

How to Get Into an Essay

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It's often difficult to just dive into a topic and begin writing. It's difficult because your understanding of the topic might not be as developed as it could be; therefore you make more work for yourself by having to constantly go back and reorient yourself with your topic. A better idea is to flesh out your topic and prepare yourself as much as possible before you begin writing.

Begin by learning as much as you can about your opinions of, or reactions to, a topic.

Questions to ask about your topic, or possible topics:

1. What do I know or don't I know about this subject?
2. What do I want to know?
3. What about this subject interests me?
4. How do I feel about/react to this subject if it is raised in a conversation?
5. What would I like to say about this question?

Next, find other texts that help answer or connect to those questions.

Questions to ask while reading and doing research:

1. What does this text say about my subject?
2. How does it answer or relate to my question?
3. Do I agree or disagree with some, all, or specific parts of this text?
4. How does my thinking interact with the thinking of the author of this text?

Then, try to make a sketch, or visualization, of how all these questions (and your answers to them) fit together. This could be a cluster map, an outline, or any other visual aid that helps you see how these ideas relate to one another. Seeing everything laid out in front of you can give you a better feeling for how to link ideas together in your paper.

Finally, start writing from your perspective. As you write, follow your sketch to see when the other texts can enter into your discussion of the subject to form a sort of conversation, or dialogue. Think of quotes from essays or books as different writers speaking, adding their points to your own and building on them. This way, you can incorporate research almost seamlessly into your own writing, making it easier to read and understand.

Before you know it, you've produced a first draft of your essay—congratulations!