

**Writing and Study Skills Services – Laurier Brantford**  
**Prewriting**

Prewriting is a useful step to take before deciding on a thesis statement or writing a rough draft of an assignment

There are four prewriting steps:

1. Understanding your Assignment

- Gather all the information given to you from the professor:
  - What is the assignment's word/page count?
  - What type of assignment is it? Is it a research paper, a personal reflective writing, a critical review, etc.?
  - What is the purpose? Try to anticipate what the instructor is assessing. For example, do you need to demonstrate the ability to present and support an argument or to summarize sources clearly/correctly, etc.?
  - How many sources are needed? Does the professor recommend any sources such as peer reviewed articles, news articles, etc.?
  - Who is the audience for the assignment? In most cases, it will be the instructor. Think about how much the instructor knows about the topic and if the topic was introduced in class.
  
- Faigley, Graves and Graves (2008) recommend that you break down the task and target **task words**:
  - “**Analyze**: find connections among a set of facts, events, or readings, and make them meaningful”
  - “**Compare and Contrast**: examine how two or more things are alike and how they differ”
  - “**Define**: make a claim about how something should be defined, according to features that you set out”
  - “**Describe**: Observe carefully and select details that create a dominant impression”
  - “**Evaluate**: argue that something is good, bad, best or worst in its class, according to criteria that you set out”
  - “**Propose**: identify a particular problem and explain why your solution is the best one” (28).

2. Finding and Exploring a Topic

- If there is no assigned topic, create a list of ideas that both interest you and relate to the course material
- Spend some time going through your list of ideas, narrowing down the options until you decide on which one would be best for your assignment
  - Put a question mark beside ideas you do not know much about

- Put checkmarks beside the ideas that are most interesting or that you know would fit the criteria of the assignment well
- Try **freewriting**: write as much information as you can about a topic for 5-10 minutes without stopping. Do not stop to fix mistakes; the goal is to write as much information down as possible. This method can allow you to see how much you know about each topic and can lead to new ideas about a topic.

### 3. Researching

- Now that you have a specific idea about what you want to write about, you can begin to explore it by starting your research
- Ensure that you have **narrowed your focus** into a specific issue that you will be able to find sufficient information about
- Create **research questions** to explore when researching your issue and reading your sources
  - Effective research questions usually have the words **why** or **how** because the answers to these questions are usually more comprehensive and integrated. Ensure that they are **open-ended questions**.
- A method you can use to organize your research information is an **idea map**
  - Use sticky notes to organize information into similar groups (i.e. solutions, problems, etc.)
  - Sticky notes can make it easy to move the information around and having all the information in one area sometimes makes it easier to visualize what you know about a concept

### 4. Creating your Thesis Statement

- With an idea and research to support or oppose that idea, a thesis statement can now be developed
- An answer to a research question can often be developed into a thesis

**Example** (adapted from examples provided by Faigley, Graves and Graves):

**Subject:** The role of the food industry in childhood obesity.

**Research Question:** How does the food industry affect childhood obesity?

**Possible Thesis:** Because the food industry offers limited choices of healthy alternatives, childhood obesity is increasing.

Work Cited:

Faigley, Lester, Roger Graves and Heather Graves. *The Brief Penguin Handbook*. Canadian ed. Toronto: Pearson Longman, 2008. Print.