



NO. 7 IN THE WRITING CENTER HANDOUT SERIES

Topic Development: Writing the Trip of Your Dreams

If you look at writing a paper as similar to taking a trip, then topic development is the stage of getting ready to go. At any point along the trip, please feel free to contact AAA . . . er . . . I mean, the Writing Center.

The Driver: You.

This is your trip, so think of yourself first. It is important to be aware of yourself and your interests and preferences before you begin to develop a topic. What are your interests? What have you enjoyed from class and readings? What would you like to know more about?

The Destination: Assignment.

Look over the assignment to know where you want to end up on your trip. Making sure you are aware of the assignment will prevent massive rewrites down the road. Consider type, length, due date, and other requirements. Where are the areas for improvisation or creativity?

The Passengers: Audience.

Who are you taking with you on this trip? Knowing how familiar your audience is with your topic tells you how much background information needs to be provided or how in depth you can be. How will the audience influence style and tone? For most papers, you want to convince an audience to see the matter from your perspective.

The Brochures: Think.

Brainstorm. Jot down ideas as they come to you. Use your creativity. If it works for you, free write — type or write your thoughts as they come out, without editing. Look at all of the information you have already gathered about your passengers, the destination, and yourself in order to guide you to the best sights and attractions on your journey. Do not eliminate any ideas at this point.

The Suitcase: Evaluate.

Now consider where you want to go. What do you need to take along with you on this trip? Where are these brainstorms leading you? Is it narrow enough? Is it too narrow? Pack for the occasion. Draw a picture or chart to show connections between ideas and details and courses of action.

The Mode of Transportation: Support.

Now that you have an evaluated topic, look at the practicalities of writing about this topic. What is the best way to get from here to there? How do you support it? What evidence do you have already? Consider tone and purpose. Develop a working thesis that indicates where you want to take the work.

The Map: Direction.

So you know where you want to go, but which route will you take? Prepare an outline or choose some other organizational strategy and plot your path. Set a timeline based on your due date. Can you handle your topic in that amount of time? Where do you need to go next?

HAVE A GREAT TRIP!

For more information on developing a topic, see

http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/general/gl_plan1.html

<http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/readassign.html>

The St. Martin's Handbook (5th ed): 57-63, 307-12