In this class you will write essays! Essays sound scary but really are not. An essay is a short, organized piece of written work that contains a central idea or thesis, several body paragraphs that develop that central idea, and a conclusion that summarizes or wraps it up. The expository essay is the typical kind of essay you will write in college; its intent is to explain, analyze, describe, or discuss the central idea (the thesis).

Part One: Developing Ideas and Turning Them into a First Draft

I. Finding Your Thesis Statement: An Overview of the Process

Your first task is to develop a main idea, or thesis statement, which for most beginning college writers is a mysterious process—but it does not need to be! Sometimes you will have a clear idea of what you want to write about before you even begin writing, and at other times you may not even have a clue. Finding a thesis or central idea is a process in itself. In order to develop a thesis statement, do the following:

- Learn about a topic by reading, asking questions (inquiry), and discussing the topic with other people. Sometimes you may be asked to observe as well.

- Freewrite thoughtfully on what you have learned or know about the subject. If you are a visual learner, find some images and/or videos to help you focus and generate ideas in your freewrite. You may begin with a word, a phrase, or a concept—whatever works for you.

- Examine the freewrite, preferably later, to find salient ideas, that is, ideas that “jump out” of the freewrite. Underline or highlight these ideas. Select three to five that are most interesting to you. Several of these salient ideas will become major themes in the essay. Work with your classroom partner and discuss these ideas.

- Then, you will examine your ideas/themes to see what kinds of relationships exist between them. For each relationship pair write a statement (one or two sentences) that explains what the relationship is between the two ideas. Please note that each one of these relationship statements is a potential thesis statement. A thesis statement is a central or main idea, one that makes all of the other ideas hold together.

- At this point you will select one relationship to develop into an essay. Hint: One idea is usually much easier to connect to all of the other ideas. This is your most likely thesis! (See the following diagram.)
• Later, the introduction of the essay will introduce the thesis and major themes of the paper, identified through this thoughtful process, but for now, you need to construct an idea map—critical!

II. Constructing an IDEA MAP: Select major ideas from your freewrites, inquiry questions, and notes:

III. Find your THESIS STATEMENT via the idea map:
1. Place each salient idea or theme from your freewrites, notes, and inquiry questions in an oval. You will probably have between three (3) and five (5) such ideas.
2. Draw a line from each idea to every other idea.
3. On each line, write a linking sentence or two that describe the relationship between each idea pair. Set aside any ideas that really don't seem to fit in, that is, ones that you seem to have a great deal of difficulty linking to other ideas. This idea should be stashed in a special idea file. It may come in handy later. (Never throw away a good idea.) Your goal is to find three ideas for which you can write strong statements.
4. Some of my students make lists of all possible idea pairs, above, and then systematically write a linking sentence or two explaining the relationship.
5. Select the linking sentence that you want to write about! This is your thesis statement. Identify it as such on your idea map! Its relationship to all of your other ideas governs how you will develop your ideas in your expository essay!
IV. Develop an OUTLINE for your essay:
1. Select **two or three relationships** from your idea map as the themes or topics of your body paragraphs. Each of these sentences can serve as a **topic sentence** of each body paragraph for your first draft! The topic sentence begins each body paragraph, tells the reader what the paragraph is going to discuss, and usually tells the reader how the paragraph is going to develop the thesis statement.
2. For each relationship, list the **evidence** you have to support the relationship: verifiable statistics, reliable information, use of an acknowledged authority, your own experience, illustrative examples of say, how something works, and most importantly, logical reasoning! Place each piece of evidence that supports the relationships in a rectangle in the diagram below.

V. Adding your EVIDENCE to your Idea Map:

1. **Outline** your paper—in whatever kind of outline most appeals to you—just make sure it is written down on a piece of paper! If you are a visual learner, feel free to use the **Shape of the Essay** handout to outline your paper! Use the relationships that you identified in your idea map as the topic sentences for each body paragraph. Then, list the evidence you have.
assembled for each assertion. One of the best ways to outline your paper is to work with a partner who will review how your thoughts are taking shape.

VI. Write a First or FIRST DRAFT of your paper:

1. Begin to write your introduction. The introduction, or first paragraph of your paper, should contain a clear statement of your thesis, summarize the relationships (themes) you are going to discuss in your paper, and otherwise frame the paper so a reader not familiar with the topic can understand it. The thesis sentence should be the last or second-to-the-last sentence in the introductory paragraph.

2. Note: If you get stuck at this point, it is perfectly okay to begin writing your introduction by only writing the thesis sentence. Many people write their introductions after they have finished the first draft. This is perfectly natural, because writing is a form of thinking, and as you write, you will have a better idea of what you really think. You will be surprised how easy it is to write an introduction after you have written your first draft. Read your draft through and then ask yourself what your reader needs to know in order to understand your paper! This is what belongs in the introduction.

3. You may now write an first draft your paper. Begin with the idea map, your notes, and the outline you wrote (above, No. 7). Devoting one body paragraph to each main idea. Remember, each body paragraph needs to have a topic sentence, which may indeed be one to the relationship statements that you developed in your idea map. And remember that you will need to make all of the connections between relationships clear to a reader whom you must assume knows little or nothing about your topic.

Plagiarism Alert

As you write, be careful to define or explain any terms or concepts that would not be likely to be well known or understood by the average person. You may use quotes from the sources in doing so, if you like. Later you will learn a specific style to use in identifying your sources. For now, I would like you to simply use quotation marks whenever you use the words of another person. You must also give credit for the ideas of another person, and you should cite where you found the idea. When you paraphrase what someone else said, you must also state whom you are paraphrasing as well as where you read the original statement. Indicate your source in parentheses at the end of the sentence containing the quote, the paraphrase, or the idea.

Part Two: Moving from the First Draft to Subsequent Drafts

The Revision Process: The Rest of the Story

The revision process encompasses all writing phases from the first draft to the end of the paper. It is the hard work of writing a paper, namely, that of rethinking and rewriting your ideas so that they are crisp and clear to a reader who knows little or nothing about your topic. Revision means, literally, to look at something (the vision part) again (the re- part).

1. First Draft Peer Review: After you have produced the first draft, share your draft and idea map with a peer reviewer. Have the peer reviewer read the paper and then tell you what he or she understood the paper to say. Take notes.
2. Together, you and your peer reviewer should discuss the ideas in the paper, what needs to be added or clarified, and what does not belong in the paper. At this point, it is usually helpful to look for areas where you can stuff in more information bits in order to better inform your reader. Using appositives is a quick, easy, and very concise way to do this.

3. Once you and your peer reviewer have added, subtracted, and clarified, the two you should look over the idea map to see if it needs to be changed to reflect how your ideas have changed. Indeed, it is quite likely that your ideas have changed in important ways. If this is the case, **redraw the idea map**, being careful to make sure that your ideas accord with what you want to be in your second draft.

4. **Re-write your paper**, using your notes from your peer review session and your new idea map. When you re-write your paper, you may find that the paper flows better if you rewrite it from the top down rather than zero in on sentences, fragments, phrases, and individual words. Use your marked up first draft as a guide when you do. Rewriting from the top down frequently restores the flow that existed in the first draft, and at the same time, results in a much better paper.

5. **Second Draft Peer Review:** Return to your peer reviewer, this time armed with your revised idea map, your essay evaluation rubric, and your Hot Spot List. After reading your paper again and examining your revisions, your reviewer should make comments in the areas provided on the Peer Review Form. Together, the two of you should discuss these comments. Since incomplete sentences are incomplete ideas, and run-together sentences are run-together ideas, the two of you should discuss how the ideas should be completed, separated, what the relationships are between ideas, and the like. Discuss using coordinating conjunctions to join together ideas of equal value and subordinating conjunctions when they are not equal in value.

6. Revise your idea map again if necessary. This process can be repeated if you decide to do a major rewrite.

7. Now you are ready to write your **final draft**. Carefully look over your notes and your idea map, and begin to write to clarify. With this amount of work invested in the process, writing the final draft usually goes much more smoothly. By the way, it is normal to encounter some difficulty with one or two sentences at this point. If you cannot work them out to your satisfaction, don’t worry. This means that the work of thinking on paper is a continuous one, but at some point, you just have to turn the paper in and leave future revisions until later!

8. **Print out your paper using double or triple spacing once you have written the third draft. Do not skip this stage.** Errors are hard to see on a screen and appear much more readily on paper. **Proofread** your paper for capitalization, spelling, homonym and other usage errors (the right word in the right place), and punctuation errors. Use your Hot Spot List once again! If possible, also ask your reviewer to proofread your paper. Make the corrections, print out your proofread final draft, and turn it in!

**Celebrate your success!**