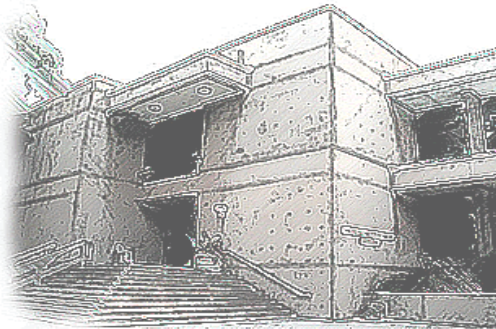


STUDY AID #8

Writing With Computers



EAST LOS ANGELES COLLEGE LIBRARIES

Helen Miller Bailey Library
1301 Avenida Cesar Chavez
Monterey Park, CA 91754
Phone: 323-265-8758

www.elac.edu/departments/library/library

Or

South Gate Educational Center Library
2340 Firestone Blvd.
South Gate, CA 90280

323-357-6214 or 323-357-6219
www.elac.edu/departments/library/sgec

Hours at East L.A. College

Monday – Thursday: 8 a.m. - 9 p.m.
Friday: 8 a.m. – 1 p.m.

Hours at South Gate

Monday – Thursday: 9 a.m. – 8 p.m.
Friday: 9 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.

From the Online Writing Lab at Purdue University
<http://owl.english.purdue.edu>

Using word processing software on a computer is an efficient way to write. You can delete, revise, and cut and paste with great ease and speed, without having to retype, and you will find your drafts easier to read as you revise. Even if you cannot type well (and many successful computer users can't), a computer can be both a convenience and an aid throughout the writing process. But remember to save your files often and make a backup copy of the file, even when you've carefully saved it. Disks can fail and not open, and files can be deleted or lost. Word processing software can aid your efforts in all aspects of the writing process:

Planning

- **Freewriting**

If freewriting or brainstorming is a useful invention strategy for you, do either invention strategy on a computer using word processing software. You can then cut and paste parts of those planning notes into a draft as needed. Some writers find that they can free write more easily by turning down the computer screen, so they cannot see what they type. You may also want to create separate files for different topics discovered while freewriting.

- **Writing an e-mail message**

As you think about your assignment or topic, try writing an e-mail message to a friend, to someone in your class. Use that e-mail message to test ideas as you would in a conversation with peer group members. Encourage the person who receives the e-mail to ask you questions that help you clarify your ideas.

- **Making an outline**

Set up headings for an outline in large bold letters. Later, as you go back and fill in the subheadings and sub points, you will be able to see the larger structure of the paper. Some word processing programs either outline for you or permit you to indicate the outline headings in a way that allows you to go back and forth between a screen showing only the headings and screens showing the detailed material within sections.

- **Planning visually**

Use a drawing or painting program to do some visual planning. To do some clustering, put a topic word or phrase in a circle in the middle of the page and then surround that circle with clusters of related ideas (also in circles). Use lines to connect these ideas to the main idea or to other sub-ideas. To try branching, another visual planning strategy, put the main idea at the top of the page and then list sub-ideas underneath the main idea with related points for each sub-idea branching off.

- **Keeping a journal**

If keeping a journal helps you, start a journal file for each assignment and include thoughts and questions that occur to you as you proceed through the writing. Include a plan for how you will proceed through the assignment, and if there are stages or steps to complete, write a "to do" list. Include phrases and ideas that occur to you and that may fit into the paper later with some cutting and pasting from one file to another. You may want to insert page breaks for different sections or thoughts.

Drafting

- **Creating a scrap file**

As you start an assignment, make two separate files, one for the assignment itself and the other for scraps of writing that you will be collecting. As you write (or plan) use the scrap file to cut and paste anything that doesn't seem to fit in as you write. This scrap file can be a very useful storage space for material that should be deleted from the paper you are writing now but that may be useful for other writing assignments. You may also want a separate file for keywords, words that come to mind and that can be used when needed or phrases that may come in handy as section headings in your paper.

- **Splitting screens**

If you are using a Macintosh or Windows, you can have multiple files visible on your screen at the same time. Consider this strategy if it helps you to look at one bit of information while trying to create another. One box on the screen can display your outline or visual planning while another can display your draft. Or, you can keep your scrap file visible while writing a draft. Remember that you can cut, copy, and paste between files.

- **Adding notes**

As you gather material from your reading (or want to save comments to yourself about something you've written), develop a method to store this kind of material that you may or may not use. For example, put parentheses around material that might not stay in a later draft, or use bold lettering, or make use of a word processing feature that permits you to store material as notes. Be sure to delete this material when you are sure you no longer want it.

Organizing

- **Mixing up the order of paragraphs or sentences**

Make a new copy of your file. Then, in the new file, use the cut-and-paste feature to move para-

graphs. You may see a better organizing principle than the principle you had been using. Do the same with sentences within paragraphs.

- **Checking your outline**

Look again at the bold-lettered headings of the outline you made during planning (or create one now), and reassess whether that outline is adequate or well organized.

- **Staying on topic in every paragraph**

Put your topic sentence at the top of each paragraph to keep the sentence in mind and not lose track of your topic.

Revising

- **Starting at the beginning of the file**

Each time you open a file, you are at the beginning of the draft. Start there when you are drafting and revising and read until you come to a section where you will be working. That rereading has several advantages for you. It helps you get back into the flow of thought, and it permits you to review what you've written so that you can revise as you read forward. But be careful not to get caught up in endless revising of the beginning of the paper, especially if like some writers, you find that you need to write the whole paper before you can write the introduction.

- **Renaming a file**

Each time you open your file, save it as a different file so that you always know which is the most recent version you've worked on. If your first draft is Draft I, the next time you open that file, save it as Draft II.

- **Saving copies of material to cut and paste**

When you are moving large blocks of text, highlight what you are going to move and make a copy for your clipboard before moving. If you lose the portion you are moving, you still have a copy available.

- **Printing out hard copies to read**

It may help you to look at a printed copy of your paper as you revise, so you can see the paper's development and organization.

- **Resisting the neat appearance of a printout**

If you print out a draft of your paper, resist the temptation to hand in that draft because it looks neat and seems to have a finished appearance.

- **Using page or print view to check paragraphs**

Switch to the page or print view so that you can see the whole view of each page on screen. Do the paragraphs look to be about the same length? Does one look noticeably shorter than the others? Does it need more development? Is there a paragraph that seems to be disproportionately long? For more help with paragraph length consistency, see our handout on paragraphing.

- **Highlighting sentence length**

Make a copy of your main file and, using that copy, hit the return key after each sentence so that each looks like a separate paragraph. Are all of your sentences the same length? Do they all start the same way and need some variety?

Editing and Proofreading

- **Using online tools**

A number of online tools exist, such as spell checkers, grammar checkers and style analyzers, but grammar and style checkers are not effective. Distinguishing between appropriate advice and inappropriate advice is difficult and a style checker relies on rules you may not be familiar with. Some word processing programs include a thesaurus which is useful for looking up synonyms for words you've been using too much or for finding more specific words than the ones you have used.

- **Changing the appearance of key features of your writing**

Change active verbs to bold letters, put passive constructions in italics, use larger fonts for descriptive words, underline your thesis statement, and so on. By changing the appearance of these features, you may see that you have too many passives or that you don't have many descriptive words.

- **Editing on hard copy**

It may be easier for you to print out a draft and mark it for editing changes. If you do, put marks in the margins to indicate lines where changes are to be made, so you can easily find them again.