

MODES OF WRITING

Questioning can be a helpful prewriting technique:

WHO is involved? Whom are you writing about or writing for?

WHAT can you remember or describe about the topic? WHAT are its parts? WHAT causes it or results from it? WHAT is most important about it? WHAT is it like or unlike? WHAT does it mean or could it mean?

WHEN did it happen? WHEN could it or should it happen?

WHERE did it happen? WHERE is it? WHERE should it be?

HOW did it happen? HOW do you feel about it? HOW does it work? HOW would you define it? HOW has your opinion about the happening, person, or place changed? HOW should your reader feel about this action, person, or thing?

WHY do you want to write about this? WHY should someone want to read about this event, person, place or idea?

You will often be given an assignment to write a particular type of paragraph or essay. At other times, you will be given the option of choosing or of combining modes. Almost all topics can be written about in a variety of ways, depending upon how you narrow your subject. Notice the following ways the general topic of “Dating” is approached:

Illustration: Explaining with specific examples. Title: “The Joys of Dating” or “Dayton’s Top Ten Night Spots.”

Narration: Telling a story; relating an incident, a personal experience. Titles: “My First Date” or “Oh, No!”

Comparison/Contrast: Emphasizing similarities and/or differences. Titles: “Dating: Then and Now” or “Dating and Gambling: Two Risky Ventures.”

Classification: Dividing a topic into categories. Titles: “Four Types of Dates” or “Blind Dates: NOT All the Same.

Causal Analysis (also known as “cause and effect”): Presenting the reasons (causes) something has happened or detailing the results (effects) of an action. Title: “Dating and Stress” or “Why I Hate to Date.”

Process: Showing step-by-step how to do something or explaining how it works. Titles: “Making a Date” or “Breaking a Date.”

Definition: Defining a word or idea in your own unique way. Titles: “Dating” or “The Perfect Date.”

Persuasion (also known as “argumentation”): Expressing an opinion. Title: “Pre-Teen Dating: A Bad Idea” or “Dating Co-Workers: A Hearty Recommendation.”

Description is often included in the above list; it emphasizes concrete details, highlighting the senses: touch, taste, sight, sound, smell. Description can occur in any of the above modes.

Here is a list of broad subjects which could be narrowed into all sorts of topics:

family	dreams	decisions
hobbies	successes	failures
talents	fears	politics
values	friends	sports
pets	nature	movies
newspapers	magazines	health
radio	diets	neighborhoods
exercise	cities	jobs
clothes	countries	vacations
states	school	teachers
wildlife	accidents	luck
emotions	military	farming
books	television	humor
freedom	hatred	happiness
men	women	children

Undoubtedly, you could add other broad subject to the above list. As an example of a narrowed topic, “family” could lead to the following thesis statements:

All of the members of my immediate family--my mom, dad, and younger sister--have experienced success during the past year. (illustration)

My mother’s family is more sociable than my father’s. (contrast)

My wife and I have different personalities primarily because of our early upbringing. (causal analysis and contrast)

The women in our family can be classified in four distinct ways: the martyr, tyrant, complainer, and clown. (classification)