Introduction to the Writing Process
Learning Objectives

By the end of this module, you will understand some basic concepts about the writing process.

- Rule vs. strategy-based writing
- The uniqueness of your writing process
- The writing process as iterative and chaotic
- The importance of efficiency when writing
- A key difference between expert and novice writers
- Experiment with caution
Rules vs. Strategies

Rules often begin with words like “always” or “never.”

- Never end a sentence with a preposition.
- Never start a sentence with because.
- Never use sentence fragments.
- Never split an infinitive.
- Never use the passive voice.
- Etc.

Strategies often begin with words like “depending upon my audience” or “given the context of Engineering”.

The Case of Prepositional Endings

➤ Never end a sentence with a preposition?

“That is the sort of errant effrontery up with which I shall not put.”

versus

“That is the sort of errant effrontery which I shall not put up with.”

-- Reputedly said by Winston Churchill
The Case of *Because*

- **Teacher’s Question:** Why did Spot chase Fluff in the story?

- **Student’s Answer:** Because Fluff is a cat and Spot is a dog. (A sentence fragment)

- **Teacher’s Preferred Answer:** Spot chased Fluff because Fluff is a cat and Spot is a dog. (A complete sentence)

- The student learns that starting sentences with *because* is bad, and **NOT** that sentence fragments are the problem. When we grow older, we learn to use alternatives for *because* (**as** or **since**). That’s a problem.
The Problem with *As or Since*

*As* the truck was in gear, the load of bricks slid off the tailgate.

could mean:

*While* the truck was in gear, the load of bricks slid off the tailgate. (Temporal implication)

or

*Because* the truck was in gear, the load of bricks slid off the tailgate. (Causal implication)
Choices

➢ In other words, many of the usage rules we learn about written English are not entirely accurate.

➢ You have a choice!

➢ Rule-based approach to writing ➔ experience of failure ➔ writer’s block or dislike of writing ✗

➢ Strategy-based approach to writing ➔ experience of success ➔ break the so-called “rules” to achieve the goals required by a document ✓
Unique Writing Processes

Each of us have unique writing processes, so we need to learn how to deal with our idiosyncrasies.

Four key factors to consider:

- Our usual practices (habits, preferences)
- Our environs (noise, light, comfort)
- Our attitudes (like or dislike)
- Our audiences (usual or novel)
My Writing Practices

Composition
For Example (circa 1988)
For Example (2018)
Writing Viewed as a Linear Process

INVENTING → DRAFTING → REVISING

Need to unpack these terms!

Planning? Researching? Creating?
Dictating? Typing? Writing?
Revising? Editing? Visualizing?

✓ Note that all are noun/verb forms
✓ All are active processes
Writing as an Iterative Process

INVENTING

REVISING

DRAFTING
Writing can also be thought of as chaotic: an irregular, non-linear, and unpredictable creative process.

*Image Source:* Chainimage
Increasing Efficiency When Writing

The Case of Creo Electronics Corporation

- Estimates of time required to produce engineering documentation for prototype optical tape recorder:
  - 11 percent of total time devoted to documentation
  - equals 3.3 person years
  - equals $120,000 (1988 dollars)

- A 10% increase in efficiency equals $12,000 saving
- A 25% increase in efficiency equals $30,000 saving

- Quadruple the costs to account for inflation!
Strategies to Increase Efficiency

- Improvements to writing environment:
  - Provide a quiet interruption-free environment
  - Organize the writing environment
  - Improve the lighting and physical comfort

- Improvements to computer skills:
  - Master using the word processor
  - Learn to touch-type or dictate
How Efficient/Effective Are You?

- Approximately what percentage of your total time writing do you spend:
  - Inventing/Planning/Researching (IPR)? X%
  - Correcting/Drafting/Writing (CDW)? X%
  - Visualizing/Revising/Editing (VRE)? X%
    
- Write these figures down on the reverse of your file card.
Writing Like an Expert

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Inventing</th>
<th>Drafting</th>
<th>Revising</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inexperienced Writer</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>05%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1st year student)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced Writer</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Professor/Lecturer)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source of study is unknown*
A Rule that Matters?

- Experiment with your writing process – try new approaches

but . . .

If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.
Conclusion

- Reflections: How much time do you actually spend revising your work?
- Reading: Extended Abstract, Strategies pp. 1-40