

Writing at COLLEGE

14 Easy Steps to Success

by Duncan Fisher



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don't worry - **YOU** can do it

You've got a writing assignment—but you can't write!

Years ago no one showed you how. Or if they tried, you didn't know what they were talking about.

It wouldn't have worked anyway. Writing is only for geniuses.

And even geniuses take years to train.

Without being a genius with years of training you know you'll never, ever find the one correct way of writing up this assignment you've been given.

And there is only one correct way to write it, as everyone knows.

So now you're in big trouble. You've got this writing to do. You have no clue how to start, let alone finish. And there is absolutely no one who can help you.

All is lost.

Your only options? Quit, go home and hide in shame, or pay someone to do your writing for you.

the **happy** truth

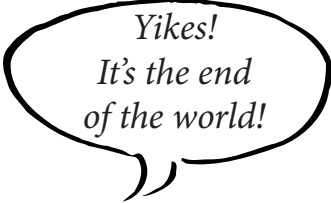
This is all nonsense, of course.

Reality is that if you're functional enough to run your life, hold down a job, catch a train, or follow a recipe, then you can write. Writing is all about procedure. It's not about flashes of brilliant insight. And you don't need a PhD to do it. Writing is a series of very simple steps—14 of them—all of which you can learn quickly, and all of which you can do.

Sorting out your thoughts and putting them on paper is just a matter of following these steps.

Follow them closely, and there'll be no more panicking about writing, ever.

We guarantee it.



Yikes!
It's the end
of the world!



we'll get you past all the classic **problems**

Are you too terrified to start?

Combat pilots function when they're scared. So do surgeons.
So do public speakers. Train right, and you'll function too, even
under pressure.

Don't know what to say?

Yes, you do. You know a lot more than you think.

Don't know how to say it?

That's just a matter of organizing what you know.

Maybe your words do come for a while, but they stop at page 3.

Let's work on planning.

Maybe you don't trust your English skills.

We'll show you the quick rules and the standard structures
you'll need.

What about time pressure?

Our system is fast. We encourage speedy work, as a matter of fact.

this **will work** for you no matter what you're writing

You may still think you can't write. We say you can. Furthermore, we
say that with our system you can write pretty much whatever you want
to write, in any setting. Writing overall is nothing more than a skill
set, just like it is in any trade. Learn the skills, and we promise you can
produce anything you need, anywhere you need it.

So cheer up! We're with you! It really isn't so hard!

Just turn the page, and we'll show you how it works.

*there's **help** and **support** right now*

If you follow our steps you can even check in with us online while you work.

Come chat, or get e-mail advice if anything in our system doesn't seem clear at first.

Duncan Fisher

Step 1

The information dump



Step 1

the idea is ...

... to calm down physically, get clear about what you're going after, and gather any information you might be able to use.

what you physically do...

... is first find an old envelope and a felt-tipped pen, then grab your jacket, and head out for a walk. You're going to jot some things, but you need distance from the big, scary question you've been asked to write about first. There's something about the gentle distractions on a walk, combined with the safety from classroom chaos, that calms most of us enough to think about the homework at hand. If you'd rather sit in a quiet room to do this, fine. Just be ready to head outside if your thoughts get all tangled up and overwhelming there.

Nothing you can think of is wrong or silly.

Once you feel like you're in your own safe space—and it may take a long time until your body is through panicking—have a nice, slow think about the question you've just been asked to write about. If it wasn't asked as a question, you rephrase whatever was said into a question, so you can answer it. If the command to write came to you as, say, 'Discuss trout fishing in Quebec,' which isn't a question at all, you rearrange it to say something answerable in specifics, like, 'What things should we know about trout fishing in Quebec?' Or perhaps it's 'Why should people go trout fishing in Quebec?' You decide, or get clarification on what the boss or the teacher wants. Take your time with this. There's no going forward until you're sure about what question you're supposed to answer.

When you're sure about what your eventual reader wants to know, close your eyes and start free-associating. Get ready to jot. Here comes the messy beginning of a good piece of writing. Ask yourself the question once more, out loud if you need to, and watch for absolutely any image or word that appears in your mind. Something will come. As soon as it does, jot it, in 3 or 4 words. Jot it even if it seems silly. Do not repress.

Nothing you can think of is wrong or silly. You'll be amazed in the end what your mind can release when it isn't scared or overregulated. (Children are more creative than we are, as a rule, because they're neither scared nor overregulated most of the time.) When the next image or word comes, jot it on its own line, separate from the one that came before. And just keep going. Do this as long as you can. Don't analyse any of it. Don't worry about the order, either. Just let it all splat where it falls. Be patient, be gentle, and have some fun with it.

Now go back to your workspace. Open a word processing document, and name it ‘What should we know about trout fishing in Quebec?’, or whatever your big, scary question is. At the top of the document, centered, put that question, so you won’t forget it. Then down the page, not centered, type out all your jottings, just as you jotted them. Remember to keep each idea on its own line; don’t run them together in a big mass.

There! That’s the information dump. It may or may not be a lot, but now you have something to work with.

*this part only applies if your project requires **research***

If you need more information than your brain has on board, you’ll research your way to the information dump. This will involve exactly the same process of finding things that ought to be part of your eventual answer, and keeping track of them. You’ll just do some reading first, and you’ll keep track initially on cards instead of on your screen.

Forget about that word processing document for now. Go buy a stack of file cards. They come typically in 3 x 5 or 4 x 6 inch sizes. The smaller ones might be easier to work with.

Sit down with the first book or website or whatever information source you’re using, and look for any statement that might be part of a good answer to your big, scary question. When you find one, write exactly those words on a card.

Then turn the card over, and jot what the words mean. If the statement had been, ‘Quebec trout stocks tripled since 1955, the year the Provincial Fishing Board pushed through the Trout Regeneration Act’, then your felt-tipped jotting on the reverse of the card would probably be [regeneration funding successful].

At the bottom of this side of the card, write the title of the book and the page number, or write out the name of the person whose website words you copied, and give the URL. When you have a mighty stack of these 2-sided cards, you’ve done your information dump, even though it’s not typed up yet.

example

What should we know about trout fishing in Quebec?

trout most popular game fish in Canada

two kinds of trout facing severe depletion (yellow-bellied and red-lipped)

sport recently re-popularized by 'Fishing with Armand' TV show

trout sacred to several new-age sects

move from bamboo to fibreglass rods in 1970s (but purists still like bamboo)

trout re-stocking appears to be working after two years

eco-activists want ban or moratorium

is re-stocking natural? (current debate)

trout may spread aquatic form of rabies

freshwater anglers like to wear spotted boxer shorts

trout civil rights: movie stars calling fishhooks 'inhumane'

sport fishing in the Olympics – possible in 20 years?

salmon fishermen think spotted boxers are sissy; prefer red longjohns

did aliens introduce fishing to ancient Egypt? – recent book by H.V. Madmann,

discussed on 'Good Morning Wyoming' 17 July 2008

should licensing laws change?

spotted boxer shorts sales 'through the roof' for last two years

what about fishing by crossbow?

front of big research card:

trout re-stocking appears to be working

back of big research card:

“we could not be happier with the preliminary results of our efforts to re-introduce native fish and game species into the local habitat. Rainbow and sabre-toothed trout levels do appear to be rising since the program started tow years ago.”

Pierre Pecher, Minister for Fish & Varmints, Bitter Springs Gazette (11 Oct. 2007), pg.7.

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