



## The Writing Process: A Look at Pedagogy

One of the lessons I've learned about the writing process is that the final product is never finished. After submitting an essay to a journal or newspaper, I still get a queasy, uneasy feeling that the essay needs more editing.

Composition pedagogy makes distinctions between writing as a process and writing as a product. Often times, beginning writers look at their work and believe that everything they typed on the computer is a finished product. However, when another set of eyes examines a beginning writer's product, it can look like a rough diamond.

Donald Murray, an American journalist and English professor, believed that knowing the steps involved in the writing process enables writers to actually understand when to clarify meaning in the paper for readers. The principle of writing as a process is adhered to by Catch the Next, Inc. (CTN), a college readiness and accelerated reading and writing program created to help developmental students understand academic writing. The writing strategies being taught by CTN instructors have helped thousands of CTN-affiliated Texas college students overcome obstacles in their freshman writing courses.

### The Process of Invention

CTN instructors teach that invention is the first step in the writing process. Invention strategies include reading as a writer, generating ideas, contextualizing ideas, and creating a working thesis. These invention strategies work for any student tasked with a writing assignment.

### Reading as a Writer

All disciplines have a specific language, and reading a book, document, works of art, history, scientific experiment, and other text involves noticing unfamiliar words, cataloging new terms, and extracting relevant information. Students tend to read texts passively instead of actively. Learning how to read actively rather than passively is one step toward decoding meaning. Students should highlight and question passages instead of reading without purposely thinking about the author's words.

Instructors can help students become active readers by showing them how to highlight important information and make notations in the margins. CTN instructors are trained in close-reading strategies where students read a text and identify significant details or patterns, known as strong lines. Students then form groups and

listen to their peers read selected sentences, phrases, and paragraphs. Using this strategy, students learn to listen actively to their peers, become familiar with unfamiliar words, look for patterns, and note references they don't understand. The close-reading strategy helps students reflect about their own readings as they gain a heightened sense of critical analysis regarding the writing process.

### Generating Ideas

To help students avoid writer's block, CTN instructors encourage students to brainstorm ideas and create discovery drafts. The best way to have students brainstorm ideas is through a pre-writing technique called free writing, where, for a set period of time, students write down ideas as they come to mind. Once the building blocks of these budding ideas are formed, students discuss and question each other's ideas in small groups. Having students ask each other questions is an informal way of dialoguing and interrogating topics using reflection. The small-group discussions help students critically assess and reflect on their and their peers' brainstormed ideas.

### Chaos Into Order

Philosopher Frederick Nietzsche is credited with saying, "Out of chaos comes order." The next strategy in the invention step is to have students organize their ideas into a logical order. Some students may use informal drafts, while others might rely on mental outlines. The more experienced student writers, however, begin by sketching elaborate ideas onto tree diagrams with dozens of limbs as identifying markers, all connecting to a root idea. During this step, it is important that students use the writing organization strategy that works best for them. Employing organization strategies helps writers expand rudimentary concepts into complete paragraphs.

### Reading Aloud

Sometimes students are unsure where an argument fits into their drafts, or how exactly counter ideas fit overall. Having students read their ideas aloud helps them select the strongest ideas that support their topics. The act of reading aloud and asking questions is fundamental in learning how to discern and delete superfluous sentences.

I like to incorporate the dialectical method during this step in the writing process to help students think more critically about how their ideas will form thesis statements. Developed by philosopher George Frederik Hegel, the dialectical method consists of a thesis—a proposition—and an antithesis, which contradicts or negates the thesis.

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Students are assigned to peer groups in which they read their thoughts and ideas aloud. During this process students in each group ask each other questions about their thoughts and ideas in order to form rough thesis and antithesis statements. Once students understand the process of clarifying and eliminating counter ideas when crafting their propositions, the actual thesis can then emerge.

### *The Thesis Statement Revisited*

The final step in invention is to have students create working thesis statements based on feedback received from the reading aloud strategy session. A working thesis or thesis statement involves a complicated ritual of give and take. Students need to determine how their thesis statements will be supported throughout their papers. During this stage, students are encouraged to search for evidential support in order to create solid, concrete working thesis statements.

### **Composing the Essay**

Once student writers have their roadmap of ideas, composing their essays becomes the final task. Before students begin writing their essays, it is imperative that instructors discuss the different types of writing habits. Instructors need to instill in students that an essay should be written for the reader and easily understood.

Writers sit at keyboards, stare at blank screens, and then make the leap into the composing process. Two types of writers usually emerge: The perfectionist who writes and rewrites sentences until they think the paper is perfect, and the spontaneous writer who doesn't follow an outline, but instead writes down every thought he or she has about the topic. The former writer is the most fastidious to deal with, while the latter writer tends to see his or her actions as a form of "brain drain" since he or she is releasing every idea imaginable about the subject. When composing their essays, students should follow their idea roadmaps in order to keep from typing everything that pops into their minds and to prevent constant revisions.

### **Conclusion**

Process-oriented writing strategies have proven successful for all levels of writing, particularly in formulating essays dealing with argumentation, persuasion, synthesis, and narration. These strategies are instrumental in advancing students' writing capabilities. One of the key factors involved in the process method is making student writing relevant in class and expecting students to have direct discussions, which allows them to question each other's work in small-group settings.

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