

WRITING WITH A PURPOSE

Always keep in mind your purpose for writing. That purpose might be to express a point of view, evaluate, synthesize, analyze, persuade, inform, or hypothesize. As you begin, your purpose for writing will determine the most appropriate approach to take; when you have completed, your purpose for writing will help you to evaluate your success.

Each different purpose for writing requires its own form, tone, and content. The point of view you are adopting will also shape what you write, and in addition you must shape your work to fit your in-tended audience, or whoever will be reading what you write. For example, the tone you would take when writing to the president of the United States would differ greatly from the tone you would take when writing to a pen pal.

USING HISTORICAL IMAGINATION

Many of the writing opportunities you will encounter in Social Studies require you to create a specific type of writing—for instance, a diary entry, a letter, a newspaper editorial, a poem, or an advertisement. Often such writing involves using historical imagination—that is, writing from the perspective of a person living then, rather than now.

An assignment may require, for example, that you address a particular historical figure, such as a former president, or that you write as if you were living through a specific historical event. When given such an assignment, try to imagine what people at the time would have experienced and what they might have thought or said about a particular circumstance or event.

The following guidelines address specific kinds of writing:

A diary is an informal, personal record of your experiences and remembrances (or those of some-one else in history). Entries are dated and consist of brief accounts of the day's happenings and your reactions to them.

A letter is a personal communication intended for a specific individual.

A newspaper editorial is a public statement of an opinion or a point of view. It takes a stand on a particular topic or issue and provides reasons for that stand.

An advertisement is an announcement to promote a product or event. Effective advertisements are direct and to the point and use memorable language, such as slogans and jingles, to emphasize significant features of the product.

How TO WRITE A PAPER OR ESSAY

Each writing opportunity you encounter will have specific instructions about what and how to write. But whether you are writing a diary entry describing your experiences as a soldier during the Persian Gulf War or an essay about changes in military technology, you should follow certain basic steps.

Writing a paper or essay involves the following four major stages: prewriting, writing a first draft, evaluating and revising your draft, and proofreading and producing a final draft for publication. Each of these stages can be further divided into more specific steps and tasks. By using the following guidelines for each of these four stages, you can improve your writing abilities and produce more accurate and interesting writing assignments.

PREWRITING

Select a topic. Choose a topic for your paper or essay. Whenever possible, select a topic that is of interest to you. Be sure that you narrow your topic so that you will be able to develop and support a clear argument.

Identify your purpose for writing. Read the instructions carefully to identify the purpose for your writing. Let the purpose of the assignment guide you as you plan and write your paper or essay.

Determine your intended audience. When writing for a particular audience, be sure to adopt the tone and style that will best communicate your message.

Collect information. Jot down your ideas and the information you already know about your topic; then conduct additional research as necessary. Your writing process will be more efficient and well organized if you have many details at hand and know what information you still need.

Create an outline. Allow yourself sufficient time to think and plan before you begin writing your first draft. Organize themes, main ideas, and supporting details into an outline. This outline will help you to stay focused as you write so that you do not forget to include important information or add unnecessary details.

WRITING THE FIRST DRAFT

Write a first draft and evaluate it. In writing your first draft, remember to use your outline as a guide. Each paragraph should express a single main idea or set of related ideas and include details for support. Take care to show the relationships between ideas and to make proper use of transitions, which are sentences that establish connections between the paragraphs.

EVALUATING AND REVISING THE DRAFT

Review and edit. Revise and reorganize your first draft as needed to make your points. Refine dull or weak sentences by adding appropriate adjectives and adverbs. Delete any words, sentences, or paragraphs that are unnecessary, that are unrelated to a main idea, or that wander too far from a main point.

Evaluate your writing style. Clarify and strengthen your writing by changing the structure of awkward sentences. Replace vague or unclear words with more precise word choices.

PROOFREADING AND PUBLISHING

Proofread your paper or essay carefully. Check your work for proper spelling, punctuation, and grammar. Make any other minor changes that are necessary. Write your final version. Prepare a neat final version. Appearance is important; it may not affect the quality of your work itself, but it can affect the way your work is perceived by others.

An outline is a tool for organizing information and creating one is an important step in your preparation for writing. An outline includes the main ideas of what you have read or plan to communicate, and underneath them lists the details that support the main ideas. Remember, though, that an outline is only a framework—the essay you write from it must be fleshed out. But if you make sure that your outline is thorough and well thought out, writing the final product will be much easier.

HOW TO CREATE AN OUTLINE

Order your material. Decide what information you want to emphasize. Order or classify your material with that in mind. Then determine what information belongs in an introduction, what should make up the body of the essay or report, and what should be left for the conclusion.

Identify main ideas. Identify the main ideas to be presented in each section and use these ideas as your outline's main headings.

List supporting details. Determine what important details or facts support each main idea. Rank and list these details as subheadings under each main idea, using more levels of subheadings as needed. Keep in mind that you must have at least two entries under each subheading: no A's without B's, no 1's without 2's, no a's without b's.

Put your outline to use. Organize your essay or report according to your finished outline. Each main heading in the outline, for example, might form the basis for a topic sentence to begin a paragraph. Subheadings would then make up the content of the paragraph. In a more lengthy paper, each subheading might be the main idea of a paragraph.

A SAMPLE OUTLINE

- I. Republicans' support of westward expansion
 - A. Settlement of the Trans-Appalachian West
 - B. Access to the Mississippi River
 - 1. Significance of the port of New Orleans
 - 2. Spain's returning Louisiana to France
 - a. threat to U.S. trade
 - b. barrier to U.S. expansion westward
- II. President Jefferson's negotiations with France
 - A. America's purchase of Louisiana
 - B. Why France sold Louisiana
 - 1. Napoleon's failure to build empire in Americas
 - a. Need for naval base in West Indies
 - b. Revolt in Saint Domingue (now Haiti)
 - c. French failure to regain control of Haiti
 - 2. Napoleon's need of money for war plans

TAKING TESTS

When it comes to taking a test, for Social Studies or for any other subject, nothing can take the place of preparation. A good night's sleep and consistent study habits give you a much better chance for success than do hours of late-night, last-minute cramming. In addition, you will find that being well prepared helps you to ignore any distractions that might occur during the test.

However, keeping your attention focused on the test and your mind free from distractions is not all you can do to improve your test scores. Mastering some basic test-taking skills can also help. Keeping up with daily reading assignments and taking careful notes as you read can make preparing for a test into a simple matter of review. Reviewing information that you already know takes less time—and causes less stress—than trying to learn something new under pressure.

You will face several basic types of questions on the tests you encounter—for example, fill in the blank, short answer, multiple choice, matching, and essay. In answering multiple-choice questions, eliminate any answers that you know are incorrect—this will narrow the field of choices remaining to you. When completing a matching exercise, first go through the entire list of items, matching all the items that you know for sure. Then study any items that remain. Read essay questions carefully so that you know precisely what you are being asked to write. Create an outline of the main ideas and supporting details that you plan to include in your essay. Keep your answer clear and brief, but be sure that you cover all the necessary points.

How TO TAKE A TEST

Prepare beforehand. This vitally important step involves more than studying and reviewing the information prior to the test. It also means being well rested and mentally focused on the day of the test.

Follow directions. Remember to read all test instructions carefully. Listen closely if the directions are oral rather than written. Ask for clarification as needed.

Preview the test. Skim the entire test and judge how much time you have to complete each section. Try to anticipate which areas of the test will be the most difficult for you and stick to your time schedule.

Concentrate on the test. Do not "watch the clock," but do stay aware of the time. If you do not know the answer to a question, move on to the next question. It is best to answer as many questions as you can within the allowed time.

Review your answers. If time permits, revise answers you were unsure of and answer those you skipped. Review your essay to catch and correct any errors in spelling, punctuation, or grammar.