

Prewriting



Anything you do before you start writing is prewriting. You should always start your writing process by making sure you understand the assignment. Other activities you may do in this stage are brainstorming, choosing a focus, and outlining.

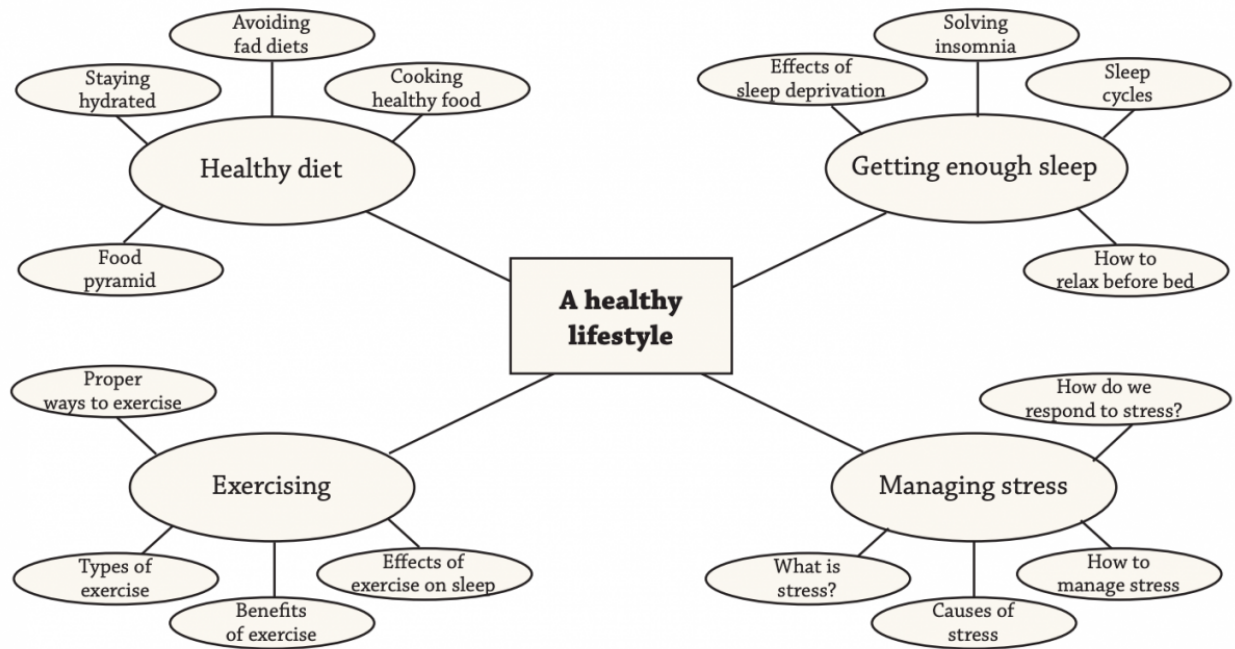
Understand the assignment

Make sure that you understand the requirements of the task. If there is a specific prompt you are supposed to use, make sure your writing addresses the prompt. If you need to write a specific style of essay (e.g., argumentative), make sure you use the right style. Always clarify any requirements that you do not understand with your teacher.

Brainstorm

Sometimes you are given a specific prompt (e.g., Should colleges use online textbooks?), but sometimes you can choose your topic. If you can choose your topic, then brainstorming can help you generate ideas to write about. There are many methods you can use for brainstorming. You can

discuss the topic with a partner, do a free write, make a list of ideas, make an idea map, etc. The following idea map was created to think of ideas for an essay about having a healthy lifestyle.



Choose a focus

If your topic is too broad, you need to narrow the topic down to a more specific focus. For example, if you choose to write about the problems students face, you will probably need to focus on a few specific types of problems (e.g., financial problems). Repeating a brainstorming activity with a broad topic may help you choose your focus. If you don't have a narrow focus, your writing may end up too general as you try to "cover" the entire topic. Without specific details and examples in your writing, your reader will not be able to understand your main idea clearly.

1 Exercise: Choose a focus

Choose a more specific topic for each general essay topic.

1. General topic: America vs. Japan
 1. Specific topic:
2. General topic: Hobbies
 1. Specific topic:
3. General topic: Robots
 1. Specific topic:

Outline

Making an outline is a prewriting activity you should do for everything you write. An outline is a plan that will make your essay easier to write and understand.

Not all outlines are the same. If you are writing a timed essay, your outline will be very simple. If you are writing a drafted essay, your outline may be more detailed.

To create your outline, think about the question that your essay answers (e.g., why is exercise important?). Answer the question. The supporting points in your answer will become your topic sentences (abbreviated TS). Write the main idea of your essay, your thesis (abbreviated TH), by summarizing your supporting points into one sentence.

The following outline is a simple outline for the example essay in this chapter. Look at the outline. How does it show the writer's plan to answer the question why is exercise important?

Example

I. Introduction

TH: Exercise is essential because it improves overall physical and mental health.

II. Body Paragraph 1

TS: Because it makes your body healthier, exercise is extremely important.

III. Body Paragraph 2

TS: Another compelling reason that exercise is crucial is that it improves mental health.

2 Exercise: Identify topic sentences and thesis statements

Which sentences are the topic sentences? Which sentence is the thesis? Label them TH or TS.

1. _____ Taco Bell is a popular place for students to eat on campus because it is healthy.
2. _____ Taco Bell is both inexpensive and healthy which makes it a popular restaurant on campus.
3. _____ Because of its inexpensive menu items, many students on campus choose to eat at Taco Bell.

3 Exercise: Evaluate and revise outlines

Evaluate and revise each of the outlines. Make sure the topic sentences support the thesis.

1. Prompt: What are some advantages of living in the city?
 1. TH: Living in the city makes it easier to get medical help and go to school.
 2. TS: Many people know that it is nice to live in the city.
 3. TS: A lot of teachers live in major cities.
2. Prompt: How has technology changed our lives?
 1. TH: Technology has many advantages in our modern lives.
 2. TS: Technology has made our modern lives easier.
 3. TS: Unfortunately, technology has also made our modern lives busier.
3. Prompt: Should schools require students to take tests?
 1. TH: Many students take tests.
 2. TS: Tests should be required because they hold students accountable for learning.
 3. TS: Another reason tests should be required is that they help measure improvement.
4. Prompt: What animals make the best kind of pet?
 1. TH: Dogs make the best pet because their owners are happier and healthier.
 2. TS: Having a pet makes people happy.
 3. TS: Dogs are very healthy pets.

4 Exercise: Create an outline

Use the templates below to create a basic outline to answer the prompt. Take 1-2 minutes to brainstorm after you read each prompt.

1. Prompt: What place in your country would you recommend that visitors see?
 1. TH:
 2. TS:
 3. TS:
2. Prompt: What makes the ELC a good place to learn English?
 1. TH:
 2. TS:
 3. TS:
3. Prompt: What is the best type of housing for students?
 1. TH:
 2. TS:
 3. TS:

The basic outlines you have practiced in this section are the type of outline you can use when you are writing a timed essay (like the independent task on the TOEFL). Other essays may require a more detailed outline.

The amount of detail required in the outline depends on the purpose of the essay as well as the purpose of your outline. Your teacher may ask you for a very detailed outline of your essays so that you can show your whole plan. When you need to make an outline, be sure to ask how much detail

your teacher expects you to include.

The following outline is a detailed outline for an example essay you will see later in this chapter.

Example

I. Introduction

Hook: It can be difficult to find time for exercise.

TH: Exercise is essential because it improves overall physical and mental health.

II. Body Paragraph 1

TS: Because it makes your body healthier, exercise is extremely important.

SS: Exercise > stronger muscles

EX: crunches, squats, push-ups

Exercise > lower heart rate

Exercise > lower blood pressure

CS: These are just some of the incredible health benefits of exercise.

III. Body Paragraph 2

TS: Another compelling reason that exercise is crucial is that it improves your mental health.

SS: Exercise is the healthiest way to deal with stress (which affects mental health)

Exercise > balanced chemicals

EX: Endorphins

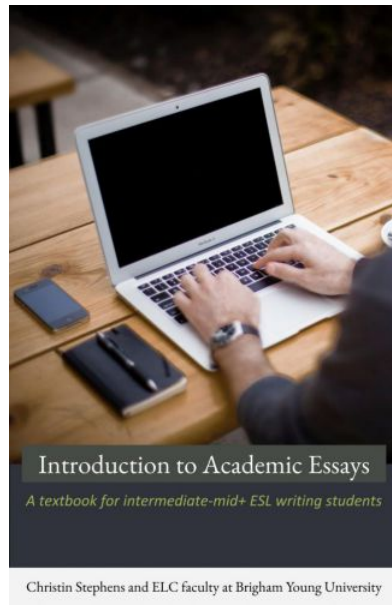
Exercise > clear thoughts

More oxygen

CS: If you watch how you feel when you exercise, you will notice that your mood and mental clarity improve.

IV. Conclusion

TH: The mental and physical health benefits of exercise prove that exercise is absolutely crucial for our bodies.



Stephens, C. (n.d.). *Academic A Writing*. BYU Open Textbook Network.
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