

## GETTING STARTED



### READING ANALYTICALLY:

If your writing assignment is based on a reading assignment—an essay in your textbook, for example—you cannot start writing until you have carefully read and understood the reading assignment. Many readers spend a lot more time reading than is necessary, usually because they aren't reading *actively*. An active, critical reader is an efficient reader who will remember what he/she has read.

**Step 1:** Read the assigned piece once quickly to get a sense of what the piece is about and how it is organized. You should be able to determine its subject – what it is about (college education? free speech? gay marriage?)

**Step 2:** Read carefully through the introduction (this might be more than one paragraph!) and the conclusion. Most writers state their main point at the beginning and/or the end of an essay. Try to identify the author's **thesis**, his/her position, opinion, or stance on the subject. The title often contains a clue to the main idea, and the examples and evidence presented in the piece support it.

**Step 3:** Re-read the entire document carefully, with a pencil. Underline key words; make notes in the margins. If you don't understand or disagree with a point, put a question mark in the margin. Circle words you need to look up. Identify the major points the author is making and determine how they relate to the thesis of the article.



**FREEWRTING** is a good technique to use when you can't think of anything to write about. Simply put your pen to paper and write, for about five minutes, on anything that comes into your mind. It won't seem logical or organized; it will be as varied and disjointed as your thoughts. When the time is up, look at what you have written. Have you repeated any ideas? Can you make connections between ideas? In a more focused freewriting exercise, you begin with a subject or topic—the assignment for the paper, for example—and freewrite about anything that comes to mind when you think about it.



**LISTING** is similar to freewriting in that you jot down ideas for a certain amount of time without organizing or editing them. However, instead of writing in mostly complete sentences, you put the ideas that come into your head underneath one another to form a list. When you have finished listing ideas, you will examine them to see how they connect with each other just like you would when you freewrite.



**MAKING SATELLITES** is a technique for generating ideas that may work for people who work less methodically, who have difficulty thinking in clear linear terms, particularly in the preliminary stages of the writing process. Drawing diagrams may help them connect related ideas and begin to organize. To make satellites, simply write your topic or subject in the middle of your page. Draw lines from the center (the topic, circled or boxed) that lead to related ideas or subtopics; circle or box those (your “satellites”) and draw lines from those that lead to supporting details.