

## WHAT BASIC WRITERS THINK ABOUT WRITING

*ABSTRACT: This article explores basic writing students' current writing processes, their thoughts on their writing, and their introduction to a structured writing process model. Findings are based on a semester-long study and include observations of and interviews with basic writing students at Sierra College of Rocklin, California. Ultimately, the article suggests that educators can assist basic writers in becoming successful college writers by introducing them to a structured writing process model while also helping them to become reflective about their own writing processes.*

The following research is based on observations made to discover what skills basic writers see themselves as possessing, and how these self-perceptions correlate with what skills they need in order to succeed in college English. This project helped me to learn more about the students I am teaching, and taught me more about how I can help each of my students grow excited about becoming better writers using their current writing abilities.

I surveyed and interviewed basic writing students as well as consulted the research already done. I have explored what basic writers think of their personal writing process, discussed a cognitive writing process theory model with them, and conducted follow-up student interviews to see if my students saw themselves as using a structured writing process. I wanted to know what my students thought of themselves as writers and how the current writing process of each might limit the ability to succeed on a typical college writing assignment.

I became interested in this topic when, as a graduate student, I was introduced to a writing process model for the first time. It seemed strange to me that no one had bothered to show or teach me how to follow such a model during my undergraduate years. The model included aspects of writing I learned on my own through trial and error. Since I began teaching, it occurred to me that discussing such a model early on in basic composition courses made sense for students who did not have as great a love for the written word as I. Why deprive students of a model, if that makes the process of writing easier to understand? Those students who struggle often look for assistance outside of themselves and become frustrated when they cannot find the

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help they need to succeed. Having a model from which to learn the basic steps of a structured writing process may be helpful to many basic writing students as well as their instructors.

What follows is a whirlwind tour through the last 30 years of basic writing. It simplifies and compresses for the sake of sticking to what seem to me, at least, the highlights.

In 1972, Donald Murray, urging his colleagues to "Teach Writing as a Process not Product," divided the writing processes into three simple stages: prewriting, writing, and rewriting. He acknowledged that the amount of time a writer spends in each stage depends on his or her personality, work habits, maturity as a person, and the ambitiousness of what he or she is trying to say. Writing is not a rigid step-by-step process, but many basic writers see it as such. Since the real challenge lies in teaching students to become recursive in their writing process steps, Murray suggested that instruction in how to write is best achieved less through lecture and more through practice, allowing students to focus on writing as a process, not just a product.

Mina Shaughnessy (1976) agreed that teaching writing as process rather than product is key, and she stressed, still more emphatically, that, contrary to a common misconception that put the burden of change on the students, it is in fact teachers who should change to help their students. She went on to elaborate a developmental scale used to place teachers who are learning to teach in the open-admissions classroom, placing the responsibility of students' education as much on the instructor as on the student. Shaughnessy demonstrated that when teachers take an interest in their basic writers' instruction in the writing process, when they learn to value as well as demand work from their students, basic writers have a better chance of becoming stronger writers.

How basic writing students are educated led Sondra Perl (1979) to investigate whether basic writers have a stable composing process which they use whenever they are presented with a writing task. She found that they did, but it also seemed an impoverished process: simply having a process does not mean that one is a proficient writer. Some of Perl's students, not knowing what to write, began by writing the essay topic or question out in order to explore it, reflect, and then further develop those ideas. Without knowing it, they were using free writing and brainstorming, the first steps of a typical writing process. Next, Perl observed students' thought processes shifting from thoughts about their intentions to the actual words on paper and back again. Although students' techniques were underdeveloped, they were composing in a recursive manner. Soon after students began composing (often too soon), they began editing. Although editing is important, many of the students confused rules, had selective perception, and/or failed to take their audience into account. Perl's work stressed the

importance of having students become aware of what and how they write so they can better implement improvements.

One such improvement lies in recourse to revision, according to Nancy Sommers (1980). She felt some models of the writing process directed attention away from revision, making it no more than an afterthought. During her interviews with them, Sommers found that her basic writers availed themselves of four operations in revising: deletion; substitution; addition; and reordering of word phrases, sentences, and themes. They rarely if ever reconceived the whole piece or revised at the level of ideas. Although students were revising, their revision took place only on a local level and missed global issues of organization, structure, logic, and content.

As one way to appreciate those larger issues and their significance, Mike Rose (1983) contended that basic writers need to read more in order to write better. He stressed that reading and writing are intimately connected in ways we are only beginning to understand. And understanding their connection can become part of a holistic teaching approach, one that views composition as a process of thinking, learning, reading, and writing. As Rose would have it, writing to a varied audience should play a central role in teaching basic writers how to produce coherent texts. Many basic writers have not had the opportunity to read and/or write academic discourse extensively in an academic discourse community. Rose suggested determining the organizational patterns required by basic writing students and then teaching these patterns through reading as well as writing, a holistic approach to teaching that should help basic writers learn to write more proficiently. Rose's article was notable in his suggestion that basic writers' writing processes are unpracticed and in need of organization and structure.

Patricia Bizzell (1990) went so far as to suggest that basic writing students' thinking processes need as much remediation as their writing. For her, the teaching task at hand is not only to convey information but to transform students' world views, particularly by reconsidering the relationship between thought and language. According to Bizzell, teachers of basic writers need to have the ambition to teach them how to think, to help them become not just better writers and better students but better people.

In some ways reminiscent of Rose, Marcia Dickson (1995) urged teaching basic writers to become more academic by teaching reading and writing as corresponding processes. The goal, as she saw it, was not correcting the organization problems or surface errors but instead deciphering why students make the writing choices they do and then linking those to reading assignments which help them master form as well as content. Feeling that basic writers tend to write about what they know and, unlike advanced writers, do not write to come to an

understanding of their topic, Dickson saw another reason to implement holistic teaching: because it fosters a higher learning. And encouraging basic writing students to learn why they write the way they do is the first step in helping them to think reflectively about their writing process.

Another important step, according to Maxine Hairston (1997), is teaching basic writers strong communication skills. Hairston believes writing is the heart of every college education, and she believes writing is so important because everyone uses writing to learn and think about communication. For Hairston, the way to teach writing skills is to use a process-oriented, low-risk, student-centered classroom where the emphasis is on communicating in writing.

The last 30 years have taught us much about teaching basic writers, and I am quite aware that none of the foregoing is news to this readership. What interests me is that much of it was news to me not so very long ago, and the summary or overview I have just provided was something I could communicate to the basic writers I was teaching in hopes that they would benefit from it. My first step was to take Shaughnessy's advice and make an educator-based change in order to better teach basic writers. I resolved to teach writing as both a process and a product, and especially to model the writing process for my students. I chose Flower and Hayes' Cognitive Writing Process model (1981) as a teaching tool because they have given wonderfully simple yet rich expression to the embedded elements of writing (see Appendix A). Flower and Hayes have made changes in their articulation of the writing process since 1981, but I am using this older model because each box in their diagram lists steps needed to help basic writers along in their process. The very notion of the writing process as an orderly progression of steps has its problems (ones Flower and Hayes came to address), but it also has its virtues in this context. I was using the model not as a description of reality but as a teaching tool. And using this model as a teaching tool seemed, by its almost programmatic nature, to keep basic writers from becoming frustrated while it still emphasized revision and recursiveness, content and method. The model also acknowledges that personal writing goals will evolve as the paper is written. My lesson plan included using this model in conjunction with practice writing each day.

## **Organizational Plan**

Learning the reasons behind basic writers' frustrations should be an integral part of becoming a successful instructor. To this end, I investigated my basic writers' composing processes as well as their sense of themselves as writers. Using the findings from my research, I resolved to restructure my classes and create lesson plans which draw

on their sense of self and further their understanding of their personal writing process.

My observations began with the investigation of whether or not the basic writers in my English 1-A class at Sierra Community College think they are good writers as well as how they think about their writing process. My hypothesis was that, like me, they too had never been introduced to a formal writing process model and that introducing them to one would have a positive impact on them as writers and how they thought of themselves as writers.

I introduced my students to Flower and Hayes' Cognitive Writing Process model after my first set of interviews in order to get a solid before-and-after sense in each student's case. I sought to find out what my basic writers thought the writing process was (as they experienced it) and then if the Flower and Hayes model helped them to write.

## **Field Study Findings Report Summary**

My research covered a five-week period and included the basic writers in my English 1-A class at Sierra Community College. I began by selecting seven whom I deemed good or typical examples of basic writers based on their disorganized and unacademic writing, lack of basic fluency, and use of dialects and slang in place of Standard Written English. None of these students were former ESL placements according to their interviews. I have changed the students' names to preserve their anonymity.

My preconceived notions of these basic writers regarding their writing ability and sense of self were based on the readings of case studies only. The case studies suggested that basic writers can produce writing based on personal experiences but that they do not use a structured writing process model, practice editing or revision, or feel writing to be important as communication. I imagined that they felt somewhat insecure about themselves as writers, yet were willing to try. My observations and interviews led to some rethinking of my preliminary assumptions.

My survey (see Appendix B) and in-class interviews produced interesting results. My survey prompted students to discuss their writing process or lack thereof. The point of asking my students to describe their writing process was to help me initiate a sequence of instruction which allowed them to put their writing situation into their own terms, then to become part of the learning process and implement positive changes to their own personalized style of writing. Their answers indicated that each did have a writing process, but also that it was not complex or structured. They acknowledged very few steps in a writing process I can describe generally as mostly consisting of picking a topic from the assignment sheet, reading parts of the assigned

homework, and producing some writing on that basis, which might or might not be proofread (much less revised). The answers I received on the first prompt on the survey (“discuss your writing process”), ranged from: “I don’t really have a structured process” (Cunn), to “My process changes with every paper” (Thompson), to “My process is fairly loose” (Sarzehed). Some of the other comments students made in answering the survey included idea generation *after* writing an introductory paragraph, and writing down important points *before* conducting any research.

The students’ answers to my initial survey questions led me to more questions instead of the answers I was looking for, so I conducted individual personal student interviews. During the one-on-one interviews, I asked each student to discuss his or her composing process. Most told me that they felt they had nothing to say on an assigned topic and/or that they did not know what they thought on a particular subject and that is why they were having trouble composing. During the personal interviews I also discussed recursive resource viewing, which I defined as rereading the assigned homework, looking over notes, and reviewing outside resources. The general consensus the students expressed was that they rarely looked back over their resources to help themselves write and did not know why – they just never thought about doing so. Very few students mentioned revision, proofreading or editing of any kind, and those that did told me they did little of it because they were under a lot of personal time constraints (everything from work to family issues to other classes’ homework); revising seemed to them an inefficient use of time, justified only if something was seriously wrong and needed correcting. I found the personal interviews very helpful; they encouraged me to open class discussion to strategies for idea generation, composition, and revision.

To provide an overview of all three, I presented the class with the Flower and Hayes Cognitive Writing Process model. I chose this particular model because of its easy-to-follow diagram and simple explanations of each recursive step. After giving the diagram to each student, I led a discussion on how my students could better implement such a process in their own writing. After the discussion, my students admitted they had never been taught a writing process before but understood the point of using one. They were also inspired to do an analysis of their personal writing processes. My students realized they were already using a writing process, so implementing a few more steps and a sense of structuring the whole would not be a difficult way to quickly improve their writing. They also recognized that the more steps they used, the easier it would be to propel themselves through the writing of their next essay, on gender roles (see Appendix C). The students seemed interested in the model and unusually interested in participating in the discussion – everyone participated. Group

discussion of a model of the writing process felt helpful and educational for all of us.

This by no means meant that all our problems were solved. Despite all they had just discovered in the class discussion, my students, despite their professed insecurities and uncertainties, were also overly confident when it came to discussing what they thought of themselves as writers. As one (O'Brian) insisted, "I know what works best for me, I just have to do it." Most of my students, when asked to rate themselves (see Appendix D) as writers on a scale of one to ten (with ten on the high end and one on the low end), rated themselves a better-than-average six. The statements they made when asked to justify these positive self-assessments included "I'm a pretty decent writer" (Cunn), "I still need work touching up transitions" (Cortez), "I feel my subject matter is good and my drection [sic] and appion [sic] are clear" (Donnelly), "I feel I have improved greatly" (Thompson), "I'm not excellent and I'm not horrible" (Parson), "My writing varies due mostly to grammar and spelling errors" (Sarzehed), and "I would rate myself a six... but I will become better and hopefully become a ten in the future" (Barson). These remarks give further insight into the composing processes of each student. There is the sense that not failing is a form of success, that practice makes perfect, that a little more effort and application is all they need. The following gives a further explanation of each student's current life position and academic standing.

Monica Cortez, a 37-year-old single mother of twin eight-year-olds, is a re-entry student. She took English A (required initial placement for weaker writers) as her prerequisite for English 1-A. According to the survey she filled out, Cortez believes her writing process consists of reading the assignment, gathering data, free writing, a day of rest, rough draft, peer review, and final draft. During our interview, she said she makes careless mistakes with her "works cited" page, but other than that, says she knows what she is doing. In the second survey, she rated herself a seven saying she is able to get her point across in a way that is easy to follow. As a reader of that writing, however, I sense she needs help with a much wider range of problems than she acknowledges in her self-assessment: under-developed paragraphs, no conclusions, recurring mistakes (and not just with "works cited"), no introductions to or analysis of quotations, comma issues, no parenthetical citations, contraction issues, and trouble following assignment instructions. Something like Flower and Hayes' model should help her address many of these issues by unpacking what is involved in writing, helping her to be more thoughtful and recursive in her composing as well as to practice editing.

Lily Cunn, a 19-year-old who also took English A as her prerequisite for English 1-A, said her personal writing process has no structure and that her routine changes with every essay. However, she

promised that, for the next assignment, she would start with reading the assignment, then do some freewriting before a rough draft. After a peer review, she said she would begin her final draft. During our interview, she said she often has trouble starting her papers. A problem she stressed was her sense that each sentence has to be perfect before she moves onto the next. She rated herself a six saying her writing is “pretty decent.” But she seems to be one of those writers who has decided, without really testing the assumption, that her writing is as good as it could be if only she tried harder — as if knowing what she should do was tantamount to getting it done. As her teacher, I cannot help but see she does not take care in her reading and does no editing, reviewing, or revising; the result is characterized by misused quotes, no analysis or elaboration of the quotations she used, over-generalizations, a lack of transitions between paragraphs, and no source attribution. Comments focusing on these particulars may well reinforce her sense that she is just not trying hard enough, that more effort and application will make all the difference. If, as she seems to believe, there’s a way if only there’s the will, the Flower and Hayes model should help her to see that there are more steps along the way than she has taken into account, that conscientious application on her part will require more than just more (and mere) conscientiousness.

Colleen O’Brian, another late teen (in this case, an 18-year-old) who took English A as her prerequisite for English 1-A, said her personal writing process usually begins with her introductory paragraph, which she writes immediately after class the day the assignment is given. Next, she brainstorms and writes a thesis. Then, she writes down some issues she thinks will make good paragraphs. She said her next “step” is procrastination, leaving her with an introduction and not much more. She rated herself a six saying she knows what works best for her, she just has to do it. My own diagnosis is that her present writing process is not just troubled by a lack of follow-through. She seems to have a sense of process that is not guided by goals for her writing; it is certainly true (and she acknowledges) that she has problems completing assignments as well as citing quotes; she also has subject/verb agreement issues, careless possessive usage, comma splices, and error-filled “works cited” pages. While she seems to have a more structured process (or at least the start of a process) than other students I interviewed, I believe the Flower and Hayes model should also help her, not least of all by helping her to feel more purposive about her writing so that she can forge ahead where she has formerly stalled out.

Derek Barson, an 18-year-old who tested into English 1-A as his prerequisite, said his personal writing process begins by discussing his assignment with others. He then said he draws up an outline from which he eventually (often over a space of some days) types up a rough draft. After running it through a spell-checker, he makes that his final



draft. In our interview, he told me he received straight As in English in high school, yet he rated himself a six because he felt he was only an average writer. My sense is that he has difficulty in mastering a typical college writing assignment because his writing process basically stops with idea generation (though he does write that up); there's a lack of reviewing, evaluating and revising that results in the lack of a thesis, little or no analysis of quotations, lapses in logic, and lapses into slang. For a writer like Barson, the Flower and Hayes model could suggest another path besides the straight and narrow (and short, particularly abridged in the move from rough to final draft), showing him the way to be genuinely recursive, not just coming up with things to say but actually taking a thoughtful second look at what he comes up with, so that he comes to revise as well as practice editing more regularly.

Adam Sarzefhed, a 19-year-old who tested into English 1-A as his prerequisite, said his personal writing process is fairly loose. He starts with an idea or opinion, researches it and then begins writing. He said he generally revises his papers but had not been doing so lately because of his busy schedule. During our interview, he told me he recently started a new job which kept him late, after closing hours, and often made him late to our 6:30 p.m. class. This new job was affecting not only his revision time, but his writing time as well. He also told me he believes a good writing process makes for a more enjoyable paper. He rated himself a six due mostly to grammatical and spelling errors. I had already noted his lack of development, transitions, and revision and guessed the problem was either laziness or time constraints. The Flower and Hayes model would not give a student writer like Sarzefhed more time, but it could help him manage his time more efficiently, structuring his process so that he does not need long stretches of time to do effective writing and revision.

Tyler Thompson, an 18-year-old attending my class directly from high school, did not take prerequisite course but was instead a self-placement, which is allowed at Sierra Community College. Thompson insisted he was capable of handling the course. In our interview, he told me that he earned straight As in high school English. He said his personal writing process began with him thinking about the topic until he came up with some good ideas; he would then write a thesis sentence. Next, he said, he did some research and then carefully organized his paper. He assured me he would reread his paper in its entirety before printing out a final draft, and he also said he prefers to let a day pass before rereading the paper again and turning it in. Though he rated himself a six, he said that he had improved greatly during the semester and learned a lot from the peer reviews. If that sounds a bit odd or contradictory, it is worth noting that he also had difficulty earn-

ing a passing grade. Thompson is a classic case of someone who can talk the talk but not walk the walk: he knows (or can at least rehearse) the steps of a writing process but he does not actually take the steps; his papers typically lack a thesis, sources, quotations and analysis; language and logic are so inconsistent it is hard to believe that he engages in editing, much less revision. I believe the Flower and Hayes model could help someone like him greatly if he could just experience the steps, not just recite them. More than any other, he was a student who made me want to get students not just to describe but to document the writing process they engaged in.

Jennifer Parson, an 18-year-old who took English A as her prerequisite for English 1-A, described her personal writing process as picking a topic, beginning research, creating a brief outline and rough thesis statement. (Like Thompson, who said he came up with good ideas and then a thesis statement, she was one of several students for whom a thesis statement could seem to come after rather than before deciding what to write and how to organize it.) Once she had an outline, she selected quotations to fill in the blanks of her outline. (She was not the only student who, when interviewed, seemed to see writing as an exercise in organizing what other people said more than what she might say.) In our interview, she told me that math and science are her favorite subjects and she hopes to be a marine biologist, but she understands the importance of learning to write well. She rated herself a five saying she is an average writer, not excellent and not horrible. She struck me as a conscientious worker, steady and determined, for whom a model of the writing process might offer a way of taking ownership of her work, making her writing something she did to communicate, not just to demonstrate organizing skills — not least of all because such ownership would probably make her more careful about language issues and genuine analysis.

It is difficult to make generalizations about all basic writers based purely on the aforementioned students. However, I suspect other teachers have some sense that they have met such students before. If it is not possible to define the typical basic writing student, it is certainly possible to see some students and their behaviors as typical of basic writing students. There are recurring patterns and traits. I can say of my basic writing students that they are by turns insecure and overconfident, rather uninterested in writing and inconsistent in how they apply themselves to composing, naive about and also inattentive to the demands of academia (especially issues of language use, citation, and analysis), and see their writing process as having little room for improvement. It is this last trait that especially interests and concerns me. Though my basic writers show significant differences among themselves, they seem to see the process of writing as almost inconsequen-

tial. Writing well, for them, seems a combination of ability and application. You are either good or not, and if you are not good enough, your one hope is to try harder. But they must suspect, as I do, that mere effort will not solve all their problems, will not move them past performance barriers they have hit before. And so they hold back. Really trying hard, really showing interest, would also prove that the ability just was not there, or so they believe. Acting uninterested or uncommitted leaves this unresolved.

Basic writers' general lack of interest in writing has prompted researchers to observe them in great detail. Sally Barr Reagan (1991) is one such researcher interested in the thoughts and actions of basic writers. Her case study of Javier describes a basic writer with low self-esteem, fear of failure, and resentment. His writing process is slow and arduous. He becomes easily discouraged and puts forth little effort if the paper subject is not personally interesting. Javier shares many issues with my basic writers when writing processes are compared. Vivian Zamel (1990) is another researcher whose case studies described basic writing students similar to the students I taught. She finds her students are overconfident but not overly interested. Zamel's students share similar writing process conflicts with my basic writers, mainly in the areas of free writing or idea generation and revision.

Attending to my students, as well as the students of Reagan and Zamel, I can hear the common themes that crystallize the basic writer's uncertainty and frustration with the process of writing each paper. The way these basic writers perceive themselves and their experiences helps to explain their written and verbal comments during both interviews as well as graded assignments. Though the above case studies should not lead to wide-ranging generalizations about basic writing students, they do suggest the need for further examination of basic writers and their writing processes, not least of all the strategy of getting basic writers to examine their own writing processes critically and consider models of more fully developed processes as means of improving.

## **Field Study Findings Analysis**

Findings from case studies such as those just mentioned are not meant to be universal; after all, they are tied to the experiences of individual students in the context of particular instructional settings. At the same time, however, such studies are illuminating because they reveal the way classroom events impact students and shape their experiences. For precisely that reason, students need to explore their beliefs, expectations, and perspectives, and this exploration needs to be structured. When these things are kept in mind, students and teachers are likely to realize the discrepancies between each others' intentions and goals and come to an advantageous middle ground about what

constructive learning consists in.

Learning about basic writers for me began with my experience of teaching English 1-A at Sierra Community College. My students had trouble writing because they had difficulty connecting with the assigned topic; they thought they had nothing to say; they were unaccustomed to expressing their opinions in formal ways or even thinking their opinions important. Small wonder, then, that they became stressed-out when faced with the challenge of writing a paper. Exhorting them simply to try harder would do little more than increase their anxiety, though they also saw trying harder as their one chance of showing improvement.

The hope, for me and my students, lay not in raising the stakes but unpacking the process. My interviews and their self-descriptions revealed two critical and connected facts: my students are inattentive to and uninformed about the writing process, and yet, despite their inattention to the process they use to write, they are using one. They can describe it if pressed and even see it as a process they can enrich or improve with some assistance. Students learn by doing and then extracting principles from their activity. Inexperienced with analysis and critical thinking as well as writing, they needed to apply these cognitive skills to their own development as writers. We know that students will be better able to learn when faced with their own writing, but they need practice in analyzing, generalizing, and abstracting as applied to their own and each other's writing, to discuss, give, and receive constructive criticism as well as revise their ideas and the ideas of others. A part of this is introducing them to the concept of a writing process as something that is both unique to them, variable with each assignment, and yet explicable in general terms, shared by others, existing in richer as well as more impoverished forms. And I found, probably more than they did, that there is a large step between discussion and implementation, especially for those new to the concept (as I myself once was).

Because having a strong writing process is important for basic writers, the need for some sort of structure is often erroneously filled with formulas for writing, such as the five-paragraph format. However, effective structure is also available through the use of a simple writing process, one that provides much more flexibility and room for growth than any formulaic approach. As I said, I came to the conclusion that integrating such a process into teaching could easily begin with the Flower and Hayes flow chart since the Flower and Hayes model was fairly easy for basic writers to follow yet did emphasize recursiveness, giving basic writers more structure but also more complexity, not just in organizing their essay, but in organizing their whole approach to it.

## Implications and Suggestions for Teaching

After analyzing my research, I have come to the conclusion that basic writers do not think in fundamentally different ways than advanced writers do. Nor do they simply lack the skills to write. In a sense, what they lack most of all is the experience of a successful composition, not as a paper, but as a process, a collection of strategies that allows them to produce effective writing, the kind that earns high grades and positive reinforcement. Nothing succeeds like success, in other words, but success of this kind is not easy to foster. Encouraging basic writers to learn the skills and strategies that make for a successful composing process as well as a successful composition, instructors themselves need a collection of skills and strategies. Among them should be the assignment of ungraded journals and/or freewrites, the printing or “publishing” of some of their basic writers’ writing, and the use of a grading rubric for the writing they do grade so students know the criteria on which each paper will be scored — criteria that suggest successful writing is based on many factors, and is never about the presence or absence of any one thing

Affirming basic writers’ skill-building is quite worthwhile, yet even more important, I’m convinced, is instruction in the writing process itself. Too often little attention is given to teaching the actual process of writing (not the model but the actual process, often a secret process) while much attention is given to viewing (and drawing conclusions from) the product of that largely unknown and unexamined process. Given, as readings, nothing but final products, students are expected to produce such things themselves without knowing how such pieces were drafted. As Murray urges, an educator needs to look at his or her instruction as teaching a process not just a product, and ask how attention to the writing process fits within that, what needs to happen so that students will be able to learn how to write more effectively.

That is a real challenge, especially since basic writers lack a due attention to process, their own as well as others’, and models of the writing process generally. Instructors should discuss a model of the writing process with their class in order to give students a schematic sense of how to write, and how successful writers write. Models are not the same as reality, which is always messier and more complex, necessarily inferred or guessed at in most instances. But models can encourage students to realize what fosters effective writing so they can come to see their own writing as deliberate and strategic.

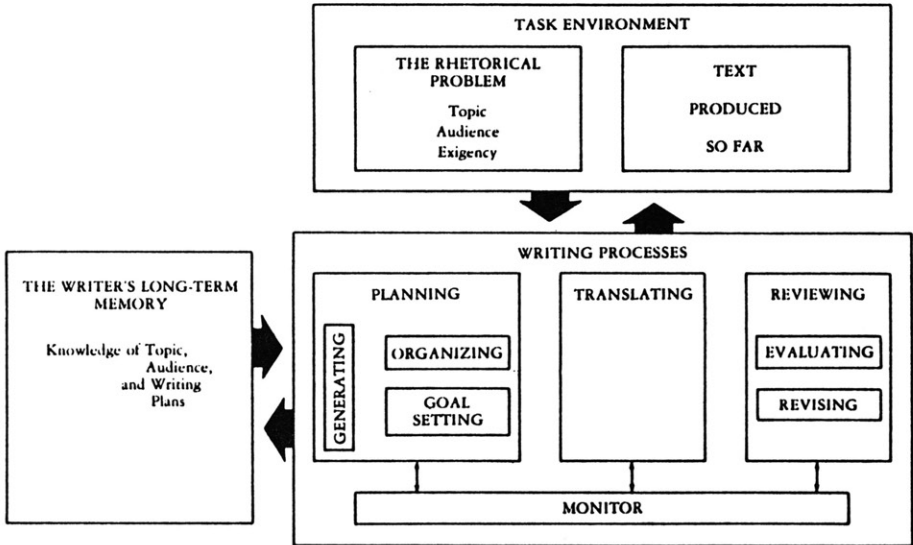
Ultimately, we are speaking not just of the process of writing but

the process of thinking. Basic writers also need to discover what they think about a particular subject before they can begin writing. Finding out what they think can be a difficult task. But it is not an impossible challenge for an individual student nor something the teacher cannot help along. Instructors can assign several types of discovery writing as well as group work to stimulate analytical discussion and encourage students' efforts. Writing, like learning, proceeds from a context and that contributes to the making of meaning.

In the future, I plan to use the skills basic writers already possess and the processes they already use to help students improve their writing process as well as their writing products. A lesson plan that would do this would introduce the Flower and Hayes writing process model early on but would also include class discussion on how the students went about their own writing, and each would write about his or her own writing process. Having the students share their different processes could and should produce an illuminating class discussion. Then I would want to discuss the Flower and Hayes Cognitive Writing Process model in some detail, stressing features, perhaps even expressing reservations, but certainly giving students a copy of the model to review and consider on their own. I would also want to give each student a grading rubric, not just so they know according to what criteria their papers will be scored, but also so they see how these criteria correlate with parts of the process. I would want them to see that writing well is not a blessing or an accident but is also not a matter of following rules or formulas. It is the consequence of both structure and flexibility, instructor's guidance and student's self-responsibility, awareness of models and self-awareness. Modeling the writing process while asking my students to examine (and revise) their own processes allows me this possibility: to guide but not prescribe, to build on what they bring without telling them that the "more" they need to supply is not just more effort.

## Appendix A

### Flower and Hayes' Cognitive Writing Process Model



## Appendix B

### Writing Process

1. Discuss your writing process (the who, what, where, when, why, and how of how you write) and why you think you write the way you do (is it helpful, a routine you always follow, a suggestion your dad made?). Incorporate a plan for how you will write essay #5 (explain how you plan to go about writing essay #5).
2. A writing process includes the steps followed to complete a writing assignment. Do you think the act of using a recursive step-by-step writing process would help you to complete a typical paper, why or why not?

## Appendix C

### Essay #5 Prompt

Choose one and write a well-planned essay in which you:

Discuss nature vs. nurture and how at least two of the authors (Devor, Nelson, Allen, and/or Tocqueville) would respond to gender heredity vs. environmentally dictated gender roles. Then discuss what you think and why.

Discuss whether or not gender roles have changed significantly in the last 50 years. ("Pleasantville" might be a good source!)

## Appendix D

### Self Evaluation

1. Rate how good of a writer you are on a scale from one to ten, with ten being the best.
2. Give a one or two sentence explanation of why you deserve this rating.

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