

Writing as a Process

Podcast Script

Since the beginning of your earliest writing instruction, you have been hammered over the head with “THE Writing Process”. That’s THE, with a capital T-H-E. You know the one. It begins with pre-writing, and 100 hours later, ends with the submission of a polished, final draft. In the beginning, most learners do what his/her teacher tells them to do, making bubbles with words inside, and linking similar ideas. Then comes outlining, drafting, peer review, editing, revising, and publishing. All this effort leads to a great paper, right? Well, sometimes...

THE Writing Process is well known and trusted, and yet it is rarely used among learners. Why? Writing teachers, hear a number of excuses. Here are a few of them:

- “It just takes so much time. I don’t have that kind of time.”
- “I don’t like the systems/strategies they taught me in school and those never worked for me.”
- “I am never going to be a great writer anyways, so what’s the point?”
- And every professor’s favorite...
- “I write my best at the last minute, right before it is due.”

What most learners don’t realize is that while there is THE writing process, there is also the writing process. A writing process is anything the learner uses to help him/her organize thoughts, and get them down on paper, then the process of revising and editing using the tools at his/her disposal. In this case, “THE” does not equal “the.” While you may be asked to submit artifacts of THE writing process in a course, that doesn’t mean that you have to adopt THE writing process as your chosen way in real life. However, you do need to have a writing process that works for you, the writer, and produces quality work that evidences your best effort. Sitting down, tossing ideas on a piece of paper, then submitting that paper will not work out well for you in college. While you may have had success with that method earlier in your education, more and more, how much time and effort you put into your writing is going to show in the final product, and a lack of effort will very quickly catch up with you.

At the end of the day, every single one of us, even your professors, has areas that can be enhanced or improved. You may classify yourself as a terrible writer, a mediocre writer, or an okay writer in certain writing situations, but in the end, we all have something to learn about writing. The frank truth is that you aren't going to gain any skills or make improvement without investing the time and dedication to improving your practice. And by "your practice", it means the way you think about writing, the way you read others' writing, the way you read your own writing, the time you invest in writing, and how you think of yourself as a writer. All of these beliefs about yourself and this topic will see the light of day in this course, and you might just find that those beliefs limit you and your growth.

For instance, if you believe you are a "good enough" writer and seem to muddle through with okay grades, that belief will show up in your practice in many ways. First, you will not spend a lot of time on your writing, because in your mind, that time won't make much of a difference. Or, you may downplay the importance of being a strong writer, and believe that your time is better spent elsewhere. You may place blame on writing courses or writing teachers, who didn't teach you what you think you needed to know, which takes the pressure off of you. Or, you may pay lip service to the importance of writing, but when it comes down to it, you don't take the time and effort to truly put in the work. Whatever your true beliefs, these will manifest and show up in your writing. They will show up in your management of time, your effort level, your attitude towards writing, your procrastination, and all of this leads to your beliefs about writing.

What it boils down to is this: Writing is a discipline. It is a self-discipline that takes time, focus and effort, and without these, you limit how good of a writer you can become. So, what does the word "self-discipline" mean? According to *Success Consciousness: Mental Tools for a Great Life*, Self-discipline means, self-control, which is a sign of inner strength and control of yourself, your actions, and your reactions. Self-discipline gives you the power to stick to your decisions and follow them through, without changing your mind, and is therefore, one of the important requirements for achieving goals. The possession of this skill enables you to persevere with your decisions and plans until you accomplish them. It also manifests as inner strength, helping you to overcome obstacles, procrastination and laziness, and to follow through with whatever you do. One of its main characteristics is the ability to reject instant gratification and pleasure, in favor of some greater gain, which requires spending effort and time to get it (http://www.successconsciousness.com/self_discipline.htm).

You have many areas of your life where you institute self-discipline. Your job or career, for instance, requires self-discipline. You must wake up at a certain time to get ready for work. You must dress yourself for your work, whether that means a professional suit, a uniform, or a coverall. You must get to work at a certain time, or face consequences if you are late. You must interact with co-workers and constituents in a certain way, demonstrating professionalism and courtesy. You must complete your job duties in a timely and responsible manner, keeping in mind all the procedures and outcomes that are required. You manage your time, making sure you allow enough time to complete your tasks and go back to check your work. And if you make a mistake, you go back and fix it until it is right. All of these require self-discipline, and without that discipline, it is likely that you will not keep the job for very long. And why do you do it? Maybe your motivation is the paycheck, the hope of advancement, job security, the feeling you get from a job well done, or the praise and appreciation of others. Whatever your motivation, you do it, because you HAVE to do it. You discipline yourself to do it.

Now take that concept of self-discipline, and compare your work life with your writing life. Do you commit yourself to writing like you do to your job? Do you set a time and place for you to conduct your writing? Do you keep your “appointments” for writing like you do in your work? Do you manage time effectively and complete your writing before it is due, and take the time to go back to make sure it is right? Do you go through the procedures for writing, the writing process, or do you just “one and done”? What would it look like if you applied the self-discipline you use in your job, to your writing? For most learners, they would respond that their writing process and writing results would look very different if they applied the same self-discipline they use in their jobs, to the task of writing. And that is very true.

Then why don't we? Why don't we approach writing as “work”, and approach it with the same level of seriousness and dedication? Why don't we discipline ourselves to be better writers, like we discipline ourselves to be competent (outstanding) workers? It comes down to belief. Our beliefs about writing, whether we are “okay” at it and don't need to improve, or terrible at it and will never improve, or we don't have time or the resources, these all interrupt our self-discipline, and change how we approach writing. A lot of times it comes down to laziness, but what is behind that laziness. Why do we accept laziness about writing, when we wouldn't accept it with other work we consider important? If writing is important, and it is, we have to address the beliefs we hold about writing, and our own personal writing practice. YOU have to address YOUR beliefs about writing, and YOUR own personal writing practice. Without that address, that honest assessment, you will not be able to discipline yourself to become a better writer.

Spend some time today addressing your beliefs about writing in general, and yourself as a writer. Here are a few questions to get you started. Please answer these honestly, as lying to yourself (in the hopes of impressing others) doesn't get you anywhere.

1. How important is writing to me? What is it more important than? What is it less important than?
2. How much will becoming a stronger writer help me? What will it help me to do better?
3. As a writer, my greatest strengths are...
4. As a writer, my greatest challenges are...
5. Writing is...
6. I would like to become a better writer, but I need help with...
7. In terms of disciplining myself with writing, I tend to...

Once you have formulated some ideas, commit these answers to paper. They don't have to be polished, but they do need to be authentic.

Today you have begun a journey to becoming a better writer!