

CLEARWRITER'S SEVEN STEPS TO RIVETING REPORTS AND EFFECTIVE ESSAYS

Most of us know that we should eat our vegetables, and that we should plan before writing. Whether we do either is less certain.

But sound planning is key to writing clearly and quickly. The idea is to separate thinking from writing, for to do two things at once is to do both badly.

Before you write...

First, answer six basic questions—concisely

- What is your topic?
- Who is going to read what you write?
- What is your purpose?
- How long should your report be?
- How much time can you spend writing?
- What is your working title?
- Make it short, memorable, and easy to repeat.

Second, create a paragraph-by-paragraph plan

- State your main message in less than 30 words.
- State each supporting message in less than 30 words.
- Turn your supporting messages into headings to anchor an outline.
- Assign paragraphs to headings and topics to paragraphs.

Third, flesh out the plan

- Make a strong point about each paragraph topic.
- Assemble details, examples, and comments under your points.
- Convert raw material into draft paragraphs.

As you write...

Fourth, ensure that your draft communicates your messages

- Avoid thinking you have to use every bit of information.
- Make sure that each sentence bears on the topic.
- Use only the strongest details and examples to support your point.
- Try numbering supporting details, examples, and comments in the order that you want them to appear in the paragraph.

After you write...

Fifth, revise your paragraphs

- Ensure that each sentence in the paragraph is unified around the point.
- Vary the ways you make your point.
- Create smooth transitions between sentences and paragraphs.
- Establish that sentences are ordered logically.

Sixth, tape your draft to a wall to apply finishing touches

- Make sure the argument progresses logically and sections are ordered in the most effective way.
- Adjust the length and balance of each section.
- Remove any duplication across sections.
- Consider moving any highly detailed or technical sections to an appendix.
- Make headings parallel.
- Clarify your original messages.

Seventh, take a last look

- Take your report off the wall, do a line-by-line edit, use spell check, and read your report once more.

That process may seem simple, but doing it well takes practice. For dozens of concrete strategies that help you put these tips into action, explore ClearWriter [online training](#) and instructor-led [workshops](#).