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More than Writing:
The Application of the Writing Process

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Abstract

Beginning writers often struggle to apply the writing process. In order to help them understand this concept, it is helpful for tutors to draw connections with outside disciplines that the student is already familiar with. Most problem-solving approaches contain parallels with the writing process. Educational research shows that meaningful connections will help students apply difficult concepts. Tutors will best support beginning writers by helping them develop a consistent application of the writing process.

Writing a paper is one of the most terrifying tasks for a beginning college student. It often seems more daunting than approaching a roommate about doing the dishes. When I was asked to write my first paper as a freshman, I opened my laptop and stared blankly at the screen. I truly believed that if I directed my thoughts at the computer for long enough, then they would eventually manifest as a perfectly eloquent essay. I had no clue where to start or how to complete a satisfactory paper. Since that experience, I have learned that I am not the only student who struggles with the writing process. Most beginning students do not have a standardized writing method.

Writing is a process which is approached differently by each person. There is not a correct system that will work for every writer. The way a person approaches writing depends largely upon their background and training. Scholars have agreed, however, that there are several distinct steps in the writing process. These include concepts such as brainstorming, prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing (“Stages of the Writing Process”). However, it is not the concepts themselves that help a student understand how to approach writing. A professor could spend an entire semester lecturing about these principles, but it would not accomplish anything until a student developed an application of the ideas that worked for them. The principles may be the same for everybody, but the application is individualized. Beginning writers often struggle to know how generic principles can work for them. It is something that skilled writers develop through repeated experience. Tutors can help students apply the writing process by drawing parallels with other mediums.

Each student has a unique approach to creativity. Often, this is influenced by their hobbies, employment, or educational experiences. Students who are versed in the sciences tend to structure their creativity in a logical way. Others who study fields in the humanities are used to

a broader sense of free-form expression. Although papers are usually written with a specific structure in mind, the process of arriving at this structure will greatly vary depending on the student. I struggled to develop a consistent system of writing until I was shown how it related to something that I was already comfortable with.

Throughout my college experience, I have specialized in music composition. I have found that my process in writing a paper mirrors my songwriting process. When writing a piece of music, I begin with a general idea of what I would like the song to accomplish. Generally, I am trying to recreate a specific emotion or feeling. Next, I begin to think of which musical characteristics best support the main emotion. I consider aspects of form, style, mode, and meter. At this point, melodies and lyrics start to freely flow. Typically, these don't come in any particular order. The document contains unordered and unorganized musical phrases which are not always associated with lyrics. After these steps, the song starts to become a cohesive work. I develop a more concrete idea of what each verse will accomplish. The details are flushed out and an initial draft of a song is completed.

My writing process follows the same basic structure. I begin with a main idea that I would like to portray. I will create a rough thesis that becomes the basis for my outline and research. Throughout the research process, the thesis begins to develop. I create a basic structural outline which includes general topics for paragraphs and a logical progression of thought. At this point, the relevant research and examples start to fit into my outline. Gradually, they fill in the paper, and it becomes a cohesive project. The ideas build off of each other to create a specific thesis. As I have become aware that my creative and writing processes support each other, I have noticed that other students experience a similar phenomenon. Their background study will

change the way they approach writing a paper. Some students are aware of the correlation, but many are completely oblivious to this fact.

If a tutor encounters a student struggling with the writing process, they can help them identify a process that has worked for them in another medium and apply it to writing. Tutors must be aware, however, that each student will approach this differently. It would be unwise for me to try to force my creative process on another student if they are not used to thinking in a musical manner. While discussing the creative process in visual arts students, Marion Botella wrote, "We can hypothesize that some creative process are more adapted to some creative individuals but it would be counterproductive to try to force all individuals to engage in the same process." It is important for the tutor to adapt to the creative style of the student they are working with.

Some students who are comfortable with writing may have a preconceived habitual method. Others are comfortable with an artistic medium similar to writing and can easily draw parallels. However, many new writers aren't comfortable with anything that they deem as creative. Often, creativity is stereotyped as visual art, music, theatre, and dance. Most hobbies or mediums have some sort of creative approach that can be applicable to writing. Baking, cycling, gaming, and gardening are all common hobbies that contain a logical approach. Any of these examples or others could be used to make a connection to writing.

If a tutor were to work with a student who was familiar with mathematics but struggled to freely express themselves in writing, they could utilize the student's mathematical background. For example, this student likely has a problem-solving approach for word problems. I had a recent conversation with a math and statistics major who outlined for me his approach to a problem. He explained that after he reads the initial prompt, he immediately determines what he

is solving for. Next, he extrapolates other important or relevant information from the prompt and decides which equations will aid in solving the problem. Once he knows what information he has been given and which equation to use, he starts plugging in the information and determining what else needs to be filled in. He begins solving for these pieces and filling in details (Bladen). Even this process of solving a math problem can be connected to writing.

A tutor could teach this student to look at a writing prompt the same way they would view a math problem. The tutor would help the student identify what their writing is trying to accomplish, or what they are solving for. Next, they help the student determine which information they have and what needs to be included. Instead of choosing an equation to use, the student decides on a structure to best accomplish their purpose. Once this information is sorted out and made clear, the student has an idea of what other information will support their argument.

Students often view writing as an isolating, foreign danger. They feel as though the daunting task of writing a paper will consume them. One of the roles of a tutor is to build a better writer, not to simply create a better paper. If a tutor can help a beginning writer develop a systematic approach to writing, then the student will become more independent in future assignments. My writing became easier when I realized that I could apply my musical process to writing a paper. Other students who may not know where their writing journey will take them can likewise benefit from drawing connections.

Drawing connections between disciplines is an important part of all aspects of learning. It is encouraged for school teachers to relate their discipline to another to help students understand the application of a concept. This is a process that is already utilized in classroom settings, and it can be adapted to work within tutoring sessions. An article from the National Science Teaching

Association describes the benefits of the interdisciplinary learning style. The author asserts, “By weaving big ideas and important skills from different disciplines, teachers can maximize classroom time and reinforce concepts and skills across subjects” (“Connecting” 58). Tutors can use this style of learning to teach difficult concepts in brief sessions, since most students have very few writing center visits. It will help students with long-term retention because they will have established connections to draw from.

Many of the beginning writers who come to a writing center struggle with a fear of writing. Some of these students hope that if they open a blank document and stare at it for a few hours, then the paper will write itself. However, these same students have passions and hobbies in which they excel. Tutors can best help these students by drawing connections between their passions and writing. The student’s own unique experiences and skills can become their cure for writing anxiety.

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