**Essays - Prewriting Steps**

Writing an essay or academic paper can be a daunting experience for a college student. Below are pre-writing steps to get started on an academic essay.

**Select a topic**
- Choose a topic of interest to you and one you know something about.
- Follow the instructions given by the instructor for assignment details.

**Brainstorm for ideas**
- Write down what you know already. Make a mind map to start organizing your thoughts on the topic. A mind map is a graphic representation of ideas around a central theme. It is a good tool to use to expand the topic with points and supports.
- Choose the most relevant main points you have come up with. Label these as your main points and list supports to develop each one. This will provide the focus and position you will take.

**Consider purpose and audience**
- The purpose of the essay is usually to inform or to defend a point of view by constructing an informed argument; both must have the content presented in an appropriate sequence.
- The instructor is usually the audience, so use an academic tone, language and writing style.

**Create a tentative thesis statement**
- Write a thesis statement that tells the topic and the point you want to make about it. In your mind think “I believe that...” then begin the sentence.
- The thesis clearly defines what the essay will be about and keeps the writer focused.
- Write the thesis statement in the introductory paragraph to alert the reader to how you will prove, defend or expand your topic as you present your main ideas and supports.

**Find sources for supporting details for your main ideas**
- Access the library for information from printed sources - books, journals and periodicals.
- Search EBSCOhost, Red River College’s database, for on-line resources.
- Check the reference lists and links from suitable articles, books and websites to lead you to other sources of information that may be useful.
Use a system to take notes and organize your information

- Place main points from your mind map on individual note cards or loose leaf paper.
- As you select information from your sources, indicate which main topic it will support and write the title, author, and page number on the note card or loose leaf page it corresponds to. Add your own original thoughts to incorporate into and add to the research information.
- Specify whether each item used is a quote, paraphrase or summary from the original source.

Make an outline

- Begin the outline by writing your topic and thesis statement at the top.
- List all your main points and supports using a numbering/alphabetical system that classifies or groups main topics, sub topics, and supports.
- Determine the organization of the main points according to chronological, sequential, or emphatic order, depending on the content and purpose of the essay.
- Keeping to the outline provides a writing plan for you right from the beginning.

Compose a rough draft

- Write freely to get the information down, not worrying about grammar or mechanical errors.
- Following your outline, write individual sections of the essay using your notes from the research and your original ideas.
- Some students write body paragraphs first, concentrating on each main point and its supports.
- Write the introduction, which should consist of an interesting opening to grab the reader’s attention, the thesis statement, and a preview of the main points to be covered.
- Write a brief conclusion. Some students follow the basics of an introduction paragraph, but in reverse order and with different wording; include the thesis, a review or summary of main points/argument and an ending thought about the relevance of the topic.
- Leave the essay for a few days before revising and editing as you will be more likely to spot errors when you read it with a fresh mind.