“Writing”

… is part **Technique**

- Composition (grammar, wording, style)
- Accepted formatting/guidelines of your discipline

**Strategies:**
- Attend workshop in skills/technique
- Use internet resources on writing
- Get a good (small) Thesaurus
- Consider hiring an editor (as needed)

… is about **Organization**

- Organization is everything for these projects – it provides structure, focus and clarity to the work; it reduces stress, increases your sense of control over the project;
- Organization cannot be quantified in terms of “pages written today” – but it is often the most effective use of writing time.

**Strategies:**
- Use the U. of M. libraries [Assignment Calculator](http://www.lib.umn.edu/help/calculator/) – this will help you get organized, set-up a timeline for completion, and even email you to see if you are following through with tasks!
- Remember:  \( A – B – C \) (know what floor you are on in the museum)
- Use the **Idea Organizer**
- Arrange to turn something (anything) in to a friend or professor on a regular basis (e.g., weekly). This may help “force” you to do something on the paper/assignment regularly and keep you on track [ … it will also increase interest as you see progress!]

… is part **Managing Stress**  (effectively)

- Low confidence, Overwhelmed, Stuck, Frustrated
- The power of distraction & procrastination

**Strategies:**
- Build Confidence (Self-efficacy)
- Remember:  “**Writing something is better than writing nothing**” … write something most days
- Don’t focus on the page length (… write the paper for the sake of writing the paper)
- Break the paper down into manageable tasks
- Get others involved in your writing process (hold a “Meeting of the Minds” group to get ideas and make the process more fun – see below)
- Get away from **where** you are writing; go on a break but keep your mind on the task
… is about making **Decisions**

- **Critical thinking & quality decisions** are major factors considered by faculty in grading papers;
- Demonstrating your ability to make informed **decisions** and to stand by (or ‘defend’) them is often more important than the length or grammatical quality of the work;
- Know what arguments you are proposing, figure out where you stand (based on your beliefs, experience, values, interests, etc.), and **tell** the reader in your paper;
- Writing is not about perfection – **you won’t please everyone who reads your work** – make your decision and stand by it (… go for it!).

**Strategies:**

- **Notecards** – when you get a paper assignment (or project),
  - **STEP 1:** pull out a notecard
  - **STEP 2:** start writing down:
    - random thoughts
    - resources you might consider for information (e.g., web sites, journals/magazines, books, etc.)
    - issues you might be aware of on the paper topic (e.g., social security – pros/cons about options such as personal savings accounts)
  - **STEP 3:** carry the card with you and jot down ideas that might come to you in your daily activities;
  - **STEP 4:** poll your friends – ask them what thoughts come to mind on the topic (write their ideas down; do you agree or disagree with your friends? Write down your opinions)
  - **STEP 5:** go to the internet – enter your topic and see what ideas you get by skimming results of a search. Do any resources stand out to you? Is the topic bigger (or smaller) than you realized? How will this affect what you write about and/or when you get started?

- Hold a **“Meeting of the Minds”** group – basically, this means gathering a few of your friends around to discuss your topic from the perspective of each of their disciplines. So if the topic is 4th century art in Rome, get friends from psychology, engineering, biology and each of you discuss the topic from your own perspective – for example, the engineering major might comment on the structures, architecture or techniques used in art of this period. **[Your task is to gather ideas, reflect on your opinions and organize how these perspectives might help you take a stance in the paper/assignment]**

… is about using **Strategy**

- Strategies include efficient ways of organizing resources and data, working effectively with professors, and balancing writing time with other parts of your life;
- Strategies also help us to know when **‘enough is enough’**.
… involves having a sense of **Purpose & Perspective**

- **Answer these questions:**
  - Why am I doing this? Why am I writing this paper, on this topic?
  - Why do I care? Why should I care?
  - What about this paper interests me? In what ways can I relate this topic/paper to my life & personal experiences?

**Strategies:**

- ✓ Meet & talk with your professors – sometimes the way an assignment is written on the syllabus (or described in a handout) is different from what the professor intends. Getting his/her personal reasons for having you do the assignment can often help generate personal interest and make it more meaningful. [Professors can be great sources of ideas/information as well]
- ✓ Use the *Idea Organizer*

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… is about **Knowing Yourself**

- Know your style of writing / working
- Turn to resources that match your style
- Know what your motivations and interests in the project are

**Strategies:**

- ✓ Work with your style – for example, if you are a
  - Visual learners may start by “drawing” the paper/assignment out (in pictures or as a map) and type the “story” of what you are looking at;
  - Auditory learners may tell the “story” of their paper/assignment into a dictaphone (or record it while giving a ‘lecture’ on the topic to friends) and later transcribe the recording;
  - Tactile learners may get other people to play the parts of different sections of a paper/assignment in order to get a better grasp of how their ideas will be best organized (or what may be missing from an argument or issue);
- **Bottom Line:** allow yourself to be creative and do what works best for you.
- ✓ Writing may not be something you are good at … not now, not ever. In this case, completing papers / writing assignments may be one of those things where simply getting done is the goal and the quality of work may need to be a secondary goal. Do your best, have a point, use whatever resources you can & state you ideas/stance to the best of your ability.