CTC Tips and Strategies: Writing a First Draft

Composing a first draft can be one of the most frustrating aspects of writing. It has, however, one redeeming quality: it is only a draft. Robert Cormier once said, "The beautiful thing about writing is that you don't have to get it right the first time, unlike, say, a brain surgeon." Remember that the first draft doesn't require perfection, just a little time and energy. Hopefully the following thoughts and questions will spark some ideas and help make writing a first draft almost painless.

1. Finding a Purpose

What are the requirements of the report?
- Remember that every class, professor, and company has its own guidelines, format, etc.
- Take the time to find out the specifics of the assignment.

Who will be reading what I write?
- Who is my audience?
- What do they already know about the subject at hand?
- What background information do they need to better understand what I want to convey?
- Focus on the clarity of technical explanations when dealing with a general audience.

What do I want those who read my writing to take away from it?
- Am I trying to inform, instruct, persuade, etc.?
- Why would someone want to read my paper? What makes it interesting?
- What do I want my audience to do with the information I give them?
- What do they need from my writing in order to do it?

2. Tips for Getting Started

- Notes and outlines often are easy ways to organize ideas.
- When writing a first draft, don't worry too much about grammar or spelling.
- If you become stuck, take a few minutes and write down whatever thoughts come to mind. Somewhere within the mess of words will be a coherent start to your paper.

3. Formulating an Introduction

- State the purpose of your writing up front.
- Confirm what will be included in your paper and, if applicable, what will not be.
- Give the reader a reason to pay attention.
- Tell the reader how they will benefit from the information you are providing by:
  a) Referring to a reader's request
  b) Offering to help the reader solve a problem

4. Organizing a Coherent Paper

- Divide paragraphs into an important point and the key evidence to support it.
- Paragraphs should build on and lead to one another.
- Focus on transitioning between thoughts clearly.
- Sentences should be written so that there is no room for interpretation or misunderstanding.
- Avoid vagueness and focus on specifics.
- Use headings if appropriate.