

## 16.1.3: The Process of Research Writing- A Guide to Understanding this Book

### Writing as a Process: A Brief Explanation and Map

No essay, story, or book (including this one) simply “appeared” one day from the writer’s brain; rather, all writings are made after the writer, with the help of others, works through the process of writing.

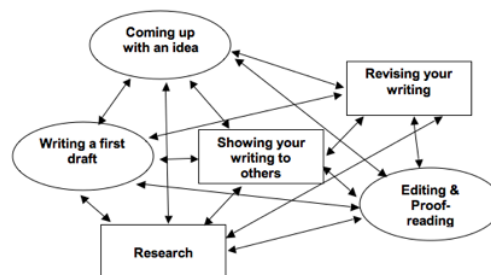
Generally speaking, the process of writing involves:

- **Coming up with an idea** (sometimes called brainstorming, invention or “pre-writing”);
- **Writing a rough draft of that idea;**
- **Showing that rough draft to others to get feedback** (peers, instructors, colleagues, etc.);
- **Revising the draft** (sometimes many times); and
- **Proof-reading and editing** to correct minor mistakes and errors.

An added component in the writing process of research projects is, obviously, research. Rarely does research begin before at least some initial writing (even if it is nothing more than brainstorming or pre-writing exercises), and research is usually not completed until after the entire writing project is completed. Rather, research comes in to play at all parts of the process and can have a dramatic effect on the other parts of the process. Chances are you will need to do at least some simple research to develop an idea to write about in the first place. You might do the bulk of your research as you write your rough draft, though you will almost certainly have to do more research based on the revisions that you decide to make to your project.

There are two other things to think about within this simplified version of the process of writing. **First, the process of writing always takes place for some reason or purpose and within some context that potentially change the way you do these steps.** The process that you will go through in writing for this class will be different from the process you go through in responding to an essay question on a Sociology midterm or from sending an email to a friend. This is true in part because your purposes for writing these different kinds of texts are simply different.

**Second, the process of writing isn’t quite as linear and straight-forward as my list might suggest.** Writers generally have to start by coming up with an idea, but writers often go back to their original idea and make changes in it after they write several drafts, do research, talk with others, and so on. The writing process might be more accurately represented like this:



**Figure 16.1.3.1**

Seem complicated? It is, or at least it can be.

So, instead of thinking of the writing process as an ordered list, you should think of it more as a “web” where different points can and do connect with each other in many different ways, and a process that changes according to the demands of each writing project. While you might write an essay where you follow the steps in the writing process in order (from coming up with an idea all the way to proofreading), writers also find themselves following the writing process out of order all the time. That’s okay. The key thing to remember about the writing process is that it is a process made up of many different steps, and writers are rarely successful if they “just write.”

### Using this book

*The Process of Research Writing* is organized in a “step-by-step” fashion. Part I of the book, “The Elements of Research,” offers advice on getting started with research in the library, about quoting, paraphrasing, and not plagiarizing your research, and about working with others in the research process. Part II, “Exercises in the Process of Research,” presents five different writing exercises

that will help you explore a research topic. Part III, “The Research Project,” offers guidelines for writing a traditional research essay, suggestions for alternative ways to present your research, and guidelines for using Modern Language Association and American Psychological Association citation.

But you should think of *The Process of Research Writing* as being similar to a cookbook or an encyclopedia: you and don’t have to read or use this book in this particular order, and you and your teacher don’t need to use all of this book in order to write successful research projects. On the other hand, like a cookbook or an encyclopedia, you should feel free to go back to passages you’ve read before. Remember: thinking through your research process should be systematic, but it isn’t necessarily a linear one.

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