

The Five Steps of Writing

1. **Define your audience and goal.** Get out a sheet of paper and write down who you're writing to, and what you want them to do with the information you're going to give them. Picture these people in your head, and be as specific as you can. (Yup, sounds nuts. Do it anyway!) **The end result of this step** is two short sentences. Example: "My audience is my instructor, my fellow students, and hiring managers (if I'm lucky). My goal is to get an A on this project, demonstrate what I can do to my classmates so they'll feel comfortable recommending me for a job, and produce a project good enough to add to my resume."
2. **Research.** Unless you're writing an opinion piece, you probably need to do research. Go online, to your local library, or both and find out as much as you can about your topic. Take copious notes. **The end result of this step is a single folder**, whether real (containing print-outs and other hard copies) or digital (containing links, bookmarks, cut-and-pasted text, etc.)
3. **Outline.** Read through your notes and see if you can find a way to organize your material in a sensible fashion. Introduction, meat, conclusion? Step one, two, and three? Problem, discussion, recommendation? Don't worry about Roman numerals and perfectly indented subheads; **the end result of this step is a list** of what you plan to cover and what order you plan to cover it in.
4. **Draft.** Using your outline as a starting place, write—*fast*. (Some people actually start with a copy of their outline and then "fill in the blanks" to make sure they don't leave anything out.) Don't worry about punctuation or spelling or fancy sentence construction; the purpose of this step is simply to synthesize what you've learned from your research and your first attempt to organize your material, and get it all down on paper. **The end result of this step is Draft #1**, a rough draft that corresponds to your outline (but which may include questions to yourself and placeholders you plan to fill in after you've done a bit more research).
5. **Revise.**
 - a. **Major revision.** Here is where you reorganize, change your focus, fill in holes, slash unnecessary material, and otherwise lay waste to your first draft. **The end result of this step is Draft #2.** It will be rough and shaggy, but it should reflect your main ideas in the order you intend to present them.
 - b. **Tune-up revision.** In this revision, you go over Draft #2 paragraph by paragraph, line by line, and make sure you're saying what you want to say as effectively as you can say it. Cut every unnecessary

word, then make sure that the first sentence of each paragraph contains the main idea of that paragraph. **The end result of this step is Draft #3**, a solid version that only lacks a bit of tweaking.

- c. **Polish-it-until-it-shines revision.** Here's where you go over Draft #3 with a fine-tooth comb, looking for punctuation and grammar goofs. Run your spell-checker program, then hunt for jargon and replace it (or define it in your text). **The end result will be a high-quality piece of writing that will do you proud!**