

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

Letty Larsen

Paper 1/Final Draft

## Writing and Computers

Have you ever thought about your writing process or the effect that a word processor might have on it? Peter Elbow believes firmly in freewriting. Donald Murray stands by revision. While Elbow writes on the early stages and Murray on the later stages, both agree that writing and editing are two different steps. In connection with that, Sharon Cogdill has written about the effects a computer can have on the writing process. Although the computer provides quickness and neatness to freewriting and revision, it can also bring about carelessness and putting appearance before meaning.

Peter Elbow believes that freewriting is a key process to good writing. He uses this exercise to generate ideas and get into the flow of writing. Freewriting is merely non stop writing. You simply write whatever is in your head without taking any time to think about it. It doesn't matter how good it is or the grammar or spelling. With freewriting you should never go back to correct anything and never get graded or critiqued on it (Elbow 4).

Elbow says that we as writers often try to do two things at once. All the while we're writing we're constantly editing. He believes these two processes should be separate. We should worry about our words and ideas first; spelling, grammar and coherence come second (Elbow 5). Elbow connects writing with speaking. We can't constantly edit what we say because once it comes out of your mouth it's too late. If we were to take the time to carefully plan and edit every sentence, simple conversations would take hours (Elbow 5).

Freewriting is a good way to generate ideas. Often our writing isn't what we'd like it to be at first, but once we get thinking and we're on a roll some great things come out. I think Elbow summed it up best when he said, "If you keep writing in it, it may change into something better. But if you abandon it, you'll likely never have a voice and never be heard" (Elbow 6).

As Elbow has written on the beginning of the writing process, Murray has written on the later stages of writing, revision. Murray believes there are three steps to writing: prevision, vision, and revision. Prevision is like the prep work for the writing. It includes all research, experiences, and interviewing. Identifying a topic, narrowing it down, and deciding a point of view are also part of this process. The second stage, vision, is writing the rough draft. With the words on the page, the writer can discover what he's after and expand on it. The

final draft, the revision, is similar to the vision only more concrete and worked out. It communicates to the reader the main idea of the writing (Murray 27). Murray has found that there are two types of revision, internal and external. External is the act of editing. Internal revision is fixing the word choice and clarifying meaning (Murray 31). While all parts of the writing process are important, Murray feels that the revision of a work is the most important phase. He says rewriting and editing are different. Editing is fixing spelling, grammar, etc.. Rewriting is the discovery of the meaning of the writing (Murray).

Murray has encountered many people, inexperienced and professionals, who are ashamed of their rewriting habits. They think that they are bad writers if they don't get their wording just right the first time. He feels that because of this discouraging feeling, rewriting has been de-emphasized in school. Actually, according to Murray, they are better writers when they rewrite. Sometimes a writer may have to revise not once but tens or hundreds of times. It's not how many times you rewrite a piece, but how good it is when it's finally completed (Murray 28).

Sharon Cogdill explains both the dangers and advantages of a word processor. Freewriting can be easier on the computer because the speed of typing correlates more with the speed of thinking than does hand writing. Cogdill says that the computer keyboard sometimes makes a writer "do little more than free associate" (Cogdill). This is good because it leads a writer to more ideas. There are also bad effects a computer can have on freewriting. People see their work on screen and get concerned with neatness and overall appearance. Without a blank screen in front of them, the writers may start doing some fancy work and too much formatting. A freewriting exercise may look so good on a computer that the writer might think that he/she has a finished piece of work. Freewriting loses its purpose at this point (Cogdill 42).

The neatness principles can also be applied to revision. Cogdill explains how computers make children like writing better. With computers their work is more legible, not messy and discouraging. They are more apt to work on their writing with a computer than without (Cogdill 42). Another good point is the ease of moving and adding. Once you've read your work and want to change something, switching and adding various sentences and paragraphs is simple. There is not more erasing and scratching out. With a computer, all that is needed is the touch of a button or two. Cogdill says that a computer creates a bigger "window" for revision. By seeing our work on a big running screen, we are more likely to make the right changes (Cogdill 44).

To some people, a word processor is like a necessity. To other people, it is a hinderance. Either way, writing is a delicate process. To be a good writer, you have to plan and throw ideas around. You also have to write, rewrite, and rewrite again if necessary.

## 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.