**So you have a writing assignment...**

No idea how to begin?  Follow the steps of this Writing Process by Dr. Mandyck.

* Determine your subject and then your “angle.” Are you writing a description, an argument, a critical essay, a historical overview?  Are you summarizing, simplifying, answering questions, explaining your own theory or ideas?
* Some people write a thesis next, but it might be too soon for that really, and a thesis can box you in.  Instead, ask yourself “what is this paper about?”  Write it out in a statement—for example, "this paper is about the two major thinkers in the area of string theory and points on which they disagree”—and that will serve as a starting point.
* Jot down a number of major points you want to make that will develop your “about” statement. Spend some time on this, and don’t rush ahead to writing yet.  You might need to do some reading and research at this point ([Instapaper](http://www.instapaper.com/%22%20%5Co%20%22) is a good way to "file away" web pages you want to come back to).  Be sure to keep track of all your sources along the way (try [easybib.com](http://www.easybib.com/)).  Put your ideas in your subconscious and let them stew.  Fill up your brain before you fill up your paper.
* When you feel “full,” pick one of your major points and write a topic sentence for a paragraph about that point.  Your topic sentence should express an idea, and the rest of the paragraph should expound on that idea and offer support for it too.  Five – seven sentences is a good rule of thumb for a paragraph; shorter than that and you haven’t developed your idea, and longer than that you are likely to ramble and digress.
* Repeat until you have covered all your major points.  You might find that you eliminate or combine what you thought were major points along the way, and you may come up with new ideas.  Do not be alarmed, as this is part of the process…
* When you have covered most of your major points in good paragraphs, go back to your “about” statement and turn it into a thesis statement, that is, the main idea that your paper turns out to be arguing for.
* Write several introductory sentences that lead up to your thesis statement, put your thesis statement last in that paragraph, and you have an introduction.
* Re-read, re-think, revise, proofread, edit, share with friends, check your facts, reconsider your word choice and sentence structure, work over your draft until it is just right.  Check format carefully—have you prepared this paper the way your teacher asked you to or the way the journal you are submitting it to will accept?  The devil is in the details.
* Prepare your Works Cited and/or Works Consulted page.  Proofread that too.  Your readers should be able to find their way back to each of your sources.  This is a good time to check for inadvertent plagiarism too.  If you used a direct quote or somebody else’s original idea in your paper, did you give them credit?  Here is some help with citations, from the UGA library: <http://www.libs.uga.edu/ref/citation.html>.
* Give your paper a clever title, one that tells what the paper is about (back to your “about” statement) and maybe even hints at your thesis.  All done!  Until the next time…