Sample

Dr. Martin

ENG 101

17 October 2020

Writing Process Analysis

Most people have deeply ingrained ways of approaching writing tasks. These approaches develop over time and vary depending on a host of factors. Although I have long considered myself a creative writer, my process when writing fiction differs from my process when composing in professional and academic contexts. Before beginning this study, I knew that I had become accustomed to an academic writing process that privileged planning and perfectionism over the flexibility and creativity I value as a fiction writer. As I collected data last week, I came to realize how thoroughly perfectionism has impacted every stage of my writing process, from planning to proofreading. Writing with attention to detail has its advantages, and planning often makes drafting easier; however, I found that when perfectionism enters my writing process too early, I work less efficiently and become hesitant to revise my work later on.

One of the first things I noticed when studying my writing process was that planning can be a double-edged sword. On one hand, planning enabled me to explore and organize my thoughts, making drafting significantly easier. When working on the writing influences assignment, for example, I spent about an hour brainstorming and outlining before writing in earnest. I noted in my process journal afterward that "Once I had the outline in front of me, writing out the draft wasn't too difficult." This example suggests that, in my case, it's true that "It is much easier to face a blank page once you have focused goals, formulated ideas, gathered resources, thought through materials, and written out a concrete plan" (Bazerman 50). As I

mention in my self-portrait, outlining was an important part of my process while working as a copywriter, since it allowed me to write coherent first drafts and "meet more demanding deadlines," and outlining still benefits me as an academic writer. On the other hand, however, I recognize that spending too much time outlining can stall progress.

As a copywriter, I had limits on the amount of time I could spend planning for any project. When writing academically and professionally, in contrast, I seem to have infinite time to organize my thoughts. As my experience writing this past week shows, this can lead to procrastination through overplanning. According to my process journal, I spent 6.5 hours preparing to write the self-portrait essay before I started a draft—this is more time than I spent drafting, revising, and editing the assignment combined. My biggest insight while brainstorming didn't come until I stopped answering prewritten questions to generate material and began to synthesize that material, subsequently "[latching] onto a few images/metaphors." Most of what I wrote during the earliest brainstorming stages did not assist me with my self-portrait, suggesting that I could have utilized my time more effectively. There are two potential reasons why I tend to spend an excessive amount of time planning. First, when working on high-stakes assignments, I write very detailed outlines filled with complete sentences. These outlines act more like drafts than outlines, meaning that I sometimes collapse the planning and drafting processes. Second, and perhaps more worryingly, I feel I need all my thoughts in crisp logical order to produce a perfect first draft. My discomfort with uncertainty is visible in my process journal when I say during one brainstorming session "I spent time looking for evidence but didn't really find the kind of aha insight I was looking for." In reality, no first draft will be perfect, no matter how much planning has taken place. As Anne Lamott says, "The right words and sentences just do not come pouring out like a ticker tape most of the time" (2). Whatever the cause of my lengthy

planning process, my data indicates that, if I want to write more efficiently, I should listen to Lamott and start writing anyway.

My concern with crafting perfect prose continues during the drafting stage. Like Bazerman, staring at a blank page, even with hours of planning behind me, sometimes left me feeling "overcome with panic and an overwhelming desire to do something else" (45). Throughout the week, I found myself seeking out distractions from social media and music when I wasn't sure how to phrase something. Sometimes, a brief, pleasant distraction made me feel more prepared to face the task, such as on October 10, when I note that listening to music "definitely helped keep my spirits up." Other times, I had to consciously drag my attention back to the assignment at hand. In my process journal, I mention "wording" and related terms in nine out of twenty-five entries. Although "wording and rewording," as I call it on October 10, may sometimes help me produce relatively polished first drafts, this editing behavior became problematic when writing emails and comments to other students, since these were times when I was thinking about how my audience would perceive me. On October 9, I write in my process journal, "I had a difficult time writing this email because I wasn't sure how to appropriately phrase my request." While it's certainly important to communicate respectfully, I really shouldn't need forty-five minutes to write an email to a professor, no matter how complex the ideas I'm trying to communicate. By paying so much attention to wording while drafting, I engaged in the same editing behavior Sondra Perl says "truncate[s] the flow of composing" in unskilled writers (328). In other words, being overly perfectionistic during the drafting stage slowed down my writing process significantly.

Overplanning and editing while drafting due to perfectionism come with consequences later in the writing process, as well. The benefit is that I often have an easier time making second

drafts presentable. Referring to the self-portrait in my process journal, I write that the session went smoothly "after I finished the first draft and could focus on cleaning up the prose and increasing cohesion." However, as I describe in my self-portrait, the meticulous nature of my planning and drafting stages also makes it difficult for me to "imagine any way to restructure my arguments." This rigidity conflicts with the way I view myself as a fiction writer. Although I did not have time to write creatively during the week I collected data, past experience has taught me that I am more willing to make big changes when revising creative pieces than I am when revising academic writing, possibly because I have had practice in workshops and because I usually write fiction without outlining exactly how the plot will progress. In my process journal, I mention revision by name exactly zero times, and only two entries seem to describe anything close to the "Deeper questions and improvements" Bazerman describes (51). Therefore, it seems I struggle to imagine ways to substantially improve my writing after the first draft.

Recording detailed information about my writing process this week has shown me how dramatically a person's insecurities, habits, and experiences can shape their approach to writing in different genres. Throughout the week, my perfectionism and lack of confidence in my ideas led me to overplan and edit while drafting, simultaneously limiting my perceived need for revision and my ability to revise even if I wanted to. In many cases, my approach may have limited my ability to live up to my ideals of creativity and flexibility when writing in academic and professional contexts. People may have their own unique writing processes, but that doesn't mean those processes are sacred. Now that I understand how I write, I can pay attention to my process while I work and steer myself in a positive direction when fear and perfectionism start to slow me down.

Works Cited

Bazerman, Charles. “Writing Processes.” *Involved: Writing for College, Writing for Yourself*. WAC Clearinghouse, 2015, pp. 44-70.

Lamott, Anne. “Shitty First Drafts.” *Bird by Bird*, 1994.

Perl, Sondra. “The Composing Processes of Unskilled College Writers.” *Research in the Teaching of English,* vol. 13, no. 4, Dec. 1979, pp. 317-336.