

Vision

Your vision for the piece is your purpose for writing and the main ideas you intend to communicate to your audience.

You might need to develop your piece's vision if...

- You feel unsure of where to begin, or you have "writer's block"
- You feel like you have too many ideas and are struggling to decide which one to stick with.
- You feel unsure of how to approach a particular assignment or prompt
- You feel unsure or unconfident about your piece's main ideas or arguments

Guiding Questions:

- Have you ever written something like this before? How did you approach it?
- Where do you like to look for inspiration when you're writing?
- What experiences have you had that relate to or inspire this piece?
- What is a big idea that is guiding you?
- Who is your audience?
- In a few words, what do you want your reader to take away from this piece of writing?
- What genre are you writing in, and what do audiences of this genre typically expect to read about?



Overview

Set a short timer for yourself (5–10 minutes) and draft ideas that come to mind about your topic. Please write casually; you do not need to write full sentences and can instead jot down bullet points, key words, fragments, or drawings/mappings.



Strategy 1: Freewriting

How to Use Freewriting

- Consider using a pen and paper to mitigate digital distractions and notifications.
- If free writing digitally, consider using a note-taking tool like OneNote, Evernote, or Google docs. You can also use FocusWriter to inspire you with fun backgrounds and sound features as you draft.
- If using a pen, challenge yourself not to set it down until after the timer has gone off. If you are using your computer or phone, challenge yourself to keep typing for the fully allotted time.
- If you are in an instructor or coaching role, consider walking away from the writer so they have space and privacy to sort through their thoughts.



Strategy 2: "Shitty" Drafts

Overview

We have the "right to write badly" (Spandel, 2005) in the early stages of drafting, which can be liberating as a writer. To help you refine your vision, focus on getting your ideas down without judgment of your writing mechanics. Know that you can revise iteratively throughout the draft process.

How to Use "Shitty Drafts"

- We borrow this exercise from Anne Lamott's *Bird by Bird* (2005), in which she points out that writers don't often know what they're doing in a piece of writing until they've done it.
- Open a document and try to write a draft freely, without judgment.
- If you notice yourself getting stuck while writing in a Word document, consider using another platform or modality for your first draft, such as paper and pen, OneNote, or Pages. This exercise can remove the pressure of writing formally, allowing you to focus more on your ideas than on your words.

Overview

Often it can help to speak through your ideas aloud and see what concepts, questions, or topics spark your inspiration. You can process your ideas to yourself, or with a friend or colleague.



Strategy 3: Free-Talking

How to Use Free-Talking

- Set a short timer for yourself (5–10 minutes) and talk about what you might envision for the piece as if you are explaining it to someone who knows nothing about the topic. Why are you writing your piece? Who do you hope will read it, and why? What point or idea are you hoping to get across? What impact do you hope your writing will have on your readers?
- Challenge yourself to keep talking throughout the allotted time.
- Record yourself so you can revisit in the future. Consider using digital tools such as Zoom, Voice Memos (iPhone), or Otter (AI transcription platform).
- Immediately after you finish talking, spend a few minutes journaling about what you said. What were your main points? What questions do you now have? What do you hope to accomplish with this piece?



Strategy 4: Annotation

Overview

If you are responding to a prompt, take out the prompt and mark it up with your interpretations, ideas, and questions. If you have started writing your piece and want to re-establish or refine your purpose for writing it, mark it up with your revisions, questions, and interpretation of your main points.

How to Use Annotation

- Consider printing out your prompt or piece to mitigate digital distractions.
- If you would like to use digital tools or annotate alongside others, consider platforms like Google docs or NowComment for collaborative features.
- Use visual annotation strategies such as highlighting, underlining, circling, etc., to clearly demonstrate your reactions.
- Write down notes in the margins as you identify the who, what when, where, and why of your piece
- If annotating a prompt, make note of any requirements (e.g., readership, use of technology, deadlines).