

What do these people want from me?!?

We have, through a painful and arduous process, identified a popular weakness in our course’s writing process. To Bingham’s satisfaction, the piece of the puzzle which causes us the most grief can be found in the act of prewriting. Before we can begin to study how to compose strong thesis statements, we must understand how to read, analyze, and respond to the question at hand.

So let’s start at the very beginning; a very good place to start. When you read you begin with “A,B,C” and when you sing you begin with “Do, Re, Mi”

Review: The Process of Writing 101

1. Read and analyze the question or prompt. (P)
2. Think. Consider the exigency at hand. (P)
3. Brainstorm. (P)
4. Outline. (P)
5. Write. (W)
6. Review and edit. (R)

Is this process linear? No. Do the activities of writing usually follow this general sequence? Why, yes! Are we required to write in this order for this class. For now, yes. Until you join the ranks of “experienced writers” it is helpful to follow this process when practicing academic, real-world, and even creative writing.

Consider the following suggested timeline when preparing and writing your free response essay, or any other timed writing assignment.

Free Response and Timed Writing Suggested Timeline

STEP	SUGGESTED TIME (MINUTES)
Read and analyze the prompt	2
Think and Brainstorm	6-8
Outline	4-6
Write	13-15
Review and Edit	3-4

*Loosely based on “Practice Essay Prompts” from SparkNotes.

Let's focus on the first step for our following exercise: Read and analyze the prompt.

When you receive an essay prompt, ask yourself the following questions:

1. Do I **understand** the topic?
 - a. **If you do**, briefly define the topic in a short phrase or sentence. This will help streamline your thought process later
 - i. Example: Social Darwinism believes that the competition between people, or groups of people, is part of life. Human Rights focuses on a few understood and guaranteed liberties provided by the state and accessible to all citizens of that state.
 - b. **If you don't**, refer back to the text and analyze the terminology. What *parts* of the question do you understand? What can you find that you *do* understand?
2. **What** is the prompt asking me to do?
 - a. Identify the information you *must* provide.
 - b. Analyze the **verbs** the prompt is using
 - i. Explain: make something clear by giving reasons or examples; tell how and why
 - ii. Discuss: give details about; illustrate with examples
 - iii. Define: briefly tell what something means
 - iv. Analyze: examine each part of the whole in a systematic way, then evaluate
 - v. In what ways/ How:
 - vi. Argue/defend/justify/support: give evidence to show why an idea is right or good
 - vii. Categorize/classify: sort into groups based on a given set of traits or features
 - viii. Compare & contrast: point out similarities (compare) and differences (contrast)
 - ix. Determine cause & effect: decide what leads to an event or circumstance (cause) and what results from an event or circumstance (effect)
 - x. Evaluate/judge/assess: Determine the worth or wisdom of an opinion, belief or idea
3. **How** is it asking me the question?
 - a. Analyze the **terminology** used.
 - i. Look at the key words the prompt uses to define the issue or exigency.
 - ii. Example: Social Darwinism, Human Rights

4. Is there more than one **part** to this question?
 - a. Make sure you are answering the *entire* question.
 - b. Is there more than one verb present?
 - c. Is there more than one term present?
 - d. What must I define *first* in order to answer the question?
5. What **documents** or **sources** do I think I will need for support?
 - a. Begin editing or trimming away what you need from what you don't need.
 - i. Consider LISTING the facts you need to know.

Practice:

Analyze the following prompts. Answer the five questions presented about each prompt. Use whatever brainstorming tool you find most useful.

1. Do I **understand** the topic?
2. **What** is the prompt asking me to do?
3. **How** is it asking me the question?
4. Is there more than one **part** to this question?
5. What **documents** or **sources** do I think I will need for support?

Prompts:

1. Consider the Identity, Membership & Community readings and your understanding of “identity charts”, explain how identity influences the ways we view ourselves and others.
2. Discuss the means by which historic change occurs and how that made an impact on the native peoples of the Americas.
3. Compare the political and societal circumstances of the Inca Empire from before the arrival of Pizarro through the end of the 16th century.
4. Explain how the availability of domesticatable animals affected the cultural development of people descended from the fertile crescent region.

5. Authors often use symbolism to reinforce the theme of their work. Discuss how this is accomplished in *Animal Farm*. Use examples from other works you have read for support.

6. “It is human nature to want patterns, standards, and a structure of behavior. A pattern to conform to is a kind of shelter.”

Evaluate the truth of the assertion above. Use evidence or examples from *Animal Farm* to support your argument.

7. Compare the spread of Buddhism and Christianity worldwide.

8. “Defects in society can be traced to defects in individuals”

How does this statement try to explain the presence of evil in society? Is this statement supported in the narrative, *The Power of Place*? What does the statement imply about individual responsibility or the responsibility of individual members of society?

9. Categorize a society or a group of societies from our study of human geography by making a real-world connection to a form of government and/ or a type of leader.