

PROCESS WRITING

Stages of process writing	Ways of giving feedback
1. Brain-storming stage	1. Teacher editing
2. Planning stage	2. Peer-editing
3. Writing the first draft	3. Self-editing
4. Editing	Conclusion
5. Proof-reading	Related sources
6. The final product	

As teachers, you might have come across this situation many times: a student who had a lot of free time on the weekend comes to your class having written three essays and she has made the same three mistakes on all the essays she has handed in. Here comes the question – is it the quantity or the quality of the papers which is important?

To provide an answer to this question, we need to analyze tertiary level writing - what we generally do when we write and what we ask our students to do when giving a writing assignment in class. If we are not free-writing, or writing in the stream-of-consciousness technique (a technique that records the multifarious thoughts and feelings of a character without regard to logical argument or narrative sequence as in "A Room of One's Own" (1929) by Virginia Woolf), what we need to do is to **plan** *what* we are writing, *who* we are writing to, *how* we write.

Once we have planned, we start writing. What we write for the first time is never perfect. When we read it for a second time, we see that some places need clarification, so we write it again. We keep **editing** and **proofreading** our **drafts** until we reach a **final product**. This is what a process approach is about. Though this process seems linear, in the real world, we keep changing our ideas *while* writing; thus, we may need to go back and forth between these stages.

Apparently, enthusiastic as the above mentioned student may seem, she never went further than writing only a first draft. Most probably, if she had proof-read and edited her draft, she would have realized her own mistake and refrained from repeating the same mistake.

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There are scientific reasons as to the benefits of process writing as well. Research has shown that when feedback is given on the draft, it is more useful since the students find the opportunity to correct their mistake by writing again.

With little effort, it is possible to apply process writing in our classes. Instead of giving the writing topic to the students and asking for the final product, we can help the students go through the stages of process writing.

Process writing consists of the following stages:

1. Brain-storming
2. Planning
3. Writing the rough draft
4. Editing
5. Proof-reading
6. The final product

1. Brain-storming stage

As most of you would appreciate, getting started is the most difficult task in writing. With the help of brain-storming, we make it less painful for the students. In the brain-storming stage, the student starts thinking about the topic given. This may be done as a whole-class activity or in groups so that students benefit from each other as well. The teacher writes on the board every idea that comes from the students, without eliminating any. For example, if the topic is "Advantages of the World Wide Web", the ideas that may come are:

- Easy research
- More examples
- No waste of time while searching
- Instant communication
- Sending photographs, files at almost no cost
- Chat, e-mail
- Wide range of sources
- Accessibility of documents
- Can see the governmental organizations' pages
- Banking
- No queues

In the brain-storming stage, the ideas can be put in linear order or in mind-maps – it depends on the ideas put on the board and the teacher. (For advantages of mind-maps, you can refer to <http://www.peterussell.com/Mindmaps/Advantages.html> .)

2. Planning stage

Once the ideas are put randomly on the board, it is now time to eliminate some and organize the rest of the ideas as "main support"

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and “example”; in other words, **plan** the writing. In our example, the plan can be something like:

- Thesis: WWW has many advantages
- I Time-saving
 - a) Search
 - b) Banking
 - c) Communication
 - II Economical
 - a) Fee -none (in the universities) or very little (from home)
 - b) No need to be transported - it is everywhere
 - c) Only requires a modem
 - III Practical
 - a) can be accessed from everywhere via telephone lines
 - b) no waiting in queues
 - c) does not require many accessories

Or like:

- Thesis: WWW has many advantages
- I Searching
 - a) easy
 - b) quick
 - c) cheap
 - II Shopping/ Banking
 - a) easy
 - b) quick
 - c) cheap
 - III Communication
 - a) easy
 - b) quick
 - c) cheap

While producing the plan, it is quite normal for the students to add or delete information. Actually, they keep adding and deleting till the final product is reached.

3. Writing the first draft

By looking at the plans, the students start writing their essays. They may change the order of their main supports, or re-arrange their minor supports. If you have read myths about people writing a perfect essay on their first try, it is time to face the truth: there is always a

mistake either in the organization or in the grammar or the choice/form of the vocabulary. This leads us to editing and proof-reading.

4. Editing

Here, we would like to point out the distinction between editing and proof-reading. Editing refers to “**what you write**”, whereas, proof-reading refers to “**how you write**”. The distinction is very important in process writing since we need to focus on one thing to correct at a time. If we try to provide feedback on both the student’s grammar mistakes and the wrong organization of her ideas, she might get confused and not be able to correct all her mistakes. Correcting everything at the same time is also hard for the teacher as the grammar mistakes keep interfering while trying to concentrate on the organization mistakes.

To avoid such confusion, we have divided the correction stage into two; editing and proofreading. It is logical to start dealing with the paper’s organization and content (editing) since the sentences may change with the help of the feedback.

As we have mentioned before, editing deals with “what you write”. While giving feedback on the student paper, we look at the content and the organization. A student essay is expected to have the following basic features:

1. Is there a thesis? / Is the thesis clear?
2. Is the introduction interesting for the reader?
3. Are the developmental paragraphs relevant to the thesis (**unity**)?
4. Are the ideas supported well? Are there enough examples / details ?
5. Are the transitions chosen correctly? Are they in the right place (**coherence**)?
6. Does the conclusion have a summary?

If the essay lacks enough examples to support the thesis, or if there is redundancy, this is the time to add or delete. Once the content and the organization of the ideas satisfy the student, she writes a second draft and the paper is ready for proof-reading.

5. Proof-reading

Proof-reading deals with “how you write”. While proof-reading, the paper is checked for any spelling, punctuation mistakes, lack of

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parallelism in the structures, flaws in the style (formal/informal), and grammar mistakes. To be more precise, we look for:

1. any sentence fragments and run-on sentences
2. references without pronouns
3. redundancy of ideas
4. lack of parallelism
5. spelling mistakes
6. repetition of the same words
7. punctuation mistakes
8. wrong tense choice
9. misused modifiers
10. style inappropriate for the audience

It is better to leave proof-reading to the last since the text may change many times before the writer is content with her essay.

6. The final product

It is quite clear that writing the paper once is never enough. Now that the student has feedback on the spelling and grammar mistakes, she writes the essay again. This means, the same essay needs to be written at least three times (first draft, second draft after editing, final product after proof-reading) before a final product can be reached. Current technology (word-processors) enables us to rewrite the same essay without spending much time. Word-processors also provide spell and grammar checks – though they do not give hundred percent correct feedback. To be on the safe side, one still needs to check it oneself.

Ways of giving feedback

There are three ways of giving feedback to the students:

1. teacher editing
2. peer-editing
3. self-editing

1. Teacher editing:

For a beginner student who starts writing essays towards the end of the first term, it may be difficult to do the self and peer editing; the teacher may provide more guidance during editing or she may do the editing and proof-reading with the student to set an example.

2. Peer-editing:

Here, the texts are interchanged and the evaluation is done by other students. In the real world, it is common for writers to ask friends and

colleagues to check texts for spelling, etc. In the classroom environment, the students can exchange their papers and comment on each others' papers.

3. Self-editing:

As you may also have encountered, it is very common for the writer to miss her own mistakes. This is why it is recommended to **sleep on it** for a night. After putting the paper aside for some time, emptying the mind and dealing with some other work, the writer is able to approach her paper with a clear mind. In the classroom environment, we can have the students write their essays one day, collect the papers, and have them edit and proof-read them the next day.

There are excellent web sites that guide the students while editing and proofreading their or their classmates' papers. You can have the students check these web sites or if you want to make sure they read them, download the checklists and take them to the class. Here are some addresses for editing:

<http://www.bgsu.edu/departments/writing-lab/goproofreading.html>

http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/general/gl_proof.html

Conclusion:

Gardner and Johnson (1997) describe the stages of the writing process:

Writing is a fluid process created by writers as they work. Accomplished writers move back and forth between the stages of the process, both consciously and unconsciously. Young writers, however, benefit from the structure and security of following the writing process in their writing.

Basically, we would like to see our students acquire the basic academic skills. Once the students get used to the stages of planning, drafting, and evaluating their papers, we will feel content that they can survive in their departments. As writing teachers, we need to encourage our students to consider their audience and the rhetorical norms of English while developing their papers.

Related sources

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