

Academic Writing II

Assignment for Essay 1

Synthesis

700-1,000 words

Summarize Elbow's and Murray's descriptions of the writing process and their most important ideas about learning to write well. Explain how Cogdill believes using a word processor can help or hinder "freewriting" and "internal revision."

Present a clear thesis in your first paragraph, and use material from the sources to illustrate your main ideas in a well organized essay. Be certain to document all quotations, paraphrases and summaries using the MLA system of parenthetical citation, and include a correctly formatted Works Cited page at the end of your essay.

Sources:

About Language 4-6, Peter Elbow, "Freewriting"

About Language 26-33, Donald M. Murray, "Internal Revision: A Process of Discovery"

About Language 41-46, Sharon Cogdill, "Computers and Writing"

SYNTHESIS ESSAY

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Portfolio

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Computing and the Writing Process

Today's computer technology has infiltrated every aspect of our daily lives. Automobiles are now equipped with computers to regulate fuel injection and give drivers the option of cruise control. Anyone can own a VCR and program it to record any number of TV shows at any time through the power of multi-use remote controls. Computers have even reached as far as the home-office and classroom. Writers of all ages use computers and word processors to create, organize, and beautify their written pieces every day. As with all advances in technology, however, shortcuts are sought out and employed by lazy writers who want to increase the speed of the writing process and not the quality. This new use of technology weakens the "prevision, vision, revision" steps involved in the writing process. In the hands of an inexperienced writer, the computer destroys rather than strengthens a great piece of writing.

Throughout the process of writing, computers may be used to save time and increase accuracy for the writer. Problems arise, however, when the computer is used to skip or combine several steps. In his essay on "Freewriting," Peter Elbow discusses one step in which the writer stimulates the flow of "creative juices" in a timed writing session known as "freewriting." The goal is to continue writing for the full time period without pausing or backtracking. The idea is to write whatever is on the mind (Elbow 4). Sharon Cogdill, author of "Computers and Writing," ties technology and the writing process into one unit of study. She feels word processing adds enjoyment and ease to the process of freewriting (Cogdill 41). "Computers have brought increased speed and efficiency" to writing (41), allowing a writer to type as fast as he thinks. As a writer improves his typing efficiency, the desire to record any and every thought that comes across the brain becomes a more realistic goal.

Elbow also argues that editing should never take place on a freewriting piece. "The habit of compulsive, premature editing doesn't just make writing hard. It also makes it dead" (Elbow 6). He feels editing becomes a problem when it is performed during the producing step (6). Cogdill says the computer tempts the writer into editing and formatting a piece when in the middle of a writer's block (43) rather than concentrating on the piece itself. Giving in to the temptation detracts from the effectiveness of the freewriting.

Once freewriting, or "prevision" as Donald Murray calls it in his article "Internal Revision: A Process of Discovery," has taken place, the second stage of "vision" (the first draft) can begin (Murray 27). Murray believes this stage takes the least amount of time for a writer (27). Cogdill, however, believes "good writing takes thought and care" (Cogdill 41). While the computer reduces the time spent on the draft, speed is not the main goal of a thorough writer.

The third step in the process of writing a paper is referred to as "revision" by Murray (Murray 27). In this stage "the writer reads to see what has been suggested, then confirms, alters, or develops it, usually through many drafts" (27). Revision is the area that the computer can be most useful in. Computers have infinitely expandable space--exactly what is needed to revise a paper properly (Cogdill 43). Yet the computer focuses a writer's attention on the screen's small window, the surface of the piece, rather than on the paper and its ideas as a whole (44). In revision, it is necessary to view the whole document at once. Writers need to make hard copies (printouts) of a paper in order to see everything capable of being revised at this point in time (43-44). Hard copies also allow a writer to examine small details, such as a word or sentence, and then move out to see the piece in its entirety (Murray 32). The reexamining process must take place over and over again (32).

There are two separate editorial phases within this revision procedure: "internal revision" and "external revision" (31). Internal revision includes everything a writer does to discover and further develop what is being said (31). "External revision" is what a writer uses to communicate to an outside audience the information he has put together (31). During external revision, the author must pay careful attention to mechanics, style, and the language used in the piece (31). Word processors can reduce the time spent on external revision and increase the productivity of that time. Problems again arise, however, if the writer pays closer attention to the surface of the paper than to the depth of the paper (Cogdill 43).

When handled correctly, the computer is a powerful asset to have in writing a piece. Not only can time be saved in drafting and revision, but numerous written works can be stored on data disks to be retrieved at any time. As new technology is created, the computer will become increasingly indispensable to writers in all walks of life. It is important to jump onto the technological band wagon before falling too far behind to catch up.

## Works Cited

- Cogdill, Sharon. "Computers and Writing." About Language: A Reader for Writers. Eds. William H. Roberts and Gregoire Turgeon. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1992. 41-46
- Elbow, Peter. "Freewriting." Writing without Teachers (1973). Rpt. in About Language: A Reader for Writers. Eds. William H. Roberts and Gregoire Turgeon. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1992. 4-6.
- Murray, Donald M. "Internal Revision: A Process of Discovery." Research on Composing: Points of Departure (1978). Rpt. in About Language: A Reader for Writers. Eds. William H. Roberts and Gregoire Turgeon. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1992. 26-33.