

# THINKING ON PAPER CHEATSHEET

## 1. Generate the Ideas

**Key verbs for this phase:** SPEW and VOMIT

**Goal:** Empty your head; articulate the ideas. You're writing for yourself

- Write whole sentences or phrases; avoid keywords
- Write down the silly and half-baked ideas too
- Turn off the internal editor/censor
- Don't wait for a fully-formed idea; write down what you've got
- Use the words you have to attract the words you want
- Let your mind roam
- Don't avoid conflict—list pros and cons
- Talk to yourself—these are private notes
- You don't get the idea and then write. You write to get the idea.
- Focus on QUANTITY—let the QUALITY take care of itself
- Generate more text than you think you'll need

**Move on to the next stage when you feel nothing new is coming out.**

### Take a Break

- Take a long break if you can afford it.
- If time presses, divide the effort into thirds: spend a third of your time on generating, a third composing, a third expressing.

## 2. Compose the Ideas

### Label the ideas with topic headings

1. Print out your ideas file and label lines, paragraphs, chunks of prose with topic headings.
2. Write marginalia, annotations, additions on separate paper. But do it quick; don't linger.
3. With ideas on paper to react to, you'll get more ideas. Write them down.
4. You're still writing for yourself. Don't force anything.
5. Don't worry about sequence; that comes later. Just tag your ideas.

### Take a break

- Congratulate yourself on the amount of raw prose you've written.
- Live with your ideas without the pressure of full concentration.

### Retype the topical draft

**Yes, retype it. The whole thing.**

1. Group the topics together. Incorporate the marginalia, annotations, and additions.
2. If you feel inspired, add stuff, but don't force it.
3. Add little corrections, linking phrases, subtle changes along the way. But don't force them. You're still writing for yourself.
4. Think of this activity as mainly retyping, though more than that is going on.

**Rewriting is rethinking.** You're re-engaging with your material, turning what was static thinking into active thinking.

**Think of it as reshuffling, neatening your notes.** You want to keep the pressure off. Tell yourself this is mainly mechanical, a clean-up operation.

### This is your FIRST DRAFT.

### Take a break

**Bask in the warm glow of your productivity.** You've proven to yourself that you have lots of ideas and you have lots to say.

### Sequence the topics

1. Print out the topical first draft.
2. Mark with arrows, numbers, letters, etc. a sequence or sets of sequences.
3. Mark some areas "Intro," "Conclusion," "Main Body," "Supporting Evidence," etc.

**Now you're starting to transition from writing for yourself to writing for your reader.** Think about the arrangement of topics that will convince your reader.

**Note to yourself the connections among the various items.** Add connecting phrases: this suggests, moreover, on the other hand, etc. Seal those relations for yourself and your reader.

### This is your SECOND DRAFT.

### Take a break.

## 3. Express the Ideas

**This is the performance part of writing, where you're onstage.**

**Goal:** Communicating with others.

**Now's the time to worry about style, grammar, formatting, language, tone, etc.** But it should be easier since you're now editing structured prose, not generating and figuring out ideas on the fly.

**Sharpen your ideas and arguments.** For every statement, ask "So what?" and "Specify!" as ways to clarify points and to anticipate stupid reader questions and stupid reader objections.

### Retype

**You knew that was coming.** Remember: rewriting is rethinking, no matter how mechanical it feels. Experience your writing as the reader will experience it: one word at a time.

**This is an advanced stage of revision.** The big pieces should be in place by now. So keep the changes small, unless the big changes easily suggest themselves.

**Sleep on this draft.**

**Read it aloud.** You'll be surprised at the small but important changes that pop out at you.

**Show it to others.** Get their opinion on how to make it stronger.

## Monitoring Your Progress

**Writing is a continuous process of generation, composition, and expression.** Phases are repeated and sometimes combined (particularly the last stages of revision).

**You may skip from one phase to another,** sometimes to good effect, sometimes not.

**Be aware of where you are in the process.** Try to keep generating, composing, and expressing **sequential**. Avoid blocks or confusion from doing too much at once or reaching for a final effect too early.

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<p><b>Process Variations</b></p> <p><b>Continuous revision.</b> Generate ideas, think in full sentences, but stay inside one file. Revising and embellishing, not retyping. Every time you go back, you add more to it. Works best with the "little and often" strategy. Good for when you want to teach yourself about a specific topic.</p> <p><b>Oral presentation with no final written product.</b> Generate, organize, and sequence the ideas as explained. Use these as the basis of your outline. If you don't want to use notes during your presentation: Open a blank file and type out your presentation without referring to your notes. See if you own the information.</p>	<p><b>Evil Passive Verbs</b></p> <p>is, am, are, was, were, be, being, been, I'm, it's, he's, here's, she's, that's, there's, they're, we're, what's, who's, you're</p>	<p><b>Evil Metaphors &amp; Cliches 1</b></p> <p>(anything) from hell          a laugh a minute          a question mark hangs over about face          ahead of the curve          all in due time          all the way to the bank at the end of the day          at this point in time (prefer "now")          barking up the wrong tree          bated breath          bear fruit          bend over backwards          better late than never          blazing inferno          braindump          brainstorm          break down barriers          brutal reminder          building bridges          burn the midnight oil          burning bridges          business at hand          call it a day          carnival atmosphere          chew the fat          clean bill of health          cookie cutter          devil is in the details          dog eat dog          dog in the fight          due to (prefer "owing to" or "because of")          eat your own dog food          firestorm          firing on all cylinders          fly by night          food fight          freak accident          full-scale search          gangbusters          get a handle on          grease the skids          herding cats          holding feet to the fire          horror smash          hot pursuit          impact (as a verb)          in order to (prefer "to")          in the black          in the nick of time          in the red          last-ditch effort          leaning forward in the saddle          leave no stone unturned</p>	<p><b>Evil Metaphors &amp; Cliches 2</b></p> <p>left at the altar          lessons learned          let a thousand flowers bloom          level playing field          long pole in the tent          low-hanging fruit          may or may not (may implies "may not")          nose to the grindstone          not ready for prime time          on a weekly basis          on steroids          open a can of worms          outpouring of support          proactive (one is either active or inactive)          quite frankly          red herring          reinvent the wheel          run it up the flag pole          rushed to the scene          same sheet of music          sense of urgency          showstopper          shrouded in mystery          silos          slippery slope          sooner rather than later          split second          stove pipe          straw man          survival of the fittest          synergy          talk off line          teach how to fish          tense standoff          the cart before the horse          the eleventh hour          the fact (of the matter) is          the long and short of it is          think outside the box          time after time          time and again          time heals all wounds          time is money          time is running out          to be honest with you          touch base          unsung heroes          up the ante          utilize (prefer "use")          wealth of experience          wipe the slate clean          with all due respect          work in a vacuum          zero tolerance</p>
<p><b>Causes of Writer's Block</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Doing too many things at once. For example, expressing ideas before they're fully articulated.</li> <li>• Trying to get it right the first time. Believing you need to have the right words now, instead of writing now and finding the words later.</li> <li>• "Real writers only do first drafts."</li> <li>• Waiting for the Muse / inspiration / your subconscious to gift you with ideas. Fear. Dread. Boredom.</li> <li>• "All I need is will power and self-discipline."</li> </ul>	<p><b>Diagnosing Prose Problems</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Circle the prepositions (before, after, in, on, to, apart, for, into, above, from, by, beside, over, among, through, around, between, etc.)</li> <li>2. Circle the "to be" forms.</li> <li>3. Ask "Who is kicking whom?"</li> <li>4. Put this action (the "kicking") in a simple active verb.</li> <li>5. Start fast—no mindless introductions.</li> <li>6. Watch out for "shun" forms (recommendation, initiation, interpretation, etc.)</li> <li>7. For each sentence, mark off its basic rhythmic units with "/". How monotonous does the passage sound?</li> <li>8. Read the passage aloud with emphasis and feeling.</li> <li>9. Mark off sentence lengths in a passage with "/". Do sentence lengths vary?</li> </ol>	<p><b>Books</b></p> <p><i>Thinking on Paper</i> by VA Howard &amp; JH Barton  <i>The War of Art</i> by Steven Pressfield  <i>Art &amp; Fear</i> by David Bayles &amp; Ted Orlando  <i>Revising Business Prose</i> by Richard Lanham (or any of his books on revising prose)</p>	
<p><b>Orwell's Questions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What am I trying to say?</li> <li>• What words will express it?</li> <li>• What image or idiom will make it clearer?</li> <li>• Is this image fresh enough to have an effect?</li> <li>• Could I put it more shortly?</li> <li>• Have I said anything that is avoidably ugly?</li> </ul>	<p><b>URLs</b></p> <p><b>Continuous revision process</b>  <a href="http://markforster.net/index.php?view=38">http://markforster.net/index.php?view=38</a></p> <p><b>Paramedic Method for Revising Prose</b>  <a href="http://www.yale.edu/bass/2paramedic.html">http://www.yale.edu/bass/2paramedic.html</a></p> <p><b>Mike Shea's writing tips PDF</b>  <a href="http://mikeshea.net/writing_tips.pdf">http://mikeshea.net/writing_tips.pdf</a></p> <p><b>See how this presentation evolved:</b>  <a href="http://brownstudy.pbwiki.com/InlsFinalProject">http://brownstudy.pbwiki.com/InlsFinalProject</a></p>		
<p><b>Orwell's Rules</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Never use a metaphor, simile, or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print.</li> <li>• Never use a long word where a short one will do.</li> <li>• If it is possible to cut a word out, cut it out.</li> <li>• Never use the passive where you can use the active.</li> <li>• Never use a foreign phrase, scientific word, or jargon if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.</li> <li>• Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Remember...</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Don't wait for the Muse. Writing is an activity, something you do—it is not something that happens to you.</li> <li>• Inspiration doesn't strike when you're writing—it strikes when you're in the shower.</li> <li>• Writing is like prospecting for gold. Sometimes we make a lucky find of a nugget on the ground, but most of the time, it takes a lot of sifting to find the precious metal in the sand.</li> <li>• Use the words you have to find the words you want.</li> </ul>		