

Writing 201: Analyzing the Writing Process

An ironic approach to purposeful writing

BEING A WRITER, I FOLLOW A FAIRLY STRICT process when writing—the same process that I preach about when teaching clients how to write: Pre-writing: planning and drafting; Reviewing: rewriting and revising; and Finishing: editing, applying mechanics, and formatting.

I've taught this process to many people (including my children). After all, there is a very good reason: it works!

The Pre-writing phase allows you to identify who you are writing for (your audience) and what you want to say to



them; to identify the purpose of your writing, to determine the points you want to make and enumerate them; to begin drafting your ideas based on these points to get your thoughts on paper without restriction. This is where the bulk of your writing can take place.

The Reviewing phase enables you to clarify your draft: to embellish your words, to add more details, to tighten up your text, to clear up any ambiguities, to sequence thoughts better, to ensure your text speaks to your purpose, to delete anything that runs astray, to cut off tangents, to sharpen.

The Finishing phase is where you edit: to employ better words, to fix grammatical infractions, to correct mechanical errors, to change punctuation, to format for clarity and understanding.

Imagine my consternation, then—with a bit of a smile—when I received the following analysis of the process my son employs for writing papers (including email and IM) at university. In his own words...

Process Analysis, by Tyler Maggiani

Let's just start with the thesis and maybe I will come up with a clever opening line later. This analysis is about how I procrastinate, spell poorly, and desecrate punctuation; or five paragraph essays, three lines of garbage, and fast-as-I-can-type talking; or Word, Gmail, and iChat.

Let's start with papers as the process is ongoing as I write this. The first planning stage is receiving the assignment which I promptly write down in an assignment book or on whatever is available, promising to myself that later in the quiet of my room I will transfer it onto a wall-sized planning calendar—which I don't have. Then I usually try to come up with some sort of plan to get started on it early because, dammit, I'm not going to wait until the last minute again. Time check. It's 2:30, time to hurry up.

This is how I really write papers: I wait until the last possible minute and the words just flow from my hands like similes flow from wherever they pool. I select a topic, usually having to do with something weird or vague so I have more leeway, and google for any sort of info on it. I write whatever it happens to be the night before the paper is due, on my computer, and with little to no attention paid to the specific format the professor dictated. I prefer a sans-serif font, mostly Helvetica, but for your sake I write with a more readable text. More from the prompting list: I don't write for an audience, I don't revise or do drafts, and if I have writer's block, well, you can imagine how that works. The paper is ready to print when it is time for class or time to sleep.

Anyway, moving on, the exception to this really happens when I have a research paper, then the research starts very early. I have outlines, quotes ready, bibliographies waiting, but I still write the night before. My papers get no rough draft; they only get a few moments of fresh air after being printed before they are handed in. I don't peer review, I don't go to a writing help center,

and I don't ask the professor if I'm headed in the right direction. Awful system to most, works well for me. I think it allows my voice to come through and gives the work a more natural feel when I'm not trying to wring every last bit of amateurism from each sentence.

On to email... I don't write professional email as that description would look a whole lot more important than this one. I send links, one word replies, and requests for money to my parents. That's about it. The time it takes me to prepare for writing an email is the time it takes me to move my mouse to reply after reading one. Or the time it takes to hit compose. There is no more preparing than that; I put less thought into email than I do into instant messages. I suppose there is the exception of when I email professors as those start with a greeting, well-formed sentences, and nice wording. Then a signature and it's off. If this paragraph were an email, it would be far too long.

iChat is my program of choice for instant messages mostly because it is free and already installed. These are a little different for me than I suspect they are for most people. I try to write eloquently and capitalize while I make use of punctuation so it sound more like I am talking than typing. My IMs are perforated with e...llip...ses... and sem;colons and some very clever drawings using a plethora of punctuation, numbers, and weird cha@a@te@s. My IMs do tend to be short though.

There you are: a comprehensive guide on how to write if you are Tyler Maggiani. Now for a little restatement of the thesis: As you can see, I have covered how I prepare for and write papers, emails, and instant messages. All done! 🍌

—RICH MAGGIANI

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