

Improving Your Writing Process

**Designed by the
Duke University Writing Studio**

Definition of Terms

Writing:

Something written, especially meaningful letters of characters that constitute readable matter; a written work, especially a literary composition.

— American Heritage Dictionary

Definition of Terms

Process:

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

— American Heritage Dictionary

Definition of Terms

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

You and Your Writing Process

When you know more about your own writing process, you will be able to improve:

- Efficiency
- Effectiveness
- Confidence

Your Writing Process

- **Idea Generation**
- **Drafting**
- **Polishing**
- **Writing Sequence**
- **Length**

Your Writing Process: Idea Generation

**Do you come up with ideas by talking,
writing, or thinking in the shower?**

Your Writing Process: Drafting

Do you write one draft or many?

Do you need to write many pages and then edit down to find your idea?

Your Writing Process: Polishing

Do you like to have one sentence “just right” before moving on to the next?

Your Writing Process: Writing Sequence

Are you:

- **a planner (do you need to write sections in order); or**
- **a jumper (moving around as ideas come to you)?**

Maximizing Strengths: Your Personality

Write from your own personality.

- <http://uwp.aas.duke.edu/wstudio/resources/general.html>
- http://www19.homepage.villanova.edu/karyn.hollis/pr_of_academic/Courses/common_files/personality_types/The%20Keirsey%20TempermentTest.html

Maximizing Strengths: Writing Process

Recognize the writing process that feels most natural to you.

Maximizing Strengths: Writing Process

- **What prewriting techniques work best for me?**
- **Do I need to start writing early or gather most of my material first?**
- **Do I have to know the whole argument to write or discover it through writing?**
- **How much time do I need to give myself to maximize my writing process?**

Maximizing Strengths: Getting Started

Rely on your preferences to start writing.

Maximizing Strengths: Getting Started

- **What time of day do I work best?**
- **Where do I work best?**
- **What is my writing personality?**
- **Am I a visual or aural learner?**
- **Do I think best by hand writing, typing, or talking to someone?**

Maximizing Strengths: Revising

Draw on both your preferences and your non-preferences when you revise.

Approaching a Paper

- **Purpose**
- **Audience**
- **Content**
- **Voice**

Approaching A Paper: Purpose

Consider the purpose.

- **What problem are you posing?**
- **What question are you answering?**
- **What genre is the paper?**

Approaching A Paper: Audience

Identify your audience.

- **For whom are you writing this?**
- **What are your reader's expectations?**
- **What can you expect to be common information?**

Approaching A Paper: Content

Think about possible content.

- **What texts are you going to use?**
- **What interests you in the texts?**
- **How might the texts/ideas connect?**
- **What points need explanation?**

Approaching A Paper: Voice

Consider your persona/ethos/the “voice” you want to project.

- **Whom do you want to appear to be to your readers?**
- **What public self are you inhabiting?**
- **What word choice/syntax would most convey that?**

Three Parts of the Writing Process

- **Prewriting**
- **Drafting**
- **Revising**

Writing Process: 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.

Writing Process: Prewriting

Effective tools include:

- Brainstorming
- Freewriting
- Looping
- Clustering/webbing/mapping
- Listing
- Outlining
- Questioning
- Incubating

<http://uwp.aas.duke.edu/wstudio/resources/prewriting.html>

Writing Process: 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?”

Writing Process: Drafting

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

Writing Process: Revising

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

Writing Process: Revising

Approaches for revising:

- Revise for meaning
- Revise for purpose
- Revise for organization
- Revise for style

<http://uwp.aas.duke.edu/wstudio/resources/revising.html>

Writing Process: Revising

Revise for meaning.

- Evaluate claim(s) and evidence.

Writing Process: Revising

Revise for purpose.

- Evaluate audience and persona.

Writing Process: Revising

Revise for organization:

Reverse outline

- **Write down the main idea of each paragraph.**
- **Review the sequence of the ideas.**
- **Evaluate logic and fullness of argument.**

Writing Process: Revising

Revise for organization (cont.):

Highlight key terms

- **Identify key terms.**
- **Assign different colors to each term.**
- **Highlight placement of terms through paper.**
- **Evaluate effectiveness of current layout.**

Writing Process: Revising

Revise for style:

Evaluate word choice, syntax, and tone

Last Steps

- **Edit for Clarity**
- **Proofread for Correctness**

Last Steps: Editing

Be aware of the effect of the choices you make.

Last Steps: Editing

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

Last Steps: Editing

Check for coherence and flow.

- **Find your essay's main claim(s).**
- **Locate the central idea of each paragraph.**
- **Assess paragraph unity.**
- **Check transitions between paragraphs.**

Last Steps: Proofreading

Proofread your final draft carefully for correctness.

- **Read the paper out loud.**
- **Read the paper backwards/out of sequence.**
- **Ask a friend to review the paper.**

Summary: Your Next Steps

Now it's time to ask yourself some important questions about you as a writer:

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

Summary:

Your Next Steps

You are now ready to become a more efficient, confident, and effective writer.

Using and customizing these techniques will change your writing process from a struggle to an adventure.

Good luck.

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/>