

# SECTION 2: HOW TO BE A BETTER WRITER

We want to be honest with you: writing is very difficult. The good news is, writing is very easy.

What we really mean to say is that clarifying ideas in your mind, putting ideas on paper, choosing the words and organizing your thoughts in a way that communicates well to a reader is a complex task. But at the same time, the most important part of writing is simply getting over the idea that it is complex and starting to put words on a page.

Here are a few tips that might help you to reframe what it means to write well and to learn to write better than you already do:

1. Writing well is about communicating content. It is a lot easier to communicate if you have an idea or there's something you really want to say. The most important step in writing is generating content by reading, thinking, talking to others and taking notes. This can help you in every assessment and really for any task that you have to write, whether it is an application essay or a short note to someone.
2. Writing well isn't always about getting it right the first time. Take some time to think, jot notes and plan what you are going to say. This might not seem possible in an exam essay, but at least you have time to take notes and plan or make an outline.
3. Writing well isn't about learning grammar or memorizing vocabulary. Obviously, making fewer errors helps you to communicate better, as does choosing the right word for the right situation. But simply memorizing rules or words won't help you to use language any better. Learn these by practising—reading, writing, and listening. Your teacher might give you some exercises like “sentence combining” or imitations of other writers—embrace these as yet another chance to gain facility with language.

## What to do:

1. **Read.** Reading widely exposes you to language—words, structure, the presentation of ideas. The more you read, the better you will write.
2. **Respond.** Think of reading as the possibility to enter into a conversation with another writer. Try writing a brief paragraph after everything you read—this is almost guaranteed to make you a better writer.
3. **Don't worry.** The more you are worried about getting a particular structure right or having the right number of parts in a thesis statement, or the right type of opening sentence, you are taking your mind away from the simple act of communication. Don't get frozen by thinking about everything that can go wrong or everything that you have to do. Just write—especially when you are in class and free to experiment.

## What not to do:

**Don't rely on formula.** There is no exact right number of sentences in an introduction. The first sentence doesn't have to "hook" the reader. The thesis doesn't need three parts. There doesn't have to be five paragraphs in an essay. Each paragraph does not have to have a simple progression of point, illustration, explanation...

So... what should it have? Well... what do you want to say? What is your answer? Write your ideas first and then decide which matter the most and decide in which order you will present them. Having a problem with introductions? Think of it this way: you use them all of the time, whether you are telling someone what you did on the weekend or asking a friend for a really big favour.

The Literature Course Companion offers practical guidance on improving your writing skills:

- Page 204 offers a set of 13 question models designed to help you develop effective, debatable arguments about literature.
- Pages 48–49 offer a model for organizing textual evidence in support of an interpretation.
- Pages 50–58 offer models for improving your integration/embedding of textual evidence.

The Language and Literature Course Companion offers opportunities to write and reflect on texts of all kinds:

- Use the reflection questions as an opportunity to write in your learner portfolio.
- Look at tips in relation to paper 1 on pp 267–269.
- Pages 392–396 offer analysis, planning and writing tips.