Bryce Panter

Writing Self Study

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Many of the writers found within the studies conducted in the Writing About Writing articles have similarities however some hold stark contrasts. For example Donald Murray who was studied by Berkenkotter is a skilled writer who shares similar techniques for keeping fluency while writing as the non-blockers featured in Roses study. In particular the non-blocker: Debbie. In contrast the young marine Tony featured in Perl’s study struggles with an overly recursive writing style and an inability to write with fluency. In the course of this paper the various elements of these writers composing processes will be compared and contrasted. These processes include recursiveness, planning, rhetorical strategies, and evaluating ones own written product. I will also identify where my writing style fits into these processes.

The area where Tony struggles most is his overly recursive writing style. “From the moment Tony began writing. He indicated a concern for correct form that actually inhibited the development of ideas” (Perl 317-36). In contrast to Tony, the non-blocker in Roses study Debbie wrote heuristically. This means that Debbie used rules while writing but unlike Tony she viewed them as flexible and did not let rules inhibit her writing fluency. While writing Debbie kept this mentality: “If a rule conflicts with what is sensible or with experience, reject it” (Rose 389-401). In comparison to Debbie, Murray the skilled writer who was featured in Perl’s study also was not affected by an overly recursive and rule inhibited writing process. Instead of constantly revising his work Murray used incubation in editing. This means that he would leave his writing and come back to it at a later date with a different mindset to edit with a new perspective. “The flashes of discovery that follow periods of incubation even brief ones are unexpected, powerful, and catalytic” (Berkenkotter 156-69). In this scenario I relate most to the processes of Murray and Debbie because I also write heuristically. In addition to writing heuristically I often make use of incubation because I will put a paper away for a couple of days before I review what I have written. By doing this like Murray I am able to approach my paper with a fresh perspective during the editing process.

The planning processes of these writers are another section that is common in the studies. Beginning again with Tony the unskilled writer in Perl’s study, “Given any topic, the first operation he performed was to focus in and narrow down the topic. He did this by rephrasing the topic until either a word or an idea in the topic linked up with something in his own experience” (Perl 317-36). This shows that Tony to write effectively had to consistently write reflexively. This weakness shows an interesting parallel to Murray’s writing style. While Murray is undoubtedly a skilled writer he also can have trouble writing extensively and prefers writing reflexively like Tony. This can be seen in the article: “When the writer was thoroughly familiar with his subject, he dictated with great fluency and ease. However when he was breaking new ground conceptually, his pace slowed and his voice became halting” (Berkenkotter 156-69). When I am planning like Tony I prefer to attempt to view the topic reflexively. By doing this, my entire writing process becomes more coherent because I gain a deeper understanding of the topic.

One rhetorical strategy that Debbie and Murray both utilized that Tony neglected while writing is the consideration of the audience. While Murray was planning “A second kind of planning activity was the stating of rhetorical goals, i.e. planning how to reach an audience” (Berkenkotter 156-69). Rose also said in his study “non-blockers are an Information-Processor’s dream. They get to know their audience” (Rose 389-401). Tony did not take his audiences perspective into account and “wrote from an egocentric point of view” (Perl 317-36). I think that the consideration of the audience is the most important rhetorical strategy because the writing is made for the audience. Consequently I identify with Murray and Debbie in this context.

Another key area that more advanced writers such as Murray take into account is the evaluation of ones own product. “As Murray demonstrated, writers *do* monitor and introspect about their writing simultaneously” (Berkenkotter 156-69). However unskilled writers like Tony do not attempt to evaluate their own writing by looking at it objectively. “When Tony completed the writing process, he refrained from commenting on or contemplating his total written product” (Perl 317-36). This is another area where I identify more with Murray, after I have written something I will invariably contemplate on my total written product because I believe this is necessary to achieve high quality work. However at this point in my life, taking into account all the writing processes and methods I relate most to Debbie’s style and process. I hope to have my writing style develop into one that is similar to Murray’s.

Works Cited

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