

Timed Writing 6

Scope

Throughout this textbook you have practiced the writing process: prewriting, writing, and revising. No matter what you are writing or under what conditions it occurs, you should experience these three stages of writing. Even a text message is drafted mentally, written, and then often reviewed quickly, if for no other reason than to catch failed autocorrections.

In formal, academic writing contexts, the prewriting stage holds extra significance. Prewriting is when you check your understanding of the prompt, decide the direction you want to take on the topic, and put limits on what you will include. This stage can often make or break an essay.

The word *scope* is used to describe extent and relevance. In the context of writing, you determine scope through your thesis statement and topic sentences. Your thesis controls what ideas will be relevant in the overall essay, and each topic sentence dictates the limits of that one point that you are addressing. In other words, scope is seen at the paragraph and the essay level.

Effective control of scope in an essay means that you will have unity of ideas and cohesion. Again, this unity and cohesion should be evident at the sentence, paragraph, and essay level.

In timed writing, you need to decide very quickly what your scope will

be. While this is partially set by the requirements of the prompt, there will always be some degree of freedom with the scope you choose. For example, a TOEFL prompt requiring you to propose a solution to a problem may allow the freedom of choosing one solution and describing at length why it is the best option or suggesting multiple solutions that are described in less detail.

1 Exercise: Outlines (Scope Focus)

Compare the two outlines for the same timed essay below. What are the advantages and disadvantages of each outline? Which would you prefer to use with a time limit of 30 minutes? Why? What changes (if any) would you make to these outlines?

Prompt: In many countries, the birth rate is decreasing. There are many potential causes of this trend depending on the country in question. Regardless of the cause, there is a debate about whether this will have a positive or negative impact on society. Do you think that a declining birth rate will have a positive or negative impact on society? What are some of the short-term and long-term effects you would expect to see?

Outline 1	Outline 2
TH: A decrease in birth rates will have a significant negative impact on the future, both as individual nations and as a global society.	TH: Although there are many potential negative impacts of a declining national birth rate, the most concerning is the stress this will place on the economy.
TS1: Our economies are dependent on a strong force and a decrease in population will make our current economic system impossible to maintain.	TS1: Lower birth rates will cause the workforce to decrease dramatically, placing unsustainable strain on companies.
TS2: There are many institutions and careers that either require a steady population of children or benefit from larger families.	TS2: With fewer adults in the workforce, governments will not be able to continue supporting important tax-funded programs.
TS3: A smaller population of children will also lead to the breakdown of many of the events and programs that create a sense of community.	TS3: A larger number of retired adults who are supported by fewer children also puts extra financial stress on the economy.
RTH: The national and global impacts of declining birth rates will have a negative effect.	RTH: The economic stress caused by a decrease in birth rates will have both short-term and long-term negative impacts on society.

Scale

A concept that goes hand in hand with scope is the idea of *scale*. Scale in writing focuses on how much you will say about a topic. At first glance, this may seem very similar to the definition of scope. However, the difference here is that scale is more connected to development of those united and cohesive ideas.

Scale comes down to how many body paragraphs are needed and how many supporting ideas are best for each paragraph. You do not want

to overwhelm your reader by including too much information, but you also do not want to undersupport your ideas.

When you brainstorm, the scale of your writing is also controlled by your thesis and topic sentences. Additionally, any bullet points you add in that brainstorm will help you remember your scale.

For example, the scale reminders for the outlines in the first exercise in this chapter would be to include both short- and long-term effects. Without including that scale of time, you miss part of the prompt. Outline 1 includes both national and global impacts of declining populations, which expands the scale for the essay by location as well. Outline 2, however, keeps a smaller scale on the topic by only mentioning the effects at the national level.

2 Exercise: Outline (Scale Focus)

Create an outline for the same prompt used in the previous exercise. Do not copy the sentences from that exercise, and try not to use any of the supporting ideas if possible.

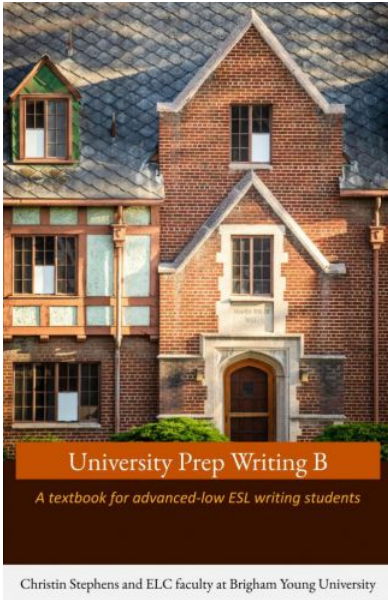
As you write your thesis and topic sentences, pay close attention to your scale. After you complete the outline, compare with a partner to see different approaches to the same prompt.

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3 Exercise: Timed Writing (Scope & Scale Focus)

Choose one of the prompts below. Set a timer for 30 minutes and write about the topic. Be sure to outline your essay first with specific emphasis on controlling your scope and scale.

- Your local school district has recently banned books from high school libraries because of offensive language use. Write an email to the school board explaining your support or disapproval of this decision.
- The idea of a "gap year" is becoming increasingly popular. Some people think this break from the routines and restrictions of school and work is valuable for young adults, while others believe it is an irresponsible use of time and money. What is your opinion on young adults taking a gap year? Why do you think that?
- You have been asked to write a short op-ed article for your university newspaper. The topic you were assigned is whether it is better for students to read digital or print versions of textbooks. Although the audience of the newspaper is the entire study body, the newspaper editor said that you are welcome to talk about the pros and cons from the perspective of your major.



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