JONATHAN: Hey. I'm Jonathan. I'm going to show you how I write a blog and show you some strategies that you can use to improve your writing. Before we begin, I want to emphasize something really fundamentally important to becoming a better writer. Writing is a skill, and therefore it can be improved. It's a common misconception that writing is a gift, and it's easy to see why. Usually, we only see a finished product, a great blog, a brilliant novel. We don't see the hours and hours of effort that were put into them.

Good writers use strategies to help them achieve success. I'll show you a number of useful strategies, but it's up to you to make use of them. Like any skill, improving your writing takes time and practice. As much as I'd love for you to watch this video, and be magically transformed into a brilliant writer, it's not happen. But the good news is if you put in the effort and believe in yourself, with patience and persistence, you'll improve your writing.

And that really is great news, because writing is such a valuable skill. Regardless of what career you choose to pursue, writing is the primary form of communication with your coworkers, bosses, clients. I mean, I was a programmer-- not a job usually associated with writing-- and I was constantly writing-- design plans, test plans, bug reports, professional emails. Taking the time to develop your writing skills is time well spent. Great writing can help you win awards, get jobs, and advance your career.

Great. So now we've established two things. Writing is a skill that can be improved, and there's value in writing. This particular assignment is to write a blog, but the strategies I'm going to show you are applicable to all sorts of writing and other activities, so let's do it. Before I start working, I always do two things-- get comfortable and reduce distractions.

Writing is a slow process that requires concentration so I change into my comfiest clothes, go to quiet place where I won't get interrupted, and shut up anything that might distract me. TVs and phones are productivity and quality writing killers.

Instead of getting my head into what I'm writing, I'm constantly texting and emailing, Facebooking, tweeting, glancing at TV, so I just shut them all off, and I'm mentally prepared to write. Research shows that students have the lowest confidence in their ability to concentrate when there are distractions around.

OK. I'm comfortable, I'm in a quiet place without distractions, it's go time. Step one, plan my writing. Amateur writers often skip this step, which is a big mistake. Researchers have found that the quality of writing assignments is determined more by the amount of planning done than by the number of revisions completed. Planning involves three things-- making a timeline, selecting a topic, and creating an outline for my blog. To make a timeline, I break apart the task of writing a blog into four stages-- planning, research, writing, and revision.

There are a lot of tools that you can use to help you create your timeline, but I like to keep it simple. I use a calendar and a text document. The calendar helps me visualize my deadlines. The text document helps me set my goals and monitor my progress. The tools aren't the important part here, it's the act of writing it down, and planning your work that matters. So first I write down the due date. Next, I know I need a day to revise my draft, so I set the previous day as the due date for my final draft. I always give myself a minimum of one night's sleep after finishing my draft to revise it.

Next, I need to set myself deadlines for the other stages. So planning, I'll do it today. Research is where I find my sources and make my notes and start to fill in my online. Research always takes me longer than I think it will, so I'll start today, and I'll aim to have most of it done by the end of tomorrow. The third stage of writing my blog is writing a draft, which is the longest stage. I'll aim to have a draft completed by the end of the next day. At this point, I've got a rough timeline. I'm going to do my best to stick to it or even get ahead of schedule.

When you first start planning, it's hard to make accurate estimates. People tend to always underestimate how long things take. I'm going to write down my progress as I go, so that I can make better estimates going forward. The next thing I do is I write

down the goals for my writing. Do this. The goals I set are going to be short term, concrete, and challenging. It's important to set goals that are difficult, but achievable. If I select goals that are too easy then I'm not motivated to work towards them, and I won't improve. But, on the other hand, if my goals are unrealistic, I'm setting myself up for failure, or I'll feel overwhelmed, and I won't even try.

OK. I'm going to set goals for each stage. For planning, I'm going to select a topic I find interesting, and create an outline for my paper before I start writing. For research, I'm going to find five high quality sources, and take notes while reading, putting them in the appropriate sections of my outline. For writing, I'm going to write an engaging introduction, have at least three subsections, and write a strong concluding paragraph that ties together my blog entry. Setting goals and writing them down is essential, because it gives me something to work toward and allows me to monitor my progress. OK. Take a minute, pause the video, and set your own goals.

OK. I'm comfortable, I'm in a good working space, I have a timeline, and I've written down my goals. Now, it's time to pick a topic. Because you can pick your own topic, you have an opportunity here to explore something that you're actually interested in, so take advantage. Writing is so much more than just knowledge telling where you talk about what you already know. It's about research and learning, sharing your thoughts and ideas. If you're passionate about your topic, it's going to come across in your writing.

Brainstorming time. Before I start, I do something really, really important. Under my planning goal, I write down my starting time. I'll focus on my interests and the themes in the course and try to find ways to connect them. I'm interested in music, cycling, and politics. For course themes, I'll go through the textbook and course website and find ones that interest me. Privacy, freedom of speech, and intellectual property. OK. How can I connect these?

Let's start with music. I stream music online using Grooveshark. And I have tons of questions about intellectual property like how is this even legal? How do the bands

get paid? Do they collect royalties? How do the songs get uploaded? As an artist, can I take my songs down? What are my rights as a listener or as an artist? What effect are sites like this having on the music industry?

Basically, I brainstorm until I've got a topic that I'm interested in that's related to the course and that's contemporary. Grooveshark and intellectual property fits the bill, but if it didn't, I'd keep brainstorming until I got a topic that works for me. Another strategy I use sometimes is to read the news and see if they're topics related to the course that I could write about. For example, before the election, there was tons of news coverage about the digital platforms of the different political parties, or I could learn more about WikiLeaks. It's always in the headlines.

Using the news as a starting point, I brainstorm the same way that I did above. After I've got my topic, I update my time sheet. For now, I'll take these ideas and make a rough outline for my post. The outline is what guides my research and my blog. The better my outline, the better my blog will be. Research shows the students who have formalized, organized outlines produce the highest quality work.

First, I'll write down a topic. Grooveshark and intellectual property. This isn't going to be the title of my blog. I'll come up with that later, but for now, remembering my goal of having at least three subheadings in my post, I refer to my brainstorming session, and I come up with some possible headings. Now, this list didn't just magically appear. What you didn't see is the humming and hawing, writing and revising I did off camera. There was no magic , just persistent effort. But that effort paid off, and now I have a rough sketch of my post. It's probably going to get updated as I go, but it'll guide my research, which is the next step in the process.

Notice that I haven't said anything about my introduction or conclusion yet. How can I write my introduction when I don't even know what my finished paper is going to look like? It's usually the last thing that I write. So before I start research, I'm going to go back to my time sheet, and write down my progress. Writing down when I worked and what I worked on is one of the best ways to get things done because it holds me accountable. I also write down distractions like texting and YouTube as

well as my work environment, so that I can realize how I work in different conditions.

OK. On to the research. I'm not going to bore you and make you watch me do my research, but I'll give you some pointers. You can start at Wikipedia, but don't try to write a Wikipedia article. Wikipedia is for knowledge telling. In your blog, you should try and synthesize information and give your own thoughts on what you've researched. Also, don't repeatedly link to Wikipedia. It's a common mistake and shows a lack of research depth.

Head to the source. For me, I'll go to the Grooveshark website, and dig around there for information. Later, if I need to know about copyright law in Canada, I'll just look up the bill. Google it. Make sure your sources are credible and of high quality. A good question to ask yourself is does the content of this site pass by an editor before I read it? If so, it's probably a high quality source. If not, how can you establish that the author has any credibility? Are they a professional? Are they respected in the field?

Take good notes. As I research, I'm making notes in the various sections of my outline, including the source of the information. I also update my outline as necessary, because as I get more information I have more ideas and more questions, and the focus of my blog becomes sharper. OK. I've finished a large chunk of my research. I got my sources, I've made detailed notes under each section, and I've been monitoring my progress towards my goals. Next, I have to write my draft.

Like I said before, I'm going to fill in the bulk of my post before I write my introduction and conclusion, because I need to know what my post is about before I can write them. So section by section, I write my draft. Again, to prevent extreme boredom, I'm not going to make you watch me write my draft, but I'll tell you roughly what I do. I start by setting goals for each section.

Next, I read over all the notes I have in each section, and I start to rearrange them and write sentences. Often I have a hard time making sentences flow. When this happens, I just force myself to write something down, because I know this is only a

draft, and I'm going to come back and revise it later. Now you might think I'm crazy, but the whole time I'm doing this, I'm talking to myself out loud, asking myself questions and giving myself encouragement. We can convince ourselves of anything, and you should choose to convince yourself that you can instead of you can't. That might be the most important thing in this entire video.

Finally, while I'm writing, I'm constantly monitoring my progress. I write down the time of what I worked on, time I spent off task, distractions and positive evaluations of my progress. After I finish the draft of the sections, I go back and I write the introduction and conclusion. Many hours later, my first draft is complete. After finishing my draft, I'm way too attached to it to make any objective revisions, so I'm going to sleep on it.

The next day with a fresh mind, I revise my blog. Revision is much more than just proofreading. In fact, proofreading is the last step of the revision process. I start by looking at my post as a whole. Does the order make sense? If not, I rearrange chunks of my text. Once I'm satisfied with the order, I start looking at each of the sections more carefully. There are good guidelines you can use to make sure your sections are in good shape like T.R.E.E. and D.A.R.E. I don't have time to discuss them in depth here, but they're useful to make sure that each section is structurally sound.

Finally, I drill down into the paragraphs and sentences, diagnosing problems and operating on the ones that aren't up to snuff. Once I've identified a problem, I can then choose the appropriate course of action. After I've done all of this, I go back through and add any supporting materials like pictures, charts, diagrams, and movies to add value to my post. I never add things just to add things. They have to add value.

The final step in the process is proofreading. I carefully reread my post to make sure I've crossed my T's and dotted my I's. After I'm done, I get a friend to read it over and give me critical feedback. Once I've integrated their feedback, I go through and self mark my blog against the rubric, and make any final revisions. And that's it.

That's how I write a blog. I really hope you've found this video helpful, and that you take away some useful strategies that you can incorporate into your writing process. Work hard and have fun.