

How to Write

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Writing can be an amazing hobby and a necessary skill. From realistic fiction to mysteries to sci-fi to poetry to academic papers, your writing is only limited by your imagination. Keep in mind that writing is a lot more than putting pen to paper: it takes reading, research, thinking, and revising. While not all writing methods work for everyone, there are some things all writers can do to boost their craft and create a comprehensive, engaging piece.

Part 1

Part 1 of 3: Developing Your Writing Style



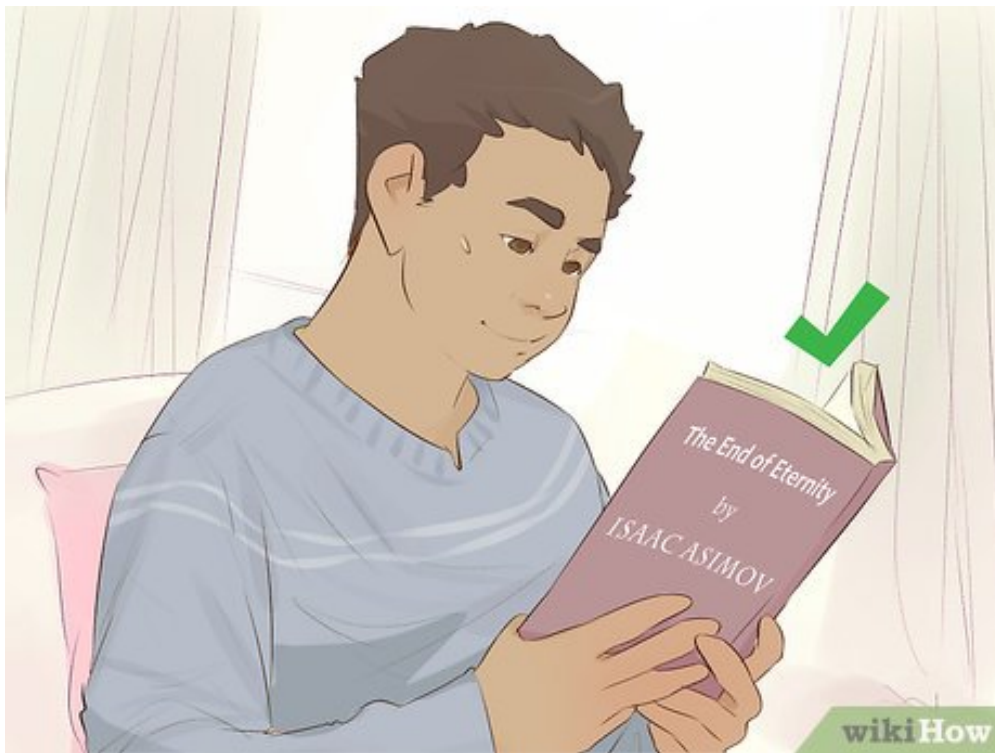
1 Find your style. Before being able to [develop](#) your writing style, you must discover your writing style. A writing style is primarily made up of **voice** and **tone**. Whether you are writing a [novel](#), [article](#), or [paragraph](#), your style is crucial.

- Your style can also vary on how long you have been writing and which genre you write in.



2 Establish your reason for writing. Maybe you like writing as a hobby, or perhaps you want to publish a book. Maybe you have a long essay due for a class, or maybe you want to improve your copywriting skills at work. No matter what, you can always improve your writing. Understanding your writing goals simply makes it easier to know what to focus on moving forward.^[1]

- For example, if you're writing a paper for a scientific journal, you won't need to establish a setting as a novelist would. Understanding what you want to write helps you tailor your skill-building approach.



3 Read different authors, genres, and styles of writing. Read a wide breadth of authors, genres, and writing styles to expand your understanding of different styles and voices. Reading helps you develop what you want to write about and how you want your writing to sound.^[2]

- Don't limit yourself to one specific genre. Read novels, non-fiction books, fan fiction, poetry news articles, academic journal articles, and even good marketing material. Familiarizing yourself with as many writing styles as possible gives you a bigger toolbox.
- It's also a great idea to read texts that can help you accomplish the type of writing you want to do. If, for example, you're writing a sci-fi novel, scientific journal articles will help you master the technical speech while good ad copy can teach you about sensationalism and emotional appeal.
- Keep up a regular reading schedule. Even if it's only 20 minutes a day before you go to sleep, you'll notice an improvement in your writing.



4 Brainstorm topics, plots, and characters for a creative piece. Before you can start writing, you need an idea about which to write. You could write about zombie-mummy romances. You could write about Mercury. You could even write about yourself. There is nothing you can't write about. Consider these questions to help get you started:[3]

- What genre are you writing in?
- What themes do you want at the core of your story?
- What important traits will your main character have?
- What will motivate your antagonist?
- What tone (comedy, tragedy, etc.) will your story have?
- Why should the reader be interested in your plot?



5 Map out subjects, topics, and arguments for non-creative pieces. Whether you're writing a news article, a journal submission, a class essay, or a non-fiction book, start by narrowing down your topic. Think of as many related subjects, concepts, people, and data sets as you can, and use these to help narrow down your topic toward a subtopic of interest. You could create a mind map or rough sketch of the plot of the story. ^[4]

- Ask yourself questions like these: What is my argument? Who is my audience? What research will I need to do? What genre am I writing in?
- For example, if you need to write about the relationship between Greek and Phoenician gods, list out all the deities from each pantheon that you can think of along with their traits. Then, pick a few that have the clearest connection as support for your paper.
- If your subject is broader, like colonial overseas connections, you have more freedom. You can talk about how food crossed oceans or how people used to communicate between overseas colonies.



6 Try freewriting to get your ideas flowing. Set a timer and write continuously until that time is up. You won't have time to worry about errors and mistakes if you're rushing to get the words out. It doesn't matter if you never use it, just beat the writer's block by filling the blank page and get your writer's muscles writing. Even nonsense is a start!

- Freewriting works for almost any style of writing. You can start writing a story, write down your thoughts and observations, crank out everything you know about your subject. Just let the words flow.



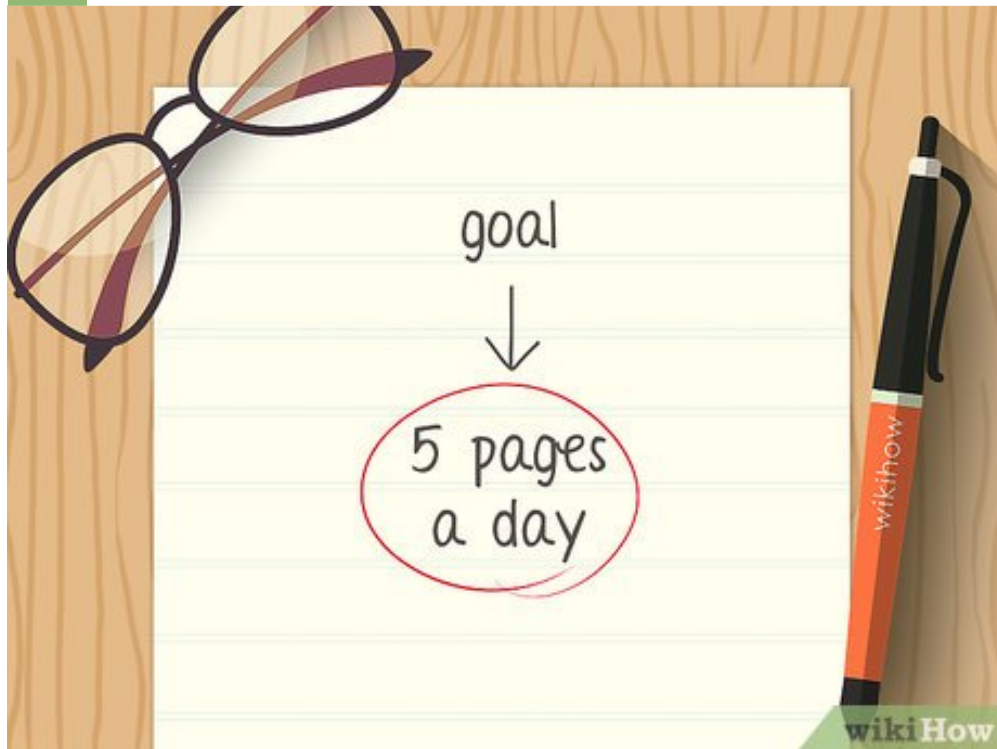
7 Identify your audience and what they know about your subject. A good writer understands their audience's perspective. They know how to use that to bring a reader into their piece. Think about who you intend to read your piece. The better you know your audience, the more you can cater your writing to the people who will actually read it.^[5]

- Your audience will determine what language you use, what needs to be explained, and what can be assumed in your work.
- An academic audience, for example, likely already has a basic background in your field and prefers concise explanations over flowery prose. You don't need to explain the basics to them.
- It's natural to want your writing to appeal to everyone, but you'll do better if you are realistic about your target audience. Someone who only reads romance novels may pick up your murder mystery, but fans of the genre are still your target group.



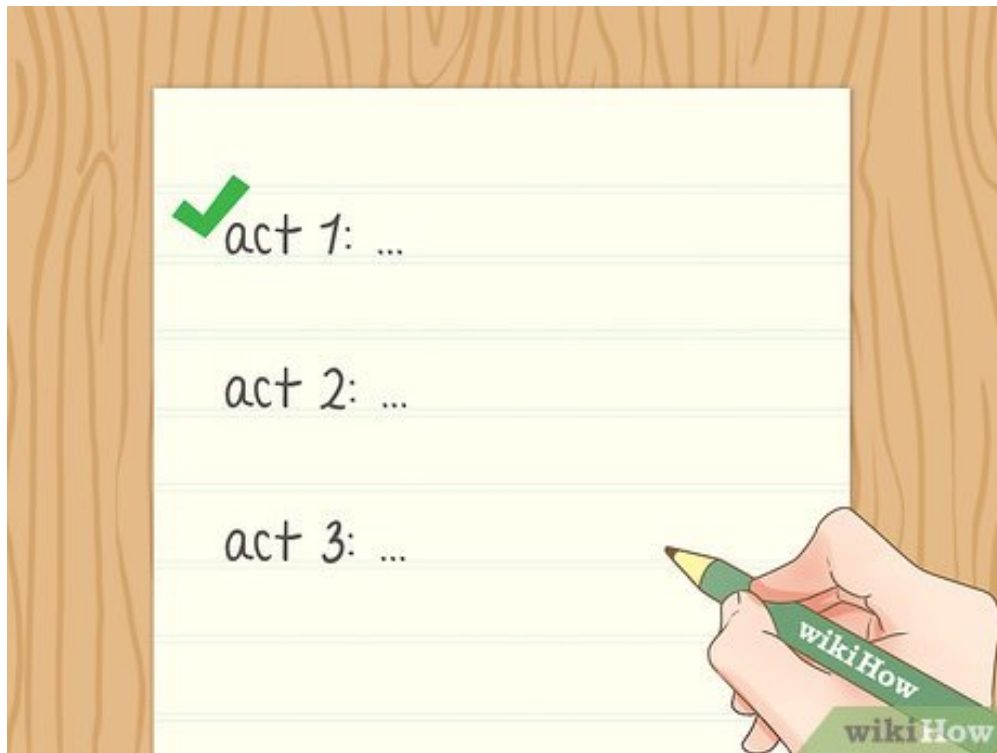
8 Research your topic. No matter what you're writing about, a little research goes a long way. For an essay, you'll need to research data and sources specific to your topic. For a novel, look into technologies, histories, topics, time periods, people, places, and anything else that has real-world tie-ins to your writing.^[6]

- Be selective about the information you retrieve online. Some Internet sources can be unreliable. **Established sources** such as peer-reviewed journals and books from academic publishing houses, have to undergo a thorough vetting process and are safer to use as sources.^[7]
- Check out a library. You may be able to find information on your topic in a library that hasn't made its way to the web. For a greater breadth of resources, try a university library.
- Research is important for fiction pieces, too. You want your piece to sound plausible even if the events are made up. Details like saying your character is 600 years old and knew Caesar (who lived over 2,000 years ago) can take your reader out of your writing.



1 Set up your timeline or goals. Your boss, teacher, or publisher may impose a deadline on you, or you may have to set one yourself. Use your deadline to **set goals** regarding what will be done by when. Budget time to write, revise, edit, get opinions, and incorporate feedback.^[8]

- If you have an open deadline, you may aim for a goal like writing 5 pages a day or 5,000 words a day.
- If you have a specific deadline, like for a school essay, you may need to be more specific. For example, you may give yourself 3 weeks to research, a week to write, and a week to edit.



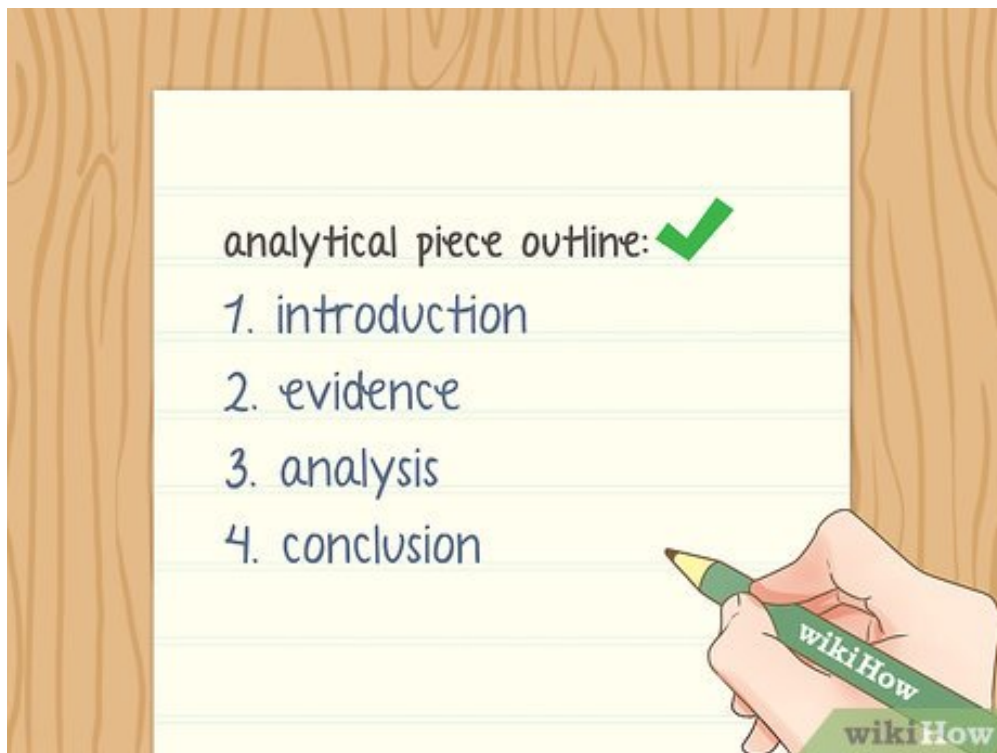
2 Outline your piece. Crafting a [simple outline](#) helps you stay on track and make sure you hit all your most important points. Your outline can be a skeleton of your most basic points, or you can fill it in with more facts and information.

- Your outline should flow in the rough order that you want your piece. You can reorganize and rearrange as you write, but the point of the outline is to help your points flow together.
- Some writers prefer to work without an outline, and that's totally fine. You should budget more time for revision and rewrites, though, since you don't have a rough flow set before you start.



3 Provide conflict, climax, and resolution in a creative piece. Creative writing can vary greatly, but the underlying story usually has a set-up, a conflict, a climax, and a resolution in that order. Give shape to your story by first introducing your protagonist and their world. Then, bring in a person, thing, or event that shakes up that world. Have that shakeup reach an intense or exciting peak (climax), before bringing everything to a close with a well-thought-out resolution.^[9]

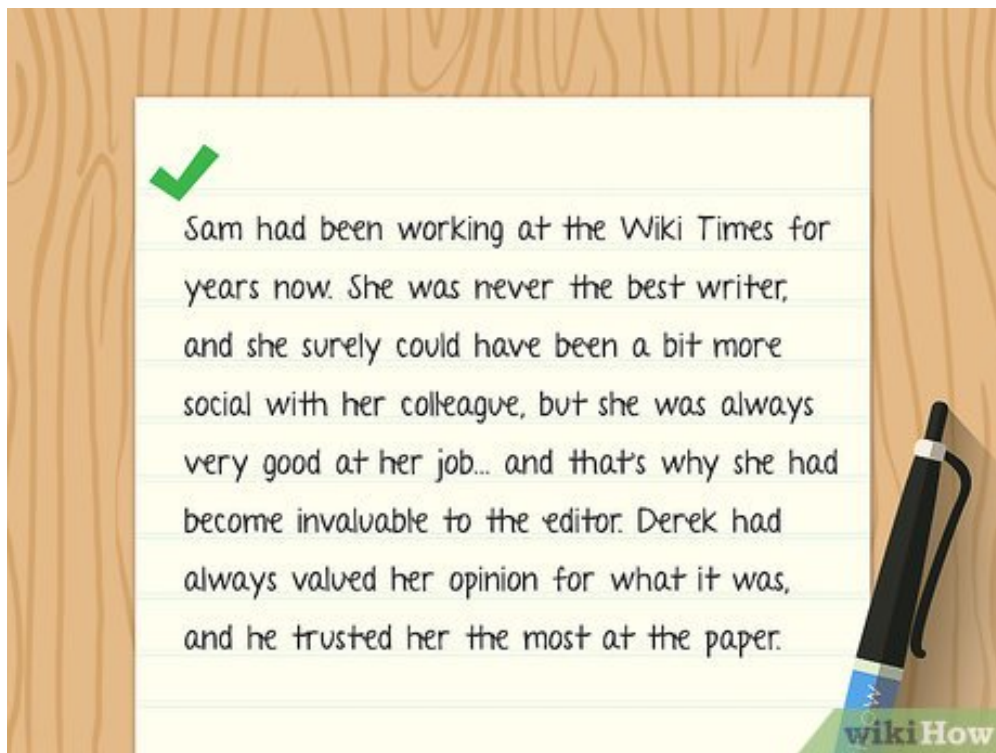
- Resolutions don't have to mean a happy ending if that's not your style. Your resolution should simply bring all the strands of your plot together so that they make sense.
- This form works for many types of creative writing, not just fiction. Popular history books often follow this format, for example.



4 Give an analytical piece an introduction, evidence, analysis, and conclusion.

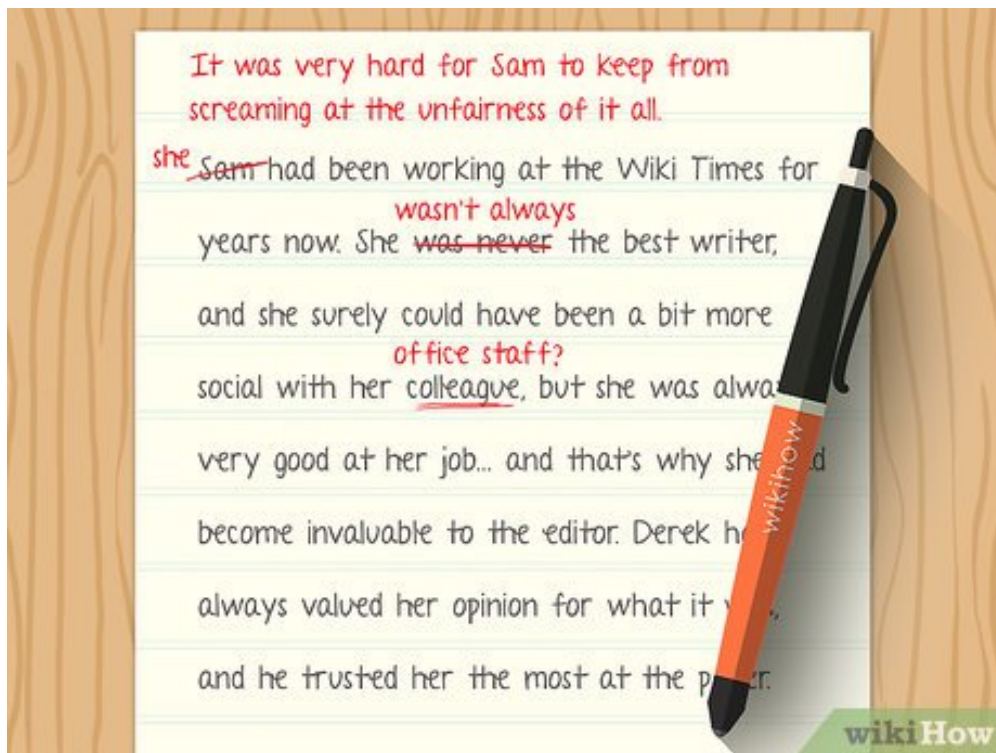
Exactly how you organize an **analytical piece** depends on what your assignment and the standards for your field. At a minimum, though, analytical pieces generally introduce their topic and argument first, then move into supporting evidence, followed by the writer's analysis or interpretation, and then a conclusion.^[10]

- If you conducted your own research or gathered your own data, your research methods should be discussed before you present your data.
- Discussion sections are also common in between the analysis and conclusion. These talk about other possible interpretations of your data and what work should follow to answer questions brought up by your research.



5 Write your first draft. Write down anything and everything you may want included in your writing. It doesn't matter how many spelling errors or weak adjectives you have in it. You'll have time to reorganize your piece and edit later, so focus building out all your ideas in the beginning.^[11]

- You can draft a full version of your piece, or you can draft in stages. Stages, like going chapter-by-chapter, can be particularly helpful if you're writing a longer piece.
- If you have an outline, don't worry about following it to the letter. Your outline helps instruct the general flow of your piece. It's a guide, not a rule book.



6 Edit in your second draft. Review your first draft and begin to edit and reorganize your content. Flesh out the plot or your argument and focus on creating clean transitions from one point to the next. Start thinking about what doesn't work and may need to be cut, too.[12]

- Check for coherency. Do all parts of your piece make sense together? If so, continue. If not, consider revising or cutting whatever doesn't fit in.
- Check for necessity. Do all parts of the story contribute? Does each section give necessary background, advance your plot or argument, develop an important character or point, or introduce critical analyses? If not, cut it.
- Check for anything missing. Are all your characters or points properly introduced? Is all your supporting data or information present? Do your points flow smoothly together, or are there some logical gaps?



7 Rewrite until you're ready to get an outside opinion. Writing often goes through many drafts and stages. Keep rewriting, reorganizing, and revising your content until you're comfortable showing it to someone else to critique. Keep your deadline in mind, and make sure you have enough time to edit before you submit your final piece.^[13]

- There is no set number of drafts you do before a piece is done. The exact number of drafts you go through will depend on your timeline, your comfort level, and your personal writing style.
- It's common to feel like there's always something more to add or revise, but try not to focus on perfection. At some point, you will need to put your pen down.

Part 3 of 3: Cleaning up Your Writing



1 Proofread your piece for technical errors. Remember that spell check alone doesn't always do the job. **Only you can catch** the difference between **to, too, and two**, or **their, there, and they're**. In addition to looking for misspellings and grammatical errors, check for items like overused words and improper word use.^[14]

- Online tools like Grammarly and the Hemingway editor can help check for more advanced issues like clarity and word use. Just like spell check, though, you shouldn't depend on these for full edits.



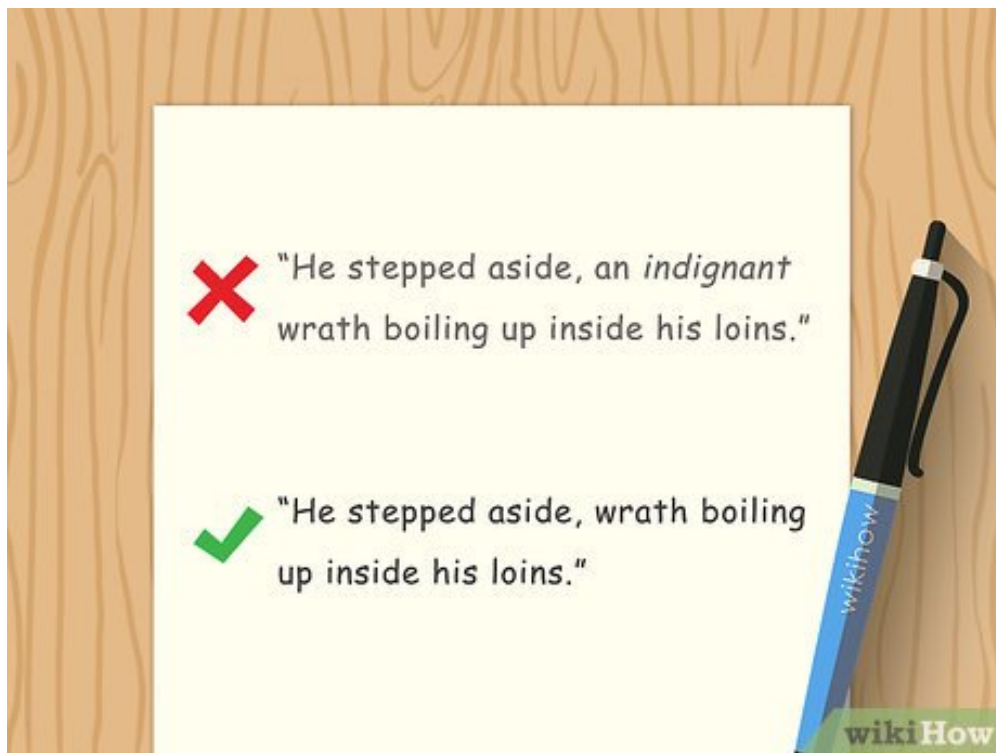
2 Ask for outside opinions. This is an important step, as other people will see what you actually wrote, and not just what you *think* you wrote. Ask at least 2-3 people you trust to review your work and look for things like clarity, consistency, and proper grammar and spelling.^[15]

- Teachers, professors, topic experts, your colleagues, and other writers are all good people to ask. You can also join a writer's group to share your work, read others' writing, and give mutual feedback.
- Ask them to be honest and thorough. Only honest feedback, even if it's a wholesale criticism of your entire story, can make you a better writer.
- If they need some guidance, give them the same questions you've been asking yourself.



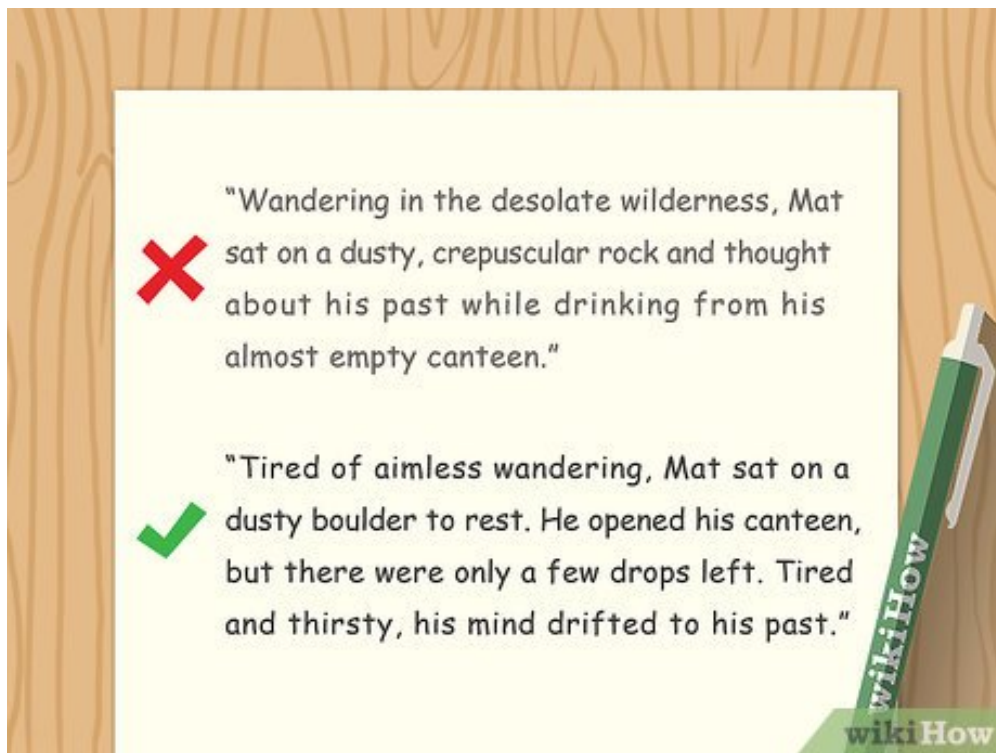
3 Incorporate the feedback you received from others. You don't have to like or agree with everything someone says about your work. On the other hand, if you get the same comment from multiple people, you should take it seriously. Strike a balance between keeping aspects that you want and making changes based on input you trust.^[16]

- Re-read your work with your readers' comments in mind. Note any gaps, places that need to be cut, or areas needing revision.
- Rewrite necessary parts using the insights gained from your readers and from your own subsequent critical reading.



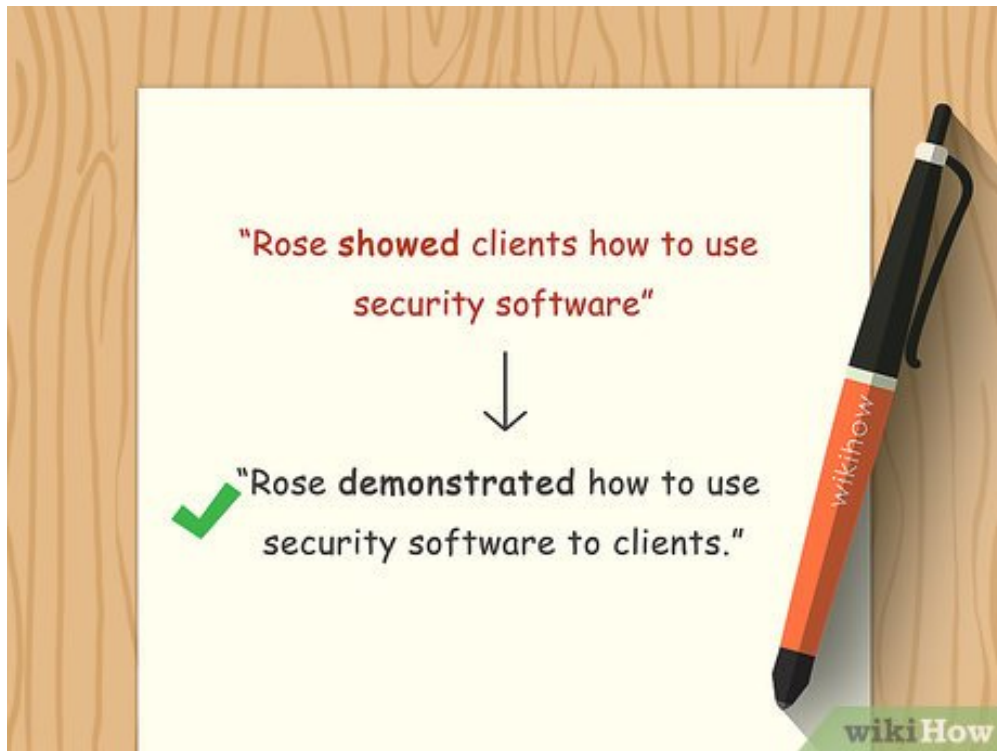
4 Omit needless words. If a word isn't essential to the telling of the story or the semantics of the sentence, omit it. It's better to have too few words than too many. Too many words makes your writing sound stuffy, pompous, or unreadable. Be especially careful of:

- Adjectives. Adjectives describe nouns and are most effective when they're used intentionally and selectively. Take the sentence: "*He stepped aside, an indignant wrath boiling up inside his loins.*" "Indignant" means angry, but so does "wrath." A better sentence would be: "*He stepped aside, wrath boiling up inside his loins.*"
- Idioms and slang. Idioms, such as "a piece of cake" or "foam at the mouth," don't always translate into enjoyable writing. Like slang, they date the piece (who says "suck the milk of nations" anymore?) and can be misinterpreted.
- Be verbs. Change be verbs, such as is, was, are, were, am, and being, to active verbs. For example, don't write, "She was tired." Instead, say, "She collapsed under the weight of exhaustion."
- Strings of prepositional phrases. It's okay to use prepositional phrases, but don't list several in a row. For example, don't say, "The cyborg climbed on the molding above the staircase along the wall beside the throne." Instead, you could write, "The cyborg skirted the staircase molding on the wall closest to the throne."^[17]



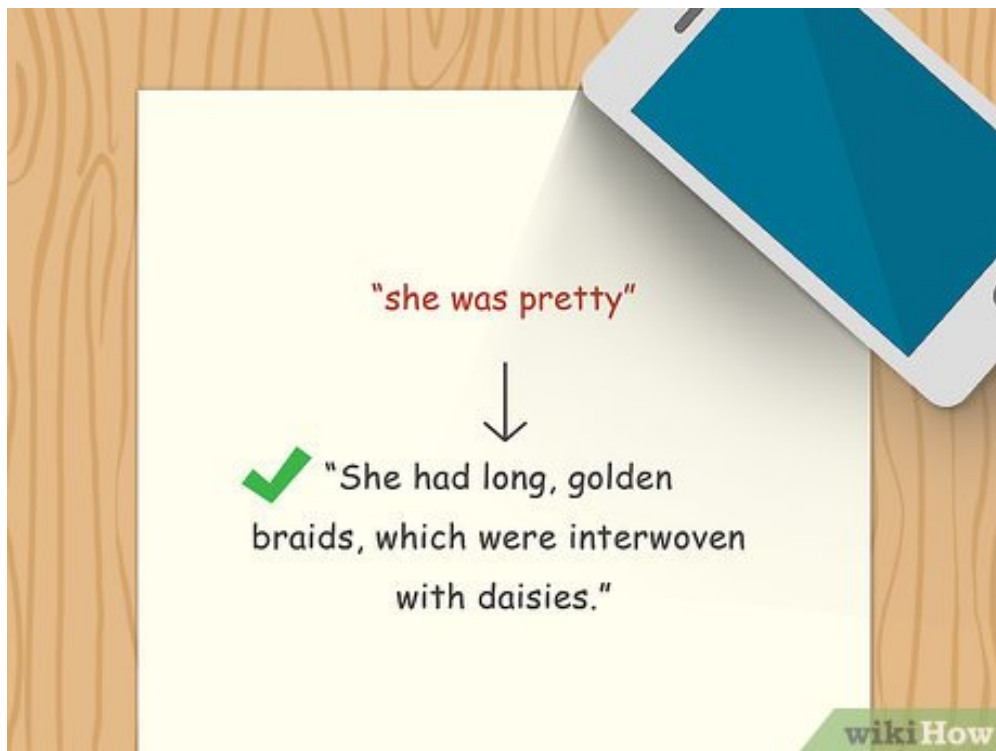
5 Keep your vocabulary simple. While lengthy and flowing prose have their place, often clear and simple is the best technique. Avoid using jargon or big words just to sound professional or authoritative. Often, that has the opposite effect. Overly complicated writing can also confuse your audience. Take a look at these examples from Hemingway and Faulkner. Which is easier to follow?^[18]

- *"Manuel drank his brandy. He felt sleepy himself. It was too hot to go out into the town. Besides, there was nothing to do. He wanted to see Zurito. He would go to sleep while he waited"* — Ernest Hemingway, *Men Without Women*.
- *"He did not feel weak, he was merely luxuriating in that supremely gutful lassitude of convalescence in which time, hurry, doing, did not exist, the accumulating seconds and minutes and hours to which it its well state the body is slave both waking and sleeping, now reversed and time now the lip-server and mendicant to the body's pleasure instead of the body thrall to time's headlong course."* — William Faulkner, *The Hamlet*.



6 Use verbs to move your sentence. A well-placed verb will make a sentence dazzle and keep it free from excessive adjectives. Build your sentence using strong verbs whenever possible.^[19]

- Take the following sentence: "*He creepily went into the room.*" There's nothing wrong with this sentence, but it's a little bland and wordy. You can enhance the sentence and be more specific by introducing a new verb. Try "*crept*," "*slunk*," or "*slithered*" in place of "creepily went."



7 Pay attention to verb voice. In a sentence written with active voice, the subject performs the action (e.g. "*The dog found its master*"). In passive voice, the subject receives the action (e.g. "*The master is found by his dog*"). Use active voice whenever possible as a rule of thumb.^[20]

- In some fields and industries, passive voice is standard. For example, as science paper may say "The solution received 2 drops of the activator," to keep the subject out of the sentence. If passive voice is standard in your field, follow those conventions.



8 Use figurative language for effect in creative pieces. Figurative language includes devices like simile, **metaphor**, personification, hyperbole, allusion, and idiom. Use figurative language sparingly for effect. "*The cleats were hard and misshapen*" might be more vivid using a simile: "*The cleats were hard and misshapen, like a shell spit out by the sea.*"^[21]

- It's easy to stick to similes and metaphors, but try adding different devices to give your writing depth and texture. Hyperbole, for instance, can make your writing explode off the page.
- Another example of figurative language is personification, which lends human attributes to non-human things. "The wind danced across the sky," creates the image of strong but graceful wind without having to say, "The wind was strong but graceful."



9 Choose your punctuation carefully. Punctuation helps us understand what different word arrangements mean. Punctuation should be present and fluid but not attention-grabbing. People make the mistake of trying to get punctuation to do too much, be flashy, or call attention to itself. Focus on how your punctuation impacts the flow of your writing, not on using as many commas as you can.[22]

- Use exclamation points sparingly. People don't often exclaim things; nor do sentences often merit exclamation. "Jamie was excited to see him!" for example, does not need an exclamation point. The sentence already states that Jamie is excited.



Community Q&A

Question

How do I get inspiration for my writing?



Community Answer

Maybe try to listen to some music that suits the scene you want to write (for example some love ballad for romance scenes or hard rock for fight scenes) and listen to the song's lyrics. Reading books or short stories about the setting might help, too. You have to try out different things, but there's always loads of options. Use the world around you to inspire you.

Helpful 23 Not Helpful 6

Question

I try to use metaphors and similes; however, sometimes the writing looks very stuffed and deliberate. How to avoid this effect?



Community Answer

Keep writing. This will improve with practice and a reflective, self-critical eye. Try not to self-edit too much as you compose, as this can stifle your creativity and keep you from generating material. Afterwards, review your writing. Delete any flowery or excessive figurative language, trying to keep similes and metaphors to a bare minimum. Work on including strong, precise verbs and specific nouns to give your text a cleaner, lighter feel and look.

Helpful 23 Not Helpful 8

Question

How do I write about emotions?



Cehea
Community Answer

Try to use a range of adjectives, but not too many. If you were describing anger, you could put something like, "I clenched my fists, scowling. 'How could she!' I shouted furiously before kicking a wall." This is more effective than, "I was angry because of what she did and I kicked a wall."

Helpful 28 Not Helpful 6

Question

My biggest problem is that I move the story forward too much. I jump from one event to the next without good explanation. The sentences also seem bland, and lack creativity in my opinion.



Community Answer

I did exactly the same thing, and I believe that the trick is to focus on one event at a time. Say you were writing a story about a princess getting rescued from a tower (original, I know), but you want the princess to fall in love with the prince, while also loving her parents who imprisoned her there, and she didn't know what to do. Focus on her emotions to start with, confused, in love, etc. Then move to the major problem: Will she run away? Figure out how it's going to happen and then map out how the story will move from Point A to Point B. Don't write a word of your story until you've got a plan.

Helpful 16 Not Helpful 7

Question

How can I write an internal memo to my organization?



Chelsea Cohen
Community Answer

A memo should be clear, concise, and about a single subject. When you write your memo, try to be as clear and specific as possible. Make sure your organization knows who the memo applies to, why it's being sent out, and what, if any, actions need to be taken.

Helpful 6 Not Helpful 4

Question

Is it possible to be redundant intentionally for a purpose? Like the boringness in a math class?



Chelsea Cohen
Community Answer

Redundancy, when used wisely, can be an intentional literary tool. It's effective in creating surrealism or a sense of disbelief. However, it's a tricky one to master so it's generally best for writers, especially novice writers, to avoid it.

Helpful 9 Not Helpful 5

Question

If I have a story all planned out but then I realize it's taken, what should I do to avoid copying?



Community Answer

There are only so many ideas, plots are more or less repeated over and over again. Try changing a few things up, such as changing the setting or a few characters until you've got something original.

Helpful 5 Not Helpful 7

Question

I tend to write a lot of "then she said," "he replied with," "then she said" and so on. Any tips and tricks?



Kathryn Lemon
Community Answer

You don't always need a "she/he said" after every line. Take, for example: "No, thanks. I'm not a fan of corn dogs," she told him, her eyes avoiding his. "Aww, come on! You can just order something else! I really want Sonic," he pleaded. "Sorry, but I'd really like something else. We can go next time." "Yeah, whatever. Chipotle?" You know who's saying the last couple of lines - you don't need to attribute the dialogue to the speakers. However, in the first couple of lines, describe the fashion in which the person is speaking. Is he angry? Sad? Nervous? He growled, snarled, or grumbled are great for angry, while mumbled, muttered, and whined are better for sad.

Helpful 17 Not Helpful 3

Question

How do I improve my writing skills when I'm having a difficult time?



Kathryn Lemon
Community Answer

Sit down and write every day. Writing prompts are some of the best ways to keep motivated, whilst still practicing your skills. Tumblr is great for this. Also, reading improves your vocabulary and makes you a better writer. Try to read from the writer's standpoint - how do they make everything sound so good? Inspiration is always great.

Helpful 10 Not Helpful 3

Question

How do I make my writing sound less forced and awkward?



Joe Kinnear
Community Answer

A quick and easy way of writing less forced is to not force so many words into one sentence. Instead of writing: "she looked at a rock in the distance while she sat down at the pier and drank apple juice", you could say: "she sat on the pier, drinking apple juice when she spied a rock in the distance." (This isn't the perfect example for all kinds of writing genres, so just go with what feels right.) For awkward writing, it comes down to the book. If you've set it in the past, just read more works set in the same time period and get a feel for the "wordage". If you've set your book in the present, go with what you've heard online, or from friends.

Helpful 9 Not Helpful 3

VideoRead Video Transcript

<https://www.wikihow.com/video/4/43/Write+Step+0+Version+2.360p.mp4>



Tips

- Avoid using archaic vocabulary and writing conventions. These are harder to write and harder to understand.
- Give your story to someone; to read and make sure that there're no spelling mistakes.
- After writing your first draft, spend a bit of time away from your story. It will let you reread it in the mind of a reader, and you may find some very obvious mistakes that you didn't notice while writing.
- Memorize technical terms. If you want to describe a house, you need to know terms like "eaves," "columns," and "facade." These technical terms don't have strong synonyms. You either have to call it "gold trim" or "gold stuff on the side of the wall."
- Don't be afraid to write out of order. Many writers start with the ending or analysis and work backward.
- Find a comfortable place to write. Different locations might lend themselves to different activities. For instance, you might brainstorm best on your bed at home and edit best at a library.

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This article was co-authored by Christopher Taylor, PhD. Christopher Taylor is an Adjunct Assistant Professor of English at Austin Community College in Texas. He received his PhD in English Literature and Medieval Studies from the University of Texas at Austin in 2014. This article has been viewed 620,610 times.

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