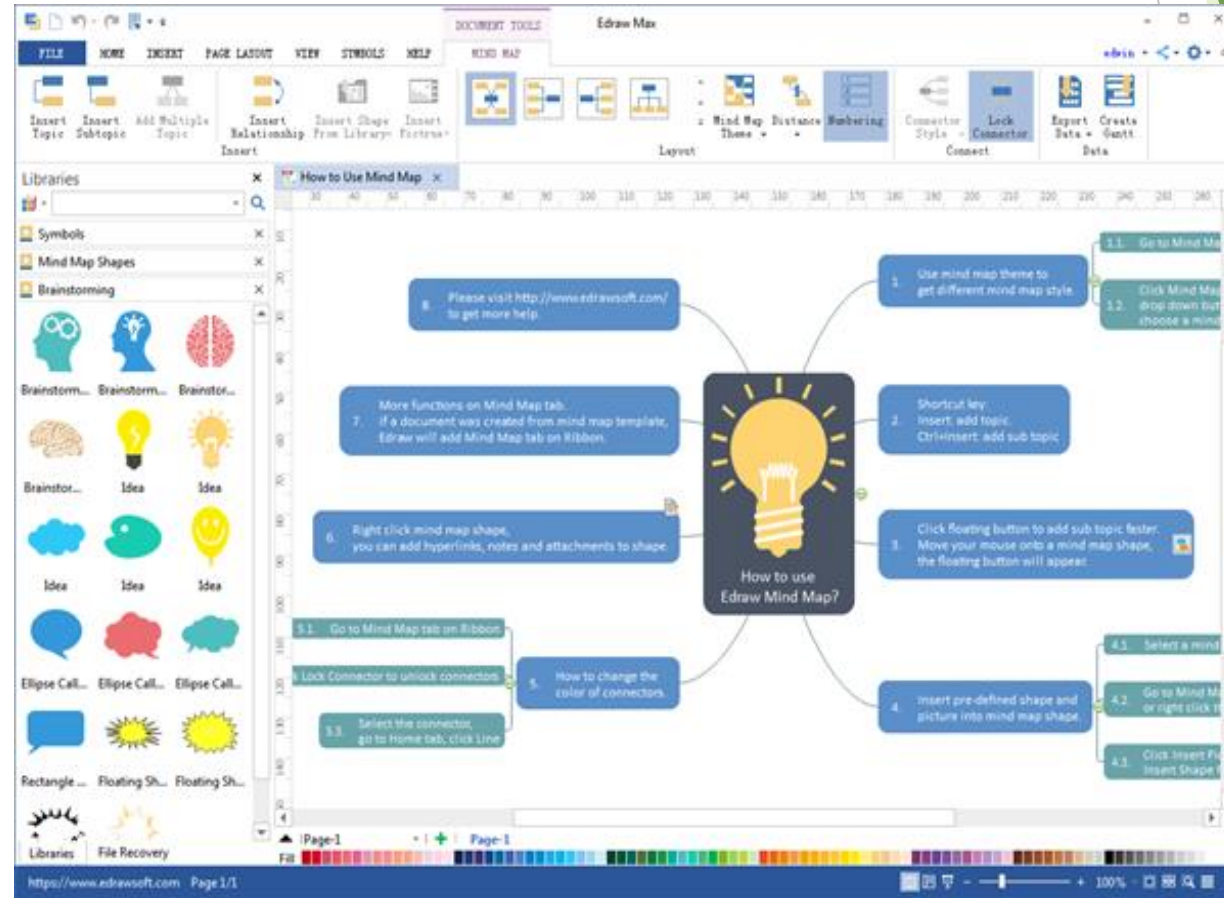
Pre-writing is the first stage in the writing process. It is aimed at discovering and exploring our early ideas on a subject.

- Free writing
- Free-falling
- Brainstorming
- Changing genres



Organising your ideas

- Mind Mapping
- Listing
- Creating topic sentences



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Drafting Exercise

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Using feedback to improve your writing

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Return to your text

1. Highlight the key ideas
2. Organize your ideas in the form of a 'mind-map'. Create a visual model of how you intend to logically order or link these ideas.
3. Begin writing the 1st draft. Try to develop topic sentences for each paragraph.
4. Then revise, edit, proofread