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Writing Self Study Part 2

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**Background:**

Perhaps the most common ailment that affects many writers is writers block. However there are some writers such as myself who aren’t affected by this notorious issue. Essentially writer’s block is the disruption of one’s creative flow due to a lack of ideas or an uncertainty of how to proceed. Many researchers have studied writers block. Mike Rose completed a comprehensive study of writers block titled: Rigid Rules, Inflexible Plans, and the Stifling of Language: A Cognitivist Analysis of Writers Block. By comparing those who were affected by writers block “The Blockers” and those who were not “The Non-Blockers” (Rose). Rose stated, “Blockers may well be stymied by possessing rigid or inappropriate rules, or inflexible or confused plans” (Rose). This means that those who adhere to strict and unnecessary rules will encounter writers block. Mike Rose conducted his study to see the differences between students who encountered writers block and those who did not.

The first and most basic way Non-Blockers avoid writers block, is they use what Rose calls heuristics or flexible rules (Rose). As a result when Non-Blockers write their creative flow is not interrupted by an obsession over rigid rules which Rose refers to as algorithms (Rose). The second and most important way writers prevent writers block is by having clear and cogent plans. Rose expresses this when he explains that Blockers are unable to prevent writers block because of “confused plans” (Rose). Consequently the best way to become a Non-Blocker is to make clear and comprehensive plans before beginning to write.

Other researchers such as Sondra Perl and Carol Berkenkotter have also conducted studies that relate to writing processes, and in those studies good planning by certain test subjects resulted in the avoidance of writers block, however when the test subjects did not plan sufficiently, writers block ensued. The best example of planning resulting in fluent writing is the planning process of Donald Murray who was featured in Berkenkotter’s study and article Decisions and Revisions: The Planning Strategies of a Published Writer. To study Murray’s planning process, Berkenkotter instructed Murray to keep a journal that extensively documented Murray’s planning process (Berkenkotter). Before Murray began to write he stated “process goals” which where specific procedures that he created in order to write (Berkenkotter). As a result of these procedures Murray was able to easily develop sub-plans to carry out his larger plan while writing. Consequently Murray had a clear idea of what to write and was not affected by writers block. “A second kind of planning activity was the stating of rhetorical goals, i.e. planning how to reach an audience” (Berkenkotter). This is an extremely important planning step for creating a relevant piece of rhetoric and for preventing writers block. As a result of stating rhetorical goals, it becomes easier to generate content because of how many things the writer must account for. For example one must take into account the audience, the situation, the specific purpose and more. After all the rhetorical goals are accounted for during planning, the writer should gain a considerable amount of criteria to discuss to satisfy these goals.

In Sondra Perl’s study and article, The Composing Processes of Unskilled College Writers, Perl conducted a study of how unskilled writers created rhetoric. The importance of planning is conveyed in her study in a section that is labeled “planning”(Perl). To gauge how much students planned before writing Perl gave a topic to each student and recorded the amount of time they spent planning (Perl). In Perl’s study, students who did not spend enough time planning were consumed by writers block. In the prewriting section of her study, Perl found that “When not given specific prewriting instructions, the students in this study began writing within the first few minutes”(Perl). As a result of this insufficient planning time, “students read the topic and directions a few times and indicated that they had “no idea” what to write” (Perl). This having “no idea” what to write is the epitome of writers block. If these students took longer to plan and came up with a clear strategy for writing they would not have encountered writers block.

**Methods:**

To study my writing process I recorded my voice while I was writing a self-study paper. After the audio recording was complete I made a transcript of everything that I said while writing. Consequently I obtained a deeper understanding of how my writing style functions. After studying my transcript I discovered that I plan extensively before I write. As a result of this planning I do not encounter writers block.

I identify as a Non-Blocker because as a result of comprehensive planning before I begin writing, I do not encounter writers block. When I create a plan for writing like Murray I first state process goals. What this means, is I state procedural goals to lead me to the development of sub plans. For example in my writing self-study transcript before I began to write I stated a general process goal by stating: “I guess ill talk about recursiveness, rhetorical strategies, planning and one other topic” This specific process goal is an example of how I state specific goals that I will develop and meet.

Another similarity between Murray and my planning process is the consideration of rhetorical goals. Before I begin to write anything I always consider who my audience is, what the context of my rhetoric is, what my specific purpose is, and what the exigency is behind my writing.

After I state my process goals and consider all of my rhetorical goals I will spend at least 20 minutes writing down a flow chart or comprehensive outline of my assignment that includes my topic, my specific purpose, my main points and my supporting points. This chart or outline will also include various quotes that I plan on using to add credibility to my writing. While I am writing I use this chart or outline as a reference to keep my creative flow running smoothly. Consequently as a direct result of comprehensive planning I am a Non-Blocker. The pie chart below is a visual representation of how much time I spend in each section of my writing process. As seen below I spend the most time planning because this is the most important aspect of how I avoid writers block.

**Discussion:**

After reading the above sections one might ask so what? The points of these methods are that they can directly benefit anyone’s writing process if they take the time to incorporate them into their writing style. By using my methods of comprehensive planning it is possible for anyone to become a Non-Blocker and over-come the infamous writers block. The reason that so many students suffer from writers block as seen in Perl’s study is a lack of planning. Most students will jump right into writing without asking themselves the following questions: What are my goals? How will I organize my assignment? What is the rhetorical situation? What are my main points? If students take at least 20 minutes to sit down and create a legitimate plan of action, then they can also become Non-Blockers and make writers block a thing of the past.

One thing that students should do to end their struggle with writers block is to make an outline of their papers. This outline should include their main points, and any supporting material that is relevant to those points. After students do this when they are writing their paper they will have a general idea on how their writing will flow. For example in the beginning of my transcript I was already talking about what would be in the end of my paper when I said “In that Perl article Tony talked about how he doesn’t do self-evaluation…. I can use that for the last topic” Consequently as I was writing my paper I didn’t have to worry about how I was going to end it. This is crucial to avoiding writers block. If students know where they want to inevitably take their paper, then writers block can be avoided.

Another method that I use, that other students can use to prevent writers block is the recapping of a point that was made after its completion and a brief preview of the next point. For example in my transcript I stated “Well I wrote about recursiveness so I guess I have to write about planning”. This helps me focus in on my goals, and allows me to keep a strong flow while writing. If students incorporate this technique into their writing processes, they can also obtain and develop a strong creative flow.

Finally students can overcome writers block by keeping information sources handy and referencing them often. While I am writing I keep my references next to my computer so I can include credible quotes quickly and efficiently. For example in my transcript I said “I’ll just reference the articles again and include the quotes that show this” by doing this my creative flow is uninterrupted and I am able to include relevant information. If students do this, their process will be even more resilient to writers block.

Works Cited

Perl, Sondra. "The Composing Processes of Unskilled College Writers." *Research in the Teaching of English*. 13.4 (1979): 317-36. Print.

Berkenkotter, Carol. "Decisions and Revisions: The Planning Strategies of a Published Writer." *College Composition and Communication*. 34.2 (1983): 156-69. Print.

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**Appendix:**

**Writing Self Study-Transcript**

Okay where’s my WAW book? Oh there it is I’ve never recorded myself writing a paper before so this should be interesting. This topic is driving me crazy, honestly I think it would be so much better if we got to choose our own topic and then write about our process in a self-analysis paper. I hope my roommates don’t think I’m crazy because I’m talking to myself in my room. All right I guess ill make my works cited page first, yeah that sounds good. *I then made my works cited page.* Ok how am I going to start this paper? First ill write about what my paper is going to cover\*Writing\*. I guess ill talk about recursiveness, rhetorical strategies, planning and one other topic…. Hmmmm. What else? In that Perl article Tony talked about how he doesn’t do self-evaluation…. I can use that for the last topic\*Writing\*. Facebook\* Okay so I’m going to talk about Tony, Murray, Debbie and myself\*Writing\*. Wow this topic is really boring… All right at least my first paragraph is done. Okay now I have to write about recursiveness. Since Tony is unskilled ill talk about him first\*Writing\*. I’m going to put that quote that talks about him going back over his work too frequently in here\*Writing\*. Okay now I have to compare him to Debbie and Tony. Ill write about how Murray and Debbie don’t suffer from an overly recursive writing process\*Writing\*. This is really annoying I hate MLA, I wonder if there’s a new episode of Archer on TV tonight. \*Facebook\*Damn I have to stay focused, Well I guess ill include quotes from the Rose and Berkenkotter articles too\*Writing\*. In class we talked about the incubation process, ill talk about Murray doing this and how I do this\*Writing\*. How is it already 5:30? I feel like I haven’t done anything today, I need to get something to eat ill finish this later…

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Yellow | Light Blue | Red | Green | Purple |
| Contextual information | Planning | Distractions | Break | Recursive |

6:30: Okay I’m just going to sit here until I’m finished, I’m sick of stressing over this paper. All I’ve been thinking about since Wednesday is getting it out of the way. Okay what did I write about so far…Well I wrote about recursiveness so I guess I have to write about planning. Since I started with Tony first in the last paragraph I guess ill just begin with him again\*writing\*. Okay Tony likes to write reflexively and so does Murray. Ill just reference the articles again and include the quotes that show this\*writing\*. How many words do I have? 562 s\*\*\* I’m going to end up going over the limit. I hope she doesn’t mind. Okay what else was I going to write about? Oh yeah rhetorical strategies. There’s a lot of quotes on paying attention to the audience, so ill write about how Tony doesn’t pay attention to the audience\*Writing\*. Hmmmm, what was it that Perl called Tony? Oh yeah egocentric. Okay ill include that quote, that’s a good one\*Writing\*. All right now ill just write about how Murray and Debbie keep their audience in mind while they write. Where are those damn quotes about Murray and Debbie doing this?..... Oh there’s one\*Writing\*. Okay the last area I wanted to cover is how Tony doesn’t evaluate his own writing process and Murray does. Okay that’s an easy one I highlighted the quotes I wanted to use earlier. I guess since I covered all the areas I should comment on who I identify with the most… Well I think I identify most with Debbie, and I would like to have my writing become more like Murray’s… \*Writing\* Okay I’m finished thank god; I really don’t feel like typing that transcript right now, ill just do it tomorrow.

**Key**