

## The Writing Process...

The struggle, the loneliness, the distractions, the writing...

When I worked as a consultant, I used to have to write these long reports about whatever we were studying at the time. Issues included universal telephone service, rate reductions, cable service policy vis a vis the local telephone company, etc.

Before I could start trying to write, I would procrastinate. I would sharpen my pencils – all 15 of them. I would clean my desk; I would go through my mail. I would do anything but write the first sentence. I wanted the writing to be perfect. I wanted the writing to be informative, inspiring, etc. The writing was nothing, because it just didn't happen. Or, it happened, but not until the last minute when I was under pressure and already stressed out. Then, I found a better way...

How do you write?

How do you compose?

There are many different ways people bring words to the page...

Freewriting

Brain storming

Write the first two pages

Write the last two pages

Outlining

Emotion induced writing

Story induced writing

Writing before bed

Writing when you wake up

Writing your dreams

Making lists

Crafting your goals

Writing about a chart or graphic

Writing about a problem

Writing about a solution

But these are lists of things that are not attached to who you are. I can write these lists on the board, but they will mean very little. In order to figure out who you are and how you best write, we need to go deeper.

### ***Why not write where you are?***

Where are you right now? Where are you sitting? Who is next to you?

Bring attention to where you are right at this moment.

What are you wearing?

What do you have to write with?

Why did you choose that pen, that pencil? Do you like your writing instrument or was it the last thing you grabbed on the way to class today?

What type of keyboard are you sitting at? Is it faster to type and think at the same time? Is it easier or more thoughtful to write long hand?

### ***I ask you again... Where are you right now?***

In Class Assignment:

1. Think about a place that is no more than 10 minutes away from this classroom. This is a place where you feel comfortable. This is a hallway, a windowsill; this is a corner of the library... One of my favorite places to be is on a windowsill overlooking Mass Ave. I like to watch people go by as I write in my notebook. I had a student who liked to sit atop the big stumpy pillars in the 77 Mass Ave Lobby. It almost seems as if there should be statues there, but there was my student, sitting, writing. Wherever your place is, think about it and figure out why you like to be there. Write this down.

2. Now, what do you like to write with? A pen, a pencil  
What do you like to write on: Paper? Cardboard? A computer?  
If you like to write with a pen or a pencil, tell your reader what type of pencil. If it never mattered to you what you write with, make it matter now. Try out a bunch of different pens until you find one that matches your mood. I like to write with a very thin-pointed felt tip pen. These write fast, and I think fast, so it works. Tell your reader what you like to write with – write it down.

3. Where did you do your best writing, your most productive writing ever? Once I was on the TGV traveling through France, the speed at which we traveled (300 km/hour) and the landscape seemed to capture me and pull me into my writing – I was very productive. I also like to write while sitting in front of Goose Pond Lake in New Hampshire. This is more contemplative writing – poetry, serious pieces, etc. I like to watch the loons watching me and I like to write about them. What is your favorite place? What is your most productive place? Write it down.

4. Let's share our experiences with the class.

In Class Assignment 2:

Stream of conscious writing

Sometimes when we don't know what to write, we can begin writing, by writing whatever comes to mind. Some people call this freewriting or brainstorming. I like to call it stream of conscious writing because it is like a stream; it is uncontrolled, it flows, yet you can be aware of it and follow it. Here is how it goes... Think of a topic you find interesting. Now, take 5 minutes to write whatever comes to mind. Don't stop writing for the entire 5 minutes. If you don't know what to write, write "I don't know what to write" The point is to fill the page, to see how much you can write in 5 minutes regardless of what it is.

### In Class Assignment 3: Emotional Writing

We all have experiences that touch us as we walk through our days. Some experiences touch us more deeply than others. For me, experiences that involve children touch me the deepest. In fact, I have to be careful about what I read or what I see on television because I can become frustrated, angry, and intolerant when I hear stories of child abuse, child neglect, etc. This sensitivity, however, is also a blessing because when something touches me this deeply, I know I have something to say. I know there is a voice inside of me that is just waiting to be heard on whatever topic it happens to be. So, I write as a way to process my feelings.

What touches you? What stories have you read or heard about that cause you to become emotionally charged? Take five minutes and make a list of issues that have called grabbed you, challenged you and caused you to wonder why things have to be the way they are?

Share these issues with the class.

When you can identify these issues, you might have a thesis topic, an article for a news paper, a best seller or even a Nobel Prize. Good writing reflects someone's passion for understanding, a search for answers, a quest for knowledge. Your questions, your thoughts can bring you closer to who you are and what your passions are.

Problems with Emotional Writing: Get some distance.

### In Class Assignment 4: Moving beyond just the topic

So you have your topic, you know what you are passionate about, but you are stuck. You don't know how to continue to write. What do you do now?

Writing happens in little bite sized pieces. Writing, when you read it, flows. Writing, when you writing is sometimes like a bunch of e-mails strung together; they stop, start, stop start and then you hit the send button and it bounces right back at you because you forgot to address it to the right person. The point is, that writing is not always fluid and you should not expect it to be so. It is a meditation, which requires concentration, commitment and consistency. Every time you forget your purpose in writing, you need to find a way to come back to that purpose; that focus.

One way to concentrate on purpose is to focus on the data collected for your purpose. What does the data state? What does the data show? Can you begin to tell your reader a story using the tables, charts and graphics that you have either collected or created? It is not enough to tell show your reader these results. You need to some how communicate what these graphics are telling the reader. So, when you're stuck, why not try starting with the data? If you have raw data such as survey results, why not try making a

summary table of these data? If you have census tract data, why not try composing a story about the people who live in that census tract?

When you immerse yourself in the details, you can begin to see patterns, trends and occurrences that others may have missed. And, you can become fascinated by these minute pieces of information that you had glossed over.