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# DRAFT DODGING: LEARNING THE ART OF REVISION

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## Abstract

While working towards a teaching degree in English language arts, I found myself reflecting on my own education in search of inspiration for how I will teach writing in my future classroom. Through a meta-dialogue, I engage with the idea(s) of being a writer who is also a lifelong learner and a newly converted defendant for the process of revision and how to share that with my students.

**Keywords:** writing, composition, developmental writing, writing process, drafting, editing, sharing literacies

It's the night before the deadline and I haven't written this submission yet.

Well, that's actually not true. I've written bits of it. I started it about four separate times, in three different physical locations (and one digital copy)—hoping that one of them could grant me a morsel of inspiration, a fragment of a beginning of a thought regarding how to *write* about the ways that I want my students to write in my classroom.

I was the kind of student who sat down to write a paper in middle and high school (and even my first few semesters in college) and do it all on the first try from beginning to end. I might assume that you, dear reader, have been a similar type of student. If not, stay with me, this gets good.

Why would I change what I said the first time about this prompt?

Plus, most of the time, I thought that I could hit the nail on the head pretty accurately—trust your gut, first thought's the best thought, right?

The teacher didn't assign due dates to tell me which evening I would spend busting out—what I thought was—a quasi-masterpiece of a five-paragraph essay. But no matter how far along I got in school, I disregarded any deadline.

I was a writing machine!!

Literally.

I would perform the input task of writing when the switch was flipped, demanding I do so and the output was what could have been considered writing (Bomer, 2011, p. 201).

As any teacher who's had me on their roster can tell you—I have things to say, so just imagine how long those body paragraphs were...

In my defense, I also didn't know how to edit, revise, or draft—let alone, write papers for different audiences. This is where you come in, reader!

My hard drive was wired to structure an essay—hamburger style. I have three points (plus, of course, the intro and conclusion paragraphs acting as the buns) and I will elaborate on them in this order. Beep boop bop, robot sounds.

If I could bring 7<sup>th</sup> grade me to into my classroom now, he would receive some lessons built upon Randy Bomer's idea of Late Revision—a way I'd describe my composing style now—which requires “writers [to] think even more deliberately about their audiences, bringing more clarity to their meanings and thinking moment by moment about the reader's experience” (2011, p. 214).

Picture a “we're doin' it live, folks!” moment, one that gives students a sneak peek behind the curtain as to how we—as veteran writers—compose. As much as I (still) wish I could craft award-winning work on the first attempt, that's not practical or doable for even the most experienced writers.

This brings us back to those four different starts of this reflection. There are digitally copied and pasted chunks that used to be highlighted in red so that I remember to “STOP” and not publish this for you all to see. Before they were digital, there were ideas, ramblings, trains of thoughts all on Post-It notes. I have all of these bits scattered throughout a Word document; now I need to start thinking about how they work together.

“Nobody's gonna read this draft, dude. Fragment it up until you're ready to sew it back together like a quilt.”

I see each of my paragraphs, *blurbs*, **bolded ideas**, **highlighted** trains of thought all as units of information. Some of these thoughts don't belong in this work. Some of these thoughts can be expanded upon. All of these facets work into that (wildly fluid stage of) late revision.

Essentially, if I could copy and paste the entirety of the Word document—comments to myself and all—it wouldn't (necessarily) be an altogether pleasurable experience for the reader. It wouldn't be writing—defined as a process of communication conveying a message to a reader (Lindemann, 2001, p. 10).

It would be disjointed, personal, revealing, unstructured, and quite frankly, it would not convey a cohesive and sound message—appearing as crappy writing. (It's not a self-put-down to call it crap, nor is it gloating to say that some of the things I tried ended up landing... and stuck!)

Here, in the privacy and safety of my draft (which is merely a state of existing at some point along the composition matrix), I'm in control to stretch my legs and play around with how I want to develop this manuscript into a whole entire thought.

Using Bomer's idea of a personal writer's notebook—a space for writing just for oneself—I can utilize a singular Word document as the private, beginning stages of a piece, which then allows me to have control over the image, the ways in which it is digested by the audience, and overall, use it as a springboard place—prior to publication—where this piece can exist as I consistently develop content with meaning attached (2011, p. 196).

That's those multiple starts, sentence fragments, notes to myself.

They're all little bricks that have been set aside by me, for me, to build some writing out of.

What we don't see, though, is the culmination of those assignments, essays, feedback, peer edits, etc. that existed between 7<sup>th</sup> grade writer, Caleb, and the writer, Caleb, who is writing this. Somewhere in between there and here, my writing life was revitalized, not by those assignments, and essays, and processes though.

But instead by how to develop my own texts as journeys with the reader in mind (I feel like that part from PBS that goes "this program was made possible by viewers like you"), or to be okay with starting the same assignment four times because I can (Bomer, 2011, p. 204). This list can go on.

Clearly, I'm not the best writer in the world—nor I don't think I am. I am learning to be a better writer though. Everyday. I want to share that aspect of myself with students. Almost like letting them in on a little secret.

"Psst. I'm still learning to write too. I've never stopped."

If I want to genuinely reach students in terms of getting their attention focused on something they're interested in writing about, I'm going to have to show them how to do all these seemingly scary things; brainstorming, drafting, editing, revising ... crafting a mobius strip of writing creation.

I asked a friend recently what they wish their teachers would have done to help them establish better writing habits. Their response: "Let me write about what I want."

There's a lot of people to please, and even more people to teach, but hopefully, giving my students that freedom to write about what they want—how they want to do it—is going to benefit my practice of teaching writing to establish good writing habits for students to utilize beyond the classroom.

### References

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### Author Biography

Caleb K. Thornton (he/him) is a graduate of Wichita State's English Education program with a dual-major bachelor's degree in English Education and English with a minor in Linguistics and a Film Studies certificate. Thornton presented at the Kansas Association of Teachers of English (KATE) Conference in fall 2022 and is currently preparing to present at the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Convention in Columbus, Ohio, this November. He is a member of NCTE, KATE, and the Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of NCTE (ALAN) and can be reached at [calebthornton.wsu@gmail.com](mailto:calebthornton.wsu@gmail.com).