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The Writing Process

- An Introduction

WHAT IS THE WRITING PROCESS?

Knowing and understanding the writing process will help you in focussing on your ideas, organising your ideas, reducing errors in your writing, and sharing your work. The writing process consists of four stages: (1) prewriting, (2) drafting, (3) revising and editing, and (4) sharing. Read about the four stages in the sections below.

1. Prewriting

Before you begin writing, determine your purpose, topic, and audience. The **purpose** of your paper is your reason for writing it, and this largely depends upon the genre you are writing. For example, you may write a letter telling a friend what you experienced during a world event, or you may write a report to provide information to your audience about some aspect of science. The **topic** is the subject which you are writing about. It could be a person, place, thing, idea, or event. Your **audience** is the person or group of people who will read your writing. Knowing your audience is important as it helps guide you in your selection of information and how to present it.

Next, it is time to brainstorm, record, and organise your ideas. During the **prewriting** stage, you will use graphic organisers and outlines. Both of these are writing tools to help you brainstorm what you want to write about and organise how to present your ideas in writing it. While it may be tempting to jump right into your paper, never skip this step since your prewriting is what informs the writing of your paper. In this book, you will learn how to use specific prewriting tools for each genre.

2. Drafting

Using your prewriting from the previous step, it is time to turn your notes into an actual piece of writing. This step, where you flesh out your ideas, is known as **drafting**. Your main goal in writing your draft is to get your thoughts down on paper. While you should always write as cleanly as possible, don't get caught up in things like spelling while drafting; you'll have time to fix errors in the next step.

When do you use informal letters?

Above all, we use informal letters when we want to communicate with close acquaintances, friends, or family members in a casual way. You have almost certainly written letters, notes, or email messages. Perhaps a parent has asked you to write a note thanking a relative for a thoughtful gift. Perhaps you have written a note to a friend, or an email message to a long-lost acquaintance. You may have created a friendly invitation, written a letter to a sibling, or composed a note of condolence. Any time you have sent a written message to a friend, family member, or personal acquaintance, you have written an informal letter.

Examples of Informal Letters

In the rest of this unit, you will find 10 sample informal letters, email messages, or notes with detailed explanations.

Sample #1

Prompt: Write a thank you note to a close acquaintance or family member.

Topic: thanking Aunt Ida for her advice regarding my New York trip

~ Thank You ~

August 31, 20__

Dear Aunt Ida,

I want to thank you for connecting me with Sarah and for all of the information and recommendations you gave me before my recent trip to New York City. This trip was the highlight of my entire summer vacation, and it wouldn't have been half as good without your advice.

Write the date at the top. If the date is left-aligned, also left-align your closing and signature.

Skip three lines, then write the salutation, or greeting. Capitalise the first word and all proper nouns in your greeting.

Since notes are generally brief and to the point, state your reason for writing in the first paragraph.

Practice

Now it is your turn to show what you know about the genre of notes. Use the sample to answer the following questions.

1. What is the purpose of this note?

2. To whom is the note written?

3. Who wrote/sent the note?

4. How would you describe the note's tone? Why?

5. Other than a note, how else might the sender have communicated her purpose?

6. On a separate sheet of paper or note card, compose a note thanking someone for a recent gift or kind gesture. Include all the elements of an informal note.

Sample #3

Prompt: Write a congratulatory note to a close acquaintance or family member.
Topic: congratulating Karen on her graduation from secondary school

November 1, 20__

To my wonderful niece,

Congratulations on your graduation from River Crest High School, Class of 2012! I am so proud of you.

You were always a bright student. I remember that, even before attending kindergarten, you were reading books and writing sentences. Even then, your mum was so proud! As the years went on, you always were at the top of your class in grades and test scores. Combine those academic skills with your excellent record of community service and athletic accomplishments, and it was easy to predict you would be graduating with honours.

I am excited to hear that you will be attending Queen's College and that you will be studying English literature. Did you know that I studied the same thing at university? Knowing what a voracious and insightful reader you are, I predict you will do well in that subject. However, if there's anything I can ever do to help, just let me know.

The wise man Confucius said, "Wherever you go, go with all your heart." Karen, the next few years will be filled with discovery and adventure for you. At university, you will be able to flower and continue your quest for knowledge. I know your mum will keep us all posted regarding your experiences and accomplishments, and the family will be watching with pride as you proceed through your course of study and enter the professional world.

Please do remember to call if there's anything at all you need. Again, Karen, congratulations on a job well done, and best of luck to you as you move into a future that looks very, very bright to us all.

Your loving aunt,

Dot

A warm greeting communicates Aunt Dot's feelings for Karen and immediately sets a friendly tone.

Sharing your memories of the reader is one way to make your note more **personal**.

Referring to the recipient by name as if you were talking face to face creates a more personal tone.

Pointing out **similarities** is another way to personalise your letter.

Share your **feelings** about the recipient's accomplishments.

Note that only the first word of the closing is capitalised.