

Improving Your Writing Process

Designed
by
Duke University's
Writing Studio

Announcement

This Power Point slide presentation is not designed to take the place of a group workshop, where you are given handouts and have an opportunity to work with your own writing. It does, however, provide an overview of the topic for those who haven't taken the workshop and a useful refresher for those who have.

Definition of Terms

Process: A series of actions, changes, or functions bringing about a result.

— American Heritage Dictionary

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- What prevents you from being a more effective writer?
- How can you become a more confident writer?

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- Do you write one draft or many?
- Do you like to have one sentence “just right” before moving on to the next?
- Are you a planner (do you need to write sections in order) or a jumper (moving around as ideas come to you)?

Questions About Your Writing Process

- Do you come up with ideas by talking, writing, or thinking in the shower?
- Do you write one draft or many?
- Do you like to have one sentence “just right” before moving on to the next?
- Are you a planner or a jumper?
- Are you a short or long writer?

Loomis-Grandstaff Writing Inventory: 20 Questions*

*Handout available on request from the Writing Studio

Loomis-Grandstaff Writing Inventory: Strategies

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- Rely on your preferences to start writing.
- Draw on both your preferences and your non-preferences when you revise.

Composition theorist Ann Berthoff describes writing as a nonlinear process where the “*what and the how continually inform one another.*”

How To Approach Writing A Paper

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- Think about possible content.
- Consider your persona/ethos/the “voice” you want to project.

Three Parts of the Writing Process

1. Prewriting
2. Drafting
3. Revising

1. Prewriting

You do not need to use these techniques in any particular order, and you might want to use some of them more than once. Choose those techniques that feel most natural to you.

1. Prewriting

- Brainstorming: generating, dividing, and classifying ideas

“Most people experience an awkward and sometimes paralyzing translating process in writing: ‘Let’s see, how shall I say this.’ Freewriting helps you learn to just say it.”

— Peter Elbow

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- Freewriting: writing down ideas and sentences immediately as they come to mind
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- Outlining: organizing ideas by priority and progression

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- Listing: jotting down ideas
- Outlining
- Questioning

“Delay is natural to a writer. He is like a surfer – he bides his time, waits for the perfect wave on which to ride in. Delay is instinctive with him.”

— E. B. White

2. Prewriting: Incubation

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- Let your subconscious mind help solve writing problems.
- Let ideas percolate or bubble up to the top before or after drafting.

2. Drafting

What works best for you?

- Do you have to draft to see what you think or do you draft in your head?
- Do you need to wait until you feel ready and then write a “clean draft” or do you write multiple drafts?
- Do you need to write, as Ann LaMott says in *Bird by Bird* “really, really shitty first drafts” to get “anything written at all”?

2. Drafting

- Based on your natural preferences, choose the writing rituals that work best for you.

“Thirty years ago my older brother, who was ten years old at the time, was trying to get a report on birds written that he’s had three months to write, which was due the next day....He was at the kitchen table close to tears, surrounded by binder paper and pencils and unopened books on birds, immobilized by the hugeness of the task ahead. Then my father sat down beside him, put his arm around my brother’s shoulder, and said, ‘Bird by bird, buddy. Just take it bird by bird.’”

— Anne Lamott

*“Writing and rewriting are a constant search
for what one is saying.”*

— John Updike

*“I write entirely to find out what I am
thinking.”*

— Joan Didion

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- Revise for meaning: evaluate claim(s) and evidence.
- Revise for purpose: evaluate tone and persona.
- Revise for organization: reverse outline. Write down the main idea of each paragraph and review the sequence of the ideas to determine if the order is logical and if you have omitted any important paragraphs.

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- Revise for meaning: evaluate claim(s) and evidence.
- Revise for purpose: evaluate tone and persona.
- Revise for organization: reverse outline
- Revise for style: check sentence structure and word choice

Interviewer: *How much rewriting do you do?*

Hemingway: *It depends. I rewrote the ending of Farewell to Arms, the last page of it, 39 times before I was satisfied.*

Interviewer: *Was there some technical problem there? What was it that had you stumped?*

Hemingway: *Getting the words right.*

Paris Review Interview

Edit for Clarity and Proofread for Correctness

- Be aware of the effect of the choices you make.

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- Identify the techniques you can use to make your writing clearer.

Edit for Clarity and Proofread for Correctness

- Be aware of the effect of the choices you make.
- Identify the techniques you can use to make your writing more clear.
- Find your essay's main claim(s), locate the central idea of each paragraph, assess paragraph unity, and check transitions between paragraphs
- Proofread your final draft carefully for correctness.

- *“Have something to say, and say it as clearly as you can.”*

—Matthew Arnold

Summary

- Based on what you have learned about your writing process, what are the tools you can use to help you become a more effective, efficient, and confident writer?

Other Resources

- *Bird by Bird* by Anne Lamott
- *Craft of Revision* by Donald Murray
- *Forming, Thinking, Writing* by Ann Bertoff
- *Write from the Start* by Ann B. Loomis
- *Writing with Power* by Peter Elbow

Interested In A More In-Depth Experience?

To sign up for a workshop, go to “Schedule An Appointment” and “Workshop/Group Sign Up” on the Writing Studio’s website:

<http://uwp.aas.duke.edu/wstudio/>