



The Really Rough Draft

Your instructor may ask you to turn in a draft of your writing assignment before the final draft is due. But first you need a really rough draft, one you won't show to anyone. This draft should be messy, embarrassing, all wrong-and you may not even exactly write it. It could be a scrawled , lopsided chart thing, the same three sentences repeatedly idiotically over and over, or a ranting paragraph that has little to do with your topic. The most important thing is, make your rough draft really rough. At this stage, you need to feel free to make mistakes. You have to have a time to write when you don't worry about having the proper content or focus, about punctuation, about grammar. You only need to get down all your thoughts on the topic. Many people find a not-quite-writing approach is the easiest way to ease into a difficult assignment. Here are several ways to create a useful rough draft

Make a List

Instead of writing a draft out in paragraphs, simply write down sentences as they occur to you. You can set yourself a goal of maybe 20 sentences.

Freewrite

Write for a set amount of time, maybe 20 minutes, without stopping. Try to keep to your topic, but don't worry about it if you end up elsewhere. The idea is to set down any and every thought, without order or organization. Don't even consider spelling, grammar, or any mechanical issue.

Write Exactly as You Speak

Tape record yourself, or simply transcribe the "voice in your head," using whatever casual language you would use with your friends. Don't make it sound like writing, just like you talking.

Overwrite

Never face a blank page. If you have a previous paper that was successful, write your new one on top of that, i.e. backspace over the old title and put your new title. Insert your first paragraph above the other paper's introduction. This can give the comforting illusion that you've done more work than you have.

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Rough Draft continued

Tripling Exercise

This may be too mechanical for some people, but for others this is a great way to stretch your ideas on a topic. First write one sentence about whatever it is you're trying to write about. Then write three sentences about that sentence. Then write three sentences about each of those three sentences. You end up with something that looks like a paragraph, and almost sounds like one.

Idea Map

Again, this is not for everyone, but for some writers it is a great way to get started. It helps to have a gigantic piece of paper, but any scrap paper will do. Write down bits and pieces of information about your topic. Draw lines to connect things that seem to go together. It can be a big, messy scribble. Sometimes these end up quite lovely, but of course that's not the point. The idea map may give you the inspiration to get started writing. Or you may move from here to another draft method, such as making a list.

From Ann Lamott, Bird by Bird

“Almost all good writing starts with terrible first efforts. You need to start somewhere. Start by getting something—anything—down on paper. A friend of mine says that the first draft is the down draft—you just get it down. The second draft is the up draft—you fix it up. You try to say what you have to say more accurately. And the third draft is the dental draft, where you check every tooth, to see if it's loose or cramped or decayed, or even, God help us, healthy.”

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