Processes of Composing
Chapter 4

Writing process is putting together ideas and thoughts into some logical order and conveying them on paper. After the initial part, you have to read over the work as an outside party so that you can detach yourself from the work and make sure it makes sense.

John, sophomore in Management

To me, the writing process is an all-at-once thing. It is me sitting down and using all of my ideas to write a paper. The writing process is everything that is involved in writing your paper, be it research, thinking, outlining, proofreading, etc.. I don't like to outline or proofread much, but if I have to I have to.

Derek, junior in Biology

My writing process is different depending on the type of assignment I have—but generally I make an outline of my thoughts, re-arrange and elaborate on them, and then just write.

Katie, sophomore in Photojournalism and Political Sceince

The process of communicating through writing is always a complex and multi-staged experience. Whether composing an academic research paper, working through an analytical mathematical problem, designing a web page, or creating a poem, a process of writing is at work. While much has been written about *the* writing process, we recognize that *many* writing processes are employed when we organize our ideas and communicate them. And as sophisticated readers and writers, none of us have time to engage in every stage of some ideal writing process each time we have a writing task. Such a process doesn't exist; rather (like our students), we assess each situation individually by asking questions like these.

- *What exactly needs to be communicated?*

- *Is writing the best/required way to do that?*

- *What kind of writing should it be?*

- *How much time do I have?*

- *Should most of the time be spent on inventing—or careful editing?*

Each time we write, we make these choices. In the pages that follow, we have named some of the processes that student writers engage in and listed specific activities and strategies that will help students become more deliberate about their communication choices.

Typically, when we discuss writing processes, four stages come to mind: inventing, drafting, revising, and editing.

For some students, writing process looks linear:
   inventing → drafting → revising → editing→→→final product

For others, process is not-so-linear:
inventing ↘   revising → inventing ↘   editing ↘ → final product
   drafting ↗   drafting drafting ↗   revising ↗

And for many students, a writing process isn't visible at all:

    drafting → final product

Students may dismiss the importance of organizing before writing, revising drafts, or proofreading carefully because they have not received constructive feedback on earlier phases of their work. The challenge of designing assignments and classroom activities is to engage these and other types of student writers by demonstrating the value of each phase of the writing process. And, as instructors, we can help students connect their writing with their learning by making the stages of composing visible.

Inventing

Inventing is the stage in a writing process where ideas are born and cultivated through analysis, research, and experimentation. Teachers have devised many strategies to stimulate student learning and understanding of an assignment's goals and final product. Through the use of a variety of inventing activities, teachers can acknowledge and learn from the multiple learning styles that students bring to the classroom. Recognizing the inventing work that students engage in can help teachers understand how student thinking is developing over the course of the semester—and how a curriculum is being taken up in critical and creative ways.

Things To

Consider

As Students Begin To Write
• *What do students need to know/do to start this project?*
• *When should they begin writing?*
• *What strategies do you recommend?*
• *Will class time be spent talking about expectations or will the assignment sheet do this work?*
• *How will they incorporate sources (research, course reading)?*

On the following page are some specific invention strategies. They can be used in class or assigned as homework as a method of generating and developing ideas.

Invention Strategies

Idea maps: Students explore, expand, and develop their topics by mapping (textually, visually, orally) their current thinking.

Idea Round Robin: In a circle, students share (orally or textually) their current thinking. Peers respond by presenting ideas for expansion, counterarguments, resources, etc. This is a useful method of encouraging students to help each other address topics that seem overwritten or *stuck.*

Topic Clusters: With their idea or topic in the center of the page, students create a web by brainstorming as many related ideas (or sources, arguments, oppositions, etc.) as possible.

Freewrites: Applicable at any stage in a writing process, freewriting is the generation of ideas through uncensored writing. It is usually not evaluated—or even necessarily shared.

Paper Outline or Sketch: Students name their depth and breadth of their project by articulating the main components of their projects in as much detail as possible.

Keyword Identification: With or without resources, students name the terms that are important to their project. This is a useful way to emphasize the importance of focused research and topic development since students will also notice the terms that are not on their lists.

Visual Representations: Students complete a draft of the assignment using visual media. Visual work like collages can allow students to experiment with their topic in ways that are limited by text.

Looping: Using a freewrite or written draft, students identify a sentence or passage for expansion. Using that text only, they write again for a period of time. This is repeated several times as a strategy for both narrowing focus and exploring the complexities of a topic.

Dialogue Writing: Using course readings, outside research, or peer perspectives, students draft a focused dialogue on their topic. This is a method for articulating and creating movement between perspectives and can be useful in moving students beyond pro/con understandings of complex issues.

The purpose of activities like these is to stimulate creative and critical thinking about the issues raised in assignments and class. Many teachers adopt a 'scaffolding' approach to assignments by designing relationships between classroom activities and formal products and by linking each course assignment to the next in anticipation of student learning. This can be incorporated into the ways writing is used as well. Here are a couple of examples:

in-class freewrite $\rightarrow\rightarrow$ topic looping $\rightarrow\rightarrow$ 2 page mini-essay $\rightarrow\rightarrow$ formal research analysis paper

lab report $\rightarrow\rightarrow$ research topic $\rightarrow\rightarrow$ annotated bibliography $\rightarrow\rightarrow$ research report

reading journal $\rightarrow\rightarrow$ keyword identification $\rightarrow\rightarrow$ topic cluster $\rightarrow\rightarrow$ paper outline $\rightarrow\rightarrow$ formal essay

Drafting

Drafting is the stage in a writing process where ideas, resources, and data are examined and organized in order to create a written product. Engaging in a drafting process helps students identify what they want to know or say, what they have learned, and how to most effectively communicate their ideas. Incorporating draft work into our assessment of student learning helps us recognize early on where additional instruction or assistance may be needed.

Things To

Consider

Encouraging Students to Prepare Drafts

- *How do learning styles influence the ways students gather and organize information?*
- *What are the accepted methods for developing claims or arguments in your discipline?*
- *Are the goals of the assignment clear? Could there be multiple interpretations of the assignment?*
- *How do you integrate research and drafting?*
- *What kinds of feedback will students need and get on their drafts?*
- *How does the process of drafting fit into the workload and timeline of the course?*
- *How does draft preparation differ for pedagogical activities such as lab work or collaborative writing?*

Using Writing to Teach

Drafts can take many forms. Some drafts are versions of all or part of the written products; others may be more graphic representations of the writer's ideas and data (idea maps, annotated flow charts, storyboards for websites, etc.). Students and instructors can explore the expression of ideas in a variety of forms when we recognize that rough drafts need not resemble the final product, and we often can make more thoughtful, analytical assessments of one aspect of the work by doing focused or partial drafts. Although it takes time, concentrating on the process of drafting can be a valuable avenue for deep learning.

Drafting Strategies that Promote Learning	
Getting Started	• Review purpose, audience and voice. • Have students create a basic list of questions or concepts to be addressed. • Have students identify what perspectives or elements of the topic will <u>not</u> be covered in the assignment (and in group work, in their particular parts of the assignment). • Experiment with starting drafts concentrating on a small section of the intended final project or a related previous assignment (journal entry, pre-lab memo on hypothesis, etc.). • Whenever students get stuck by writer's block, lack of supporting information, or a need for more thinking about a point, they can use inventing strategies or simply note the concept or keywords and return to the section later.
Developing a Thesis, Claim, or Question	• Help student distinguish between opinions and positions. • Have students map their ideas or claims are related (chronological arrangements, foundational proof, etc.). • Encourage students to identify the limits of their arguments and the strengths of alternate positions. • When drafting questions or problem sets, challenge students to present multiple solutions.
Incorporating Evidence	• Have students take their lists of questions or claims and identify the resource materials, data, or supporting information relevant to each issue. • Discuss evaluation of sources (accuracy of Internet resources, rigor of data needed to defend analysis, diversity of perspectives, etc.). • Review appropriate citation of sources.

Teaching

Ideas

See Chapter 3 for ideas on teaching claims and analysis.

See Chapter 8 for ideas on teaching resource use.

Drafting Strategies that Promote Learning (Cont'd)	
Organizing Drafts	• Experiment with organization by literally cutting the draft into sections and moving them around. • Have classmates try to recreate the activities (field technique, experiments, personal interactions, etc.) described in the draft to assess accuracy and audience interpretations. • Outline the draft *after* it's written to get a visual representation of the organization of ideas.

Revising

Revising is the stage when ideas are reviewed, changed, expanded, and/or abandoned. Revision often occurs once a tangible draft of the assignment is composed, though it can happen at any stage. Engaging in revision can help students learn to look critically at their work and imagine more clearly how their work might be read and understood.

See Chapter 6 for ideas on giving effective feedback on drafts or developing peer review activities.

When You Ask Students to Revise . . .

• *Should students revise? How? What is your goal in asking them to revise?*

• *Will they be focused on content revision or written organization and style?*

• *Will revisions be based on your recommendations, peers' or their own intuition?*

• *How do should students understand the purpose and audience for the project?*

• *Do students have a clear sense of revision or peer response guidelines?*

• *Do students understand what kind of paper you want (empirical, analytical, personal essay, research report, etc.)?*

Revising in the Classroom and On Their Own

Revising Ideas for the Classroom	*Revising Ideas for Students*
Reading Aloud: Read a draft aloud to a partner or have partner read draft aloud to author.	**Abstract:** Write an abstract for your paper; be concise about the claims you want to make. Then reexamine your paper to see how you accomplish this.
Focused Peer Exchange: Ask author to write main concerns on top of draft and underline main claims; ask peer to read through the draft, summarizing the function and claim of each paragraph as she reads. She should also summarize the paper in a paragraph on the back.	**Peer Exchange:** Take home two peers' papers and make comments according to class guidelines.
Class Listserv: Send excerpts and share resources.	**Reverse Outline:** Using your draft, create an outline of your paper. Begin by naming the purpose of each paragraph.
Expansion Freewrite: Read a peer's paper and mark areas what more information/detail would be effective. Explain the need in the margins.	**Claim Significance:** Rank the significance of your claims. *Does your organization make sense? Are you communicating in the most effective way?*
Targeted Revision: Bring in and work on only one section of the paper.	**Coding:** Use different highlighters to delineate your claims, descriptions and research.
Keywords: Identify keywords for the papers. Authors can then decide if this is what they intend.	**Selected Revision:** Concentrate on specific areas of improvement like clarifying claims, transitions, etc.
Translation: Translate papers into another genre or form. For example, try turning a research paper into an editorial or transforming lab report into a public health announcement.	**Imagined Audiences:** Imagine two different readers—one who would support your claim and one who would oppose it. *What kinds of reactions would they have to your paper?*

Editing

Editing is usually the final stage of a writing process and refers to the careful attention we give every aspect of a piece of writing before delivering it. Such practices may include attention to organization, language choices, grammar, punctuation, genre, and form. Helping students to apply editing strategies after completing most of the content drafting and organization of the assignment will help them understand how written content and form are dependent upon one another. Through the practice of editing strategies students can learn to recognize that carefully edited writing is the result of deliberate stylistic choice.

Things To

Consider

See Chapter 7 for ideas on establishing expectations.

When You Ask Students to Edit . . .

- *What does it mean to edit? Do students understand your definition?*
- *What do you value most in the editing stage?*
- *What is an 'A' paper? How can students achieve this?*
- *What issues of grammar, punctuation, structure, style, etc. do you notice most in student writing?*
- *How have you helped students learn about such issues? What resources do you ask students to use to create polished texts?*
- *Do students understand how strong editing skills might move beyond the scope of your class?*

Why Teach Editing?

Strong editing skills will allow students to:

- Develop an eye for detailed, analytical writing.
- Recognize clear and thorough research and analysis.
- Accept, use, and give peer and teacher feedback.
- Get distance from initial writing stages.
- Recognize the value of alternative perspectives.
- Revisit work with the audience in mind.
- Concentrate on how language constructs meaning.
- Write in any field or profession.

Editing in the Classroom and On Their Own

Editing Ideas for the Classroom	*Editing Ideas for Students*
Hold an editing workshop. Distinguish between *global* and *local* editing. Using a sample paper (print, overhead, or web-based), ask students to suggest editing changes. Ask them to focus on global issues (organization, clarity of ideas, etc.) as well as local ones (sentence structure, grammar, punctuation) as they review peer work.	**Purpose:** Reread the assignment. *What is being asked for? What is valued? How does your work satisfy the assignment? What is most effective? least? What would you do with another week?*
Develop class criteria for editing. Ask students to identify what will make the assignment successful. Develop a criteria list and ask them to apply it to their work. Use a sample to demonstrate.	**Style:** Look closely at grammar, punctuation, and sentence length. *What does this say about you as a writer? What do you value in your writing style? Is this evident in your writing?*
Hold an "audience" workshop. Ask students to name their intended audiences on back of their papers. Exchange work and have students respond through the persona of the intended reader.	**Language:** Look closely at language. *What choices have been made? How are you represented in the paper? How do you balance your words with your research? What is the role of jargon and/or slang? Are you using inclusive language?*
Editing vs. Proofreading workshop. Ask students to name the differences between editing and proofreading by distributing a sample piece of text. Help them distinguish between the two by situating editing as a more global activity that looks at how sentence level concerns impact and are impacted by form and organization. Proofreading, on the other hand, attends to the specifics of spelling, grammar and punctuation. Note: these terms are fluid and should be defined in each class!	**Alternative Perspectives:** Examine the multiple perspectives on the issue. *How did others take up your ideas? How can you use feedback that you don't necessarily agree with to understand the way you've presented your ideas?*
	Audience: Examine your audiences. *Who are they? What do they value most? How will they experience this writing? How should they respond to it?*

The Challenges of Focusing on the Process of Writing

Student Concerns

Challenge: *The purpose of having a draft due isn't clear. I don't understand what's supposed to go in each draft.*

> **Teaching Strategy:** Make expectations clear. If multiple drafts are required, concentrate on specific areas for each one (thesis development, editing, etc.).

Challenge: *I never do drafts. It doesn't help me to write things over and over—and my schedule is too busy.*

> **Teaching strategy:** Remind students that drafting is not about doing things over and over. It's about improving based on feedback and reflection. When possible, build peer review of work into course and give yourself time to respond to student drafts.

Challenge: *I'm not a good speller. I just use the computer to check my work.*

> **Teaching Strategy:** Technology makes it much easier for us to research, revise and edit work, but it can't do everything. Students should be encouraged to develop editing and proofreading strategies (if not skills!) such as reading work aloud, perhaps with a partner, reviewing a paper after putting it away for a while, and editing typed rather than hand-written work.

Challenge: *I don't know where to start.*

> **Teaching Strategy:** Remind students that they do not have to begin at the beginning of written work. They may be more comfortable starting with a middle section of a report or with memos to themselves about ideas to develop, questions they have about the topic, or goals of the project. You may have noticed that activities in one section of this chapter are similar to exercises in other sections. Writer's block can occur at every stage of the composing process; the inventing, drafting, revising and editing strategies described in this chapter can be used at any time to help students take a fresh look at their work.

Teacher Concerns

Challenge: *It's difficult to make space when there's so much content to cover. There isn't much time for students to write in a 50-minute class.*

> **Teaching Strategy:** Writing activities can be brief or lengthy, formal or informal. Some written work may be assigned as homework. Writing activities that promote critical thinking during class may be a quick as writing exit notes to you about one the most important thing they learned that day or a question they have at the end of the class period.

Challenge: *Responding to drafts is difficult. I'm not sure how much time to spend on comments; I don't want to make the same comments I would on a final draft.*

> **Teaching Strategy:** When students submit drafts for review, ask them to identify what they are struggling with and/or the particular concerns or portions of the assignment that they want feedback on, and concentrate on these areas of feedback.

> **Teaching Strategy:** Develop a template for responding to student work based on the elements of the assignment.

Challenge: *What counts as "text"? We don't do much work with printed text in my field anymore. How does the writing process change when other media are involved?*

> **Teaching Strategy:** Define *text* with your class. As communication technologies evolve, academic work may take the form of websites, documentaries, computer-aided lab reports, sculpture, audio recordings, etc.

> **Teaching Strategy:** Discuss the nature of the medium in which students are working. What are the protocols for giving feedback through e-mail or websites? Will drafts of material posted on websites be accessible to the public?