
My Writing Process and the Importance of Flow Writing

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Having a grasp of one's own writing process is vital for any rhetor. By studying certain qualities of personal writing and identifying patterns, an individual can improve her writing. Authors like Clayton Stark discuss in depth how writing in a natural environment versus a probed studied environment affects writing, and question the effectiveness of that research. I plan on evaluating the aspect of environment when writing and honing in on the effects of a natural setting. We are aware that being studied while writing, like a lab rat in a confined room, creates barriers for research. The exercise is just not practical, and a writer's discourse will be altered by the mere consciousness of the observer, making self-testing the preferred method. Suppose an individual used the method of self-testing in the natural environment of his home versus a soundproof room in the library. A soundproof room in the library with limited distractions, aside from stray thoughts, proves to be more efficient for writing. This leads me to plan more writing away from a distraction-infested environment that disrupts the flow of the thought process.

In this research study, I will be considering the work of Tierney and Pierson on the topic of reading and writing, keeping in mind how these processes are closely related. From their findings we learn that writers use two core techniques: goal setting and knowledge mobilization. They address their exigence through goal setting and apply it with information they know or have gained through research by means of knowledge mobilization. Readers use experience and their own knowledge mobilization in order to better understand a rhetor's goals or exigence. This concept will be important when looking back at my two research examples as I examine the differences in one's writing when placed in different environments.

Carol Berkenkotter's work with Donald Murray has vital importance to my research, also, as I plan on analyzing the effects of planning and revising, something Berkenkotter calls "reconceiving," and the relationship between the flows of writing in different environments. I take into account how I am similar to Murray; my own revising often leads to new planning episodes. I also plan on using Murray's comments on the research, comparing the problems he faced when taking part in the experiments to my own. Erica Keller and Clayton Stark bring in the aspect of self-analysis. They explain how this method is more successful: as individuals study themselves, they use advanced methods of introspection that an observer would never be able to tap into. Stark hones in on the effects of the writer's environment. He illustrates his environment for his readers, conveying how it affects his writing either positively or negatively. A natural environment sets the mood for an instinctive writing process that I find is not altered by the awareness of a subject being studied. However, I have found in my research that a college student's natural environment is infested with distractions that cause a disruption in the flow of thoughts and ideas, subsequently altering their writing.

Methods

For my research I conducted two different controlled experiments based on a natural environment using the method of self-analysis. One study was conducted in the most natural environment possible for any college student, the bedroom. The other experiment was staged in a study room in the library. I recorded both experiments with a tape recorder from start to finish without interruption.

The first test site was my room, at my desk with my phone next to me, Facebook open, and music playing from time to time. My door was also open with my roommate in the other room watching TV at a reasonable volume, but still loud enough for me to hear it. All of these different things going on while writing proved to be distractions and led to pauses in my work, as hypothesized. Twice I even got up from my seat to go to the kitchen, doing things unrelated to my writing.

The second study, conducted in the library, eliminated distractions from the scene. I still had access to all necessary tools to write a successful paper, such as my laptop, textbook, notebook, pens, and instructions. Having these vital tools still kept it a natural environment, as I did not have anyone else sitting there watching me or the thought that someone would be listening to my tapes. I simply had no access to the Internet. I shut my phone off and could not hear anything but the keys typing and the sound of my own voice. Although this environment appears distraction-proof, still keep in mind it is only “outside source” distraction-proof. I still had to deal with myself and random stray thoughts. I also got up to walk around in the room; however, this time the purpose was simply to stretch my legs. Even while out of my seat in this environment I remained productive, planning while pacing around the room.

From start to finish I attempted to say everything that came to mind. This practice proved harder than I initially imagined, just as Murray says. Each session was timed, and notes were taken at the conclusion in order to write down tendencies and patterns I noticed while writing. I referred back to the tapes later to confirm these patterns.

Findings

The differences in the writing process found in the two separate environments are very evident. In the first case, staged in my room, we see many more distractions and interferences in the composing process. The majority of these distractions are what I would call “outside distractions,” meaning anything unrelated to a random or disparate thought, straying away from the subject matter. These “outside distractions” caused interruptions in my flow of writing. As I wrote, I noticed that I maintained a rhythm and constant flow of ideas that I pour on the page as long as I stay on track. These writing bursts may not be perfect, but they maintain spontaneous-originality that creates a unique argument. I call this tool *flow writing*.

This tool of flow writing worked much better in the library, suppressing distractions as an uninterrupted surge of writing accumulated upon itself. The calmness of this environment gave me an equilibrium as I wrote, putting me in a Zen like state. Being in my room almost made me too comfortable, allowing me to lose focus periodically. These habitual distractions caused me to lose some of the ideas that arose when flow writing from one sentence to the next. In some cases I would have the idea for the next sentence in my head but lose it only after checking my Facebook or reading a text message. After coming back

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to the paper, I would have to create a new idea for the next sentence, restarting the cycle of flow writing, and rebuild momentum as I wrote. In the first case I spent 78 minutes writing 369 words, as opposed to the second case where I spent 49 minutes writing 741 words. The numbers don't lie; writing in a distraction-free environment definitely improves my writing process. Time and ideas were maximized when involved in the distraction-free environment of the library, as I exploited the tool of "flow writing."

Commonalities

Like Mr. Murray, in the middle of writing I tend to revise simple local sentences, which often leads to local and global planning: "reconceiving." It was much easier to use the strategy of reconceiving without outside distractions. This could explain why the second paper was jam-packed with description and argument, as opposed to the first. I tend to go back over my work for minor rephrasing of sentences after a burst of writing when the material is fresh in my mind. I took what I initially put on the page and rearranged it to be more meaningful to my argument, which often led to new planning.

Conclusion

In both of these experiments I found it difficult to speak all my thoughts when writing. Often, my thoughts would generate faster than I could say them out loud. This, along with steady distractions in the environment of my room, constantly caused me to lose my thoughts and ideas. I

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do, however, believe it is possible to maintain a natural environment without actually being in a place that you work every day. A natural writing environment only requires the personal tools to produce quality-efficient discourse.

It surprised me how difficult it was to be able to jump back into flow writing after being distracted and away from my actual writing environment. I would compare it to an actor who is completely submerged in a role for a blockbuster movie. Even off the set most of the time they will remain in character, for, once being in character—or flow writing, in my case—is disrupted, it is often hard to pick it back up right away.

Revising after bursts of writing certainly is something that has worked for me. The process helps me sort through the nonsense, while my logic and motive for placing it there are still fresh in my mind. I then am able to relax, putting these thoughts into perspective, and rearranging and rephrasing them to appeal to my audience more effectively. This process certainly compares to the work of Berkenkotter and Murray. "Reconceiving," as they call it, is the synergy of planning and revising.

I definitely relate to Murray and his problems with speaking his thoughts out loud. Although I relate mostly to Murray in my writing process, too, I have a process of my own that is a combination of reconceiving and my very own flow writing. This consists of a burst of uninterrupted writing, where sentences and ideas build off of each other like tree branches. After this jolt of writing is stopped, I sit back and revise shortly, inspiring a new planning period that leads to another episode of flow writing, as the process starts over again. It has been noted that distractions seriously hinder this process. Writing in an environment that is personal to you could be helpful, yet the constant distractions place notable constraints on the writing process, as it disrupts the flow of thoughts, causing the loss of spontaneous ideas.

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