

Need System, Not Inspiration

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The ability to organize and express thoughts clearly and concisely is one of the greatest assets a student can possess.

As you go up the ladder in school, you will be asked more and more often to write themes, reports, and essays. Your grades in some courses will depend almost entirely on how well you have written your reports.

It is unfortunate that many students approach the act of writing with a sense of awe. You do not have to be a literary genius to write a competent paper. In fact, it is better to get rid of the idea that "inspiration" is needed.

Simply go about it as you would any other project. Decide what has to be done and figure out the most logical way to do it.

Here are some steps that will help you in mapping your written reports:

1. Make sure you understand exactly what the teacher expects you to write about.

If you are not sure, write a sentence stating what you believe the subject to be, and show it to the instructor.

Understanding of the topic can save you much fretting and many hours of work. You may write the finest paper in the world, but if it is not on the topic assigned, you are going to be in trouble.

2. Make a list of places to look for material for the report.

Most student research is done in libraries. Your research will be made easier and more effective if you ask the teacher or librarian how to use encyclopedias, the New York Times Index, the Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature, and the library card file system itself.

As you consult such sources, make a list of the books, maga-

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

1. Understand Subject
2. Research Sources
3. Gather Material
4. Organize Material

zines, newspapers, and pamphlets which offer some promise of giving the information you want. Behind each reference, write down the page number.

Be Selective
3. Now start gathering the information from these sources.

Make notes in your own words; don't just copy what the writer has written, unless, of course, you intend to quote him word for word. Credit the source.

Don't copy material down in wholesale lots. Be selective. Ask yourself: "Does this actually pertain to the subject?"

This doesn't mean you should accumulate only a few notes. Gather plenty of material that you can use. It is better to have some facts and ideas left over than to have too few.

When you find that you have run out of things to say and yet have not written a substantial paper, this is the signal to go back and do more research. Don't try to "bluff" it out. If your teacher is a good editor of reports, he'll detect your effort to pad.

4. After gathering your material, organize it.

That is, make an outline. Decide which ideas are the big ideas, and which ideas are the smaller, supporting ideas. Decide the order in which these ideas should appear in the finished product.

The extent to which you use these suggestions will be governed, of course, by the nature and the length of the paper you are asked to write. Normally, a one-page theme will not require the research required for a four-page report.

If your assignment is a lengthy term paper, you will want to consult one of the many fine books that have been written to guide you in that kind of project.

Of the four steps described above, the one most likely to spell success or failure for your paper is Number 4.

How to Outline
If you have never learned to make an outline, you should take time out right now to learn how.

First, open a book to a brief chapter. The first paragraph or so, perhaps even the first sentence, will contain a statement of what the chapter is about. Write Roman numeral I on the top line of a sheet of paper, and copy that sentence behind it.

Second, find the main ideas or items of information in the remainder of the chapter which explain or support statement number 1. Place them under 1 in their proper order as statements, A, B, C, D and so forth.

Let us use a simple example. A book on guinea pigs might contain a chapter which opens with the statement that guinea pigs make excellent pets. The chapter also explains that guinea pigs are clean animals, that they are strong and rarely get sick, and that they whistle at their masters when they want carrots.

These facts would fall into the following pattern:
I. Guinea pigs are easy to care for and make interesting pets.
A. They are clean.
B. They are strong and rarely get sick.
C. They whistle for food.

Usually, the pattern of a piece of writing is more complex. But with patience you can figure out that pattern if you start with these keys: One, find the biggest idea. Two, find the supporting ideas and facts.

After you have practiced outlining material that is already written, reverse the process. Write down a list of observations, thoughts, and facts, about a subject with which you are familiar. Now take another sheet of paper and rearrange this material in a logical, sensible order.

You will get from this a sense of harmony and rightness which will give you enthusiasm and confidence when you start the actual writing of your report.

(Tomorrow: More about how to write a report that will win a good grade.)



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Businessmen Mull Practices

PORTLAND (AP) — Businessmen from throughout Oregon gathered here Tuesday for a report on advertising and merchandising practices the Federal Trade Commission considers illegal.

"There must be a big effort by all to clean house. If we don't do it ourselves, the government will step in and do it for us," said Lyle Jantz of the Portland Better Business Bureau, one of the sponsors of the conference.

John R. Heim, director of the FTC's Bureau of Consultation, was here to give the major address at the meeting, the third of its kind held in the country.

Most businessmen want to comply with FTC regulations, he said, but many are unaware of the requirements of the law.

"Prevention of such violations before they occur is, we believe, part of our function and we are very hopeful that programs of this nature will achieve this end."

The FTC has said it wants to crack down on false claims of special clearance sales, false claims of wholesale prices and the practice of marking goods at higher than normal sale price so they later can be marked down to special clearance prices.

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