

Prewriting and outlining are essential to the writing process, as they will guide you and help you define and plan your work's scope. These strategies are not just useful in the beginning of your writing process but can be revisited as you write. While this handout covers general concepts, always work with your audience and assignment in mind.

Analyzing Your Assignment

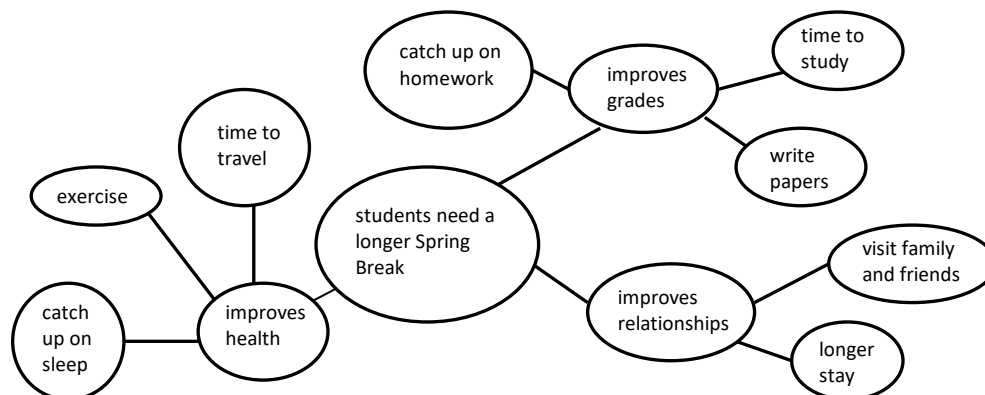
Determine the genre (type of writing), purpose, audience, and tone of your writing to simplify and focus your writing process.

- **Determine the purpose** of your writing.
 - What has your instructor or the assignment description asked you to do? What is the purpose of the paper? What is the genre of the assignment?
- **Identify the audience** of your paper.
 - Who will read my paper? What does my audience already know? What does my audience *not* already know? What topics, details, or approaches will interest my audience? What level of language should I use?
- **Establish the tone** of your work.
 - Do I sound knowledgeable? Do I sound professional without sounding artificial? Am I using jargon or terms my audience may not be familiar with?

Prewriting and Outlining Strategies

Create a Cluster Diagram

To help you understand the relationship between your ideas and visualize how you could organize them in an essay, group your thoughts into categories according to their similarities.



Formulate a Thesis Statement

A thesis statement presents your main point, limits your topic, and indicates your paper's organization. It is typically placed at the end of your introduction. Composing a working thesis that incorporates your main claims before you begin writing can help you structure and form a clear argument throughout your essay. You will likely continue to refine your thesis as you write.

Try Freewriting

Freewriting can be a great way to get all your thoughts down on paper. Try writing without stopping, setting a timer, writing down all you know about your topic or even recording a conversation where you explain your topic to a friend.

After freewriting, you might find that your paper jumps among topics and lacks focus. There are a few different strategies you can use to organize your draft:

- Make a **reverse outline**: Make a heading for each paragraph that sums up what that paragraph is about. Move any off-topic sentences to the paragraph(s) where they belong.
- Pick a **color** for **each subtopic** your paper touches on and color code each sentence in your essay. Put all the sentences of the same color in the same paragraph. You could also print out your paper and use scissors to cut it up and rearrange paragraphs or sentences.
- Do **another freewrite**—you may find that after getting all your ideas out, your second draft will be more focused and cohesive.

Develop an Outline

Outlines help you organize all the information you have gathered. Outlines can be as detailed or as general as you want. The process of creating an outline depends on your individual writing style and creation process, so there is no wrong way to make an outline.

Detailed Outline

Title: The Importance of a Longer Spring Break
Intro: My own spring break story
Thesis: A longer spring break improves health, grades, & relationships.
I. A longer spring break improves health
 A. Catch up on sleep
 1. Naps
 2. Sleep in
 3. Rest periods
 B. Exercise
 1. Outdoor activities
 2. Community activities
 3. Time at the gym
II. A longer spring break improves grades
 A. Catch up on homework
 1. Read
 2. Study
 3. Get ahead
 B. Write papers
 1. Research
 2. Outline
 3. Rough drafts
III. A longer spring break improves relationships
 A. Visit family
 1. Time to travel home safely
 2. Stay for longer visits
 3. Time to see more family
 B. Visit friends
 1. Go on an outing together
 2. Get together for lunch
 3. Have sleepovers
Conclusion: Sum up, explain why it matters, tie back to intro story

Simple Outline 1

A longer spring break improves health, grades, and relationships.

- Health = more sleep and exercise
- Grades = time for homework and papers
- Relationships = more time for family and friends

Simple Outline 2

Thesis: Implementing a longer spring break for college students would benefit their health, grades, and relationships.

This paragraph will explain how a longer spring break improves health by giving students more time to sleep and exercise.

This paragraph will be about how extending spring break would allow students to catch up on homework and papers.

This paragraph will show that a more extended spring break helps students improve their relationships with family and friends.

This paragraph includes a counterargument as required by the assignment. It includes why having a more condensed spring break is preferred by some students and faculty.