What are the 5 Stages of the Writing Process?

Now that you know why you are writing and for whom, you are ready to embark on the 5 stages of the writing process: 1) Pre-writing or Planning; 2) Drafting; 3) Revising; 4) Editing; and 5) Publishing.

Stage 1: Pre-writing
First, think about your key messages — don’t start to write until these are very clear. Then, develop an outline that organizes your work into the main parts required by most publications as follows: 1

- **Abstract:** 100-150 word summary of paper; usually written last
- **Rationale/ objective:** Why you did what you did & why you are writing about it
- **Background:** What available research and/or expert opinion says
- **Context & setting:** What was happening in your setting
- **Design & methods:** What you did
- **Findings:** What results occurred
- **Analysis (discussion):** What you learned from the results & what you did about it, if anything
- **Conclusion:** Summary of work, including limitations, lessons, or benefits for others

Test the flow of ideas and key messages to see where you might have to develop them further or add transitions. Decide where you can use tables or figures to amplify your key messages. Graphics should stand alone and the text describing them should summarize their main parts. Based on the journal’s Instructions for Authors, determine the length in words or pages, required parts of the paper, and possible tables, figures and illustrations. To compute words per page using 12 point Times New Roman font, expect that an 8.5” by 11” page with 1” margins gets just short of 300 words (285+).

Stage 2: Drafting
Now you are ready to use your outline to develop a first draft of your paper. You already have thought about what you will say, so just get started. You may be surprised how fast the words come. Writing is like any other skill – it will improve with practice. Don’t worry about spelling, punctuation or grammar at this stage. The idea is to get it down, then get it right. Date each draft to show how they improve – and to assure that no ideas are lost that you may need later. Draft the body and graphics of the paper first, then add the introduction, conclusion, abstract, acknowledgements, title and author information.

Stage 3: Revising
Reread and take a second look at the previous draft(s). Ask yourself if this is your best work. Is it clear? Does it make sense? Rearrange sentences, paragraphs and transitions to create a logical flow of ideas. Find clumsy or overused words and phrases and replace them with simpler ones. Shorten sentences of 20 words or more and paragraphs of 8 sentences or more (Dixon, 2001). Use solid sentence structure and substitute strong nouns and verbs for the passive voice.

Stage 4: Editing
Get out your red pen (or computer highlighter tool). Correct grammar, punctuation, spelling and sentence structure. Run the spell and grammar check from your computer software. Put the paper away for a few days and edit again – and again. Enlist an accomplished writer with no vested interest in your project to proofread the paper for clarity and errors. Friends and family can also provide feedback on clarity and flow of ideas.

Stage 5: Publishing
Make sure that your final draft is as perfect as possible. Now, you are ready to submit your paper!


---

This resource, others, and more information are available at: [www.sophe.org](http://www.sophe.org)