

4 HOW WRITING HAPPENS

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OVERVIEW

The writing process is often oversimplified as a series of linear steps: brainstorming, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing.¹ While this notion enables students, like you, to conceptualize writing as something that improves over time, it also conceals the chaos of writing and its social, emotional, and material messiness. To capture some of that messiness, this intentionally unconventional chapter unfolds in three parts. Part 1 offers Zack’s still-in-process draft alongside his “self-talk”—an inner monologue that reveals a range of indecisive and conflicted thoughts passing through his mind as he works through his essay. The essay, itself, explores how writing is shaped by the rhetorical situation, first-order and second-order thinking, a writer’s identity, genre conventions, and source usage. At the end of Part 1, Zack offers a “Top 10” list of revision and editing strategies that can help you work through the writing process. Part 2 illustrates how writers give feedback to other writers: Ryan provides constructive feedback for Zack’s revision. Finally, in Part 3, Zack reacts to Ryan’s feedback, then formulates a revision plan for how he plans to approach his next draft.

INTRODUCTION

Lean in close, we have a secret: we’re both writing professors and we struggle with writing. It’s true—even after we each went to grad school to study writing education—we still struggle. You might think that we would’ve graduated with a skeleton key that could unlock any obstacle that a writer would ever encounter. Nope! If anything, our

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experience helped us realize that writing is even *more complicated* than we ever imagined. (Fun fact: we met in a fall 2012 course, ED 202C: The Development of Writing Abilities, led by Dr. Charles Bazerman, who we mention later in the chapter.)

Like many of you, we wrestle with half-baked ideas in stolen snatches of our days—jotting something down in our journal during the commute to campus, cranking out a quick paragraph between classes—and we struggle to transform those ideas into language with pen, paper, keyboards, and cell phones. If you're like us, as you're writing, you occasionally pause, re-read your words, and wonder how badly you've confused your audience with your word choice (“*Will they know what I meant by that term?*”), organization (“*Should I rearrange these paragraphs?*”), or countless other writerly decisions you've made (“*Is this quote too long?*”). And tell us if this rings a bell: when you finally think you're done, you send along your work with a mix of confidence (“*Not bad!*”), uncertainty (“*But probably not that good!*”), and manufactured apathy (“*Lol, whatever—I'm so over this!*”). All writers have those thoughts—that “self-talk,” you might say—so if you think about it, it's embedded in the writing process. It's a part of how writing happens.

That self-talk appears throughout the piece you're about to read. You'll notice that some paragraphs—for instance, the very first one—are written in all italics. Those italicized areas represent the writer's (Zack's) self-talk about his piece *while* he's writing it. Why'd we decide to include that? We wanted to preserve some of those behind-the-scenes aspects of how writing happens while it was (still) happening.

We also wanted to keep another aspect about how writing (actually) happens—or at least, how we believe it can happen more effectively: by using feedback. That's why we've organized our chapter into three parts:

- Part 1: Zack's 4th Draft
- Part 2: Ryan's Feedback to Zack
- Part 3: Zack's Revision Plan for Draft #5

It's a weird piece, we know. But based on everything we know about writing—and that we've experienced as writers—writing happens in weird ways.

PART 1: ZACK'S 4TH DRAFT

Damn, those first few introductions didn't pan out so well, did they? Sigh. Let's try this again. What kind of opener might make sense for me here? Hmm . . . what if I shoot for something that frames what I'll be saying in the piece—a lead-in to my argument? How about that part in Elbow's essay on freewriting

where he has that borderline meltdown?! Nothing captures the spirit of how writing happens better than that!

Halfway through an essay about freewriting—a method that writers can use to get their writing to *start happening*—one of the Writing Studies field’s most influential scholars, Peter Elbow, shares some of his own freewriting. Tell me if you can relate.

Whats happening. Whats happening. Whats happening. Whats happening. Whats happening. What’s happening, I don’t know what’s happening to me. I don’t want to write. I don’t know what I want to write. I don’t know what I want to write. I don’t know what I want to write. (47)

There’s a lot to glean from that little excerpt: confusion, apathy, self-doubt, and—OK, I’ll just say it: The dude was freaking out. Admit it: you’ve been there too. We all have. Writing is such a complicated experience; it’s caught up in our emotions, our past experiences, and our future goals. It’s a nightmare, really. (Only worse: you can wake up from nightmares!)

You might be wondering: didn’t Zack just say that this Elbow guy was an expert on writing? And if so, shouldn’t it come easy to him?

Here’s the bad news: whenever you’re in the process of writing something, you’re probably going to get stuck in an awkward and uncomfortable space. The good news? Everyone else goes through the same thing. Writing is messy, and writing happens in different ways for different folks. To show you just what I mean, in this piece, I’ll be leading you through how writing happens, from point A to point Z.

Hold on: that “A to Z” stuff is going to undermine my argument, isn’t it? I’m trying to say that the act of writing isn’t neat or tidy—that it’s a marathon-like hike with disorienting turns and dead-end trails. And now I need to convey that message in a polished essay that unfolds in a linear fashion? Wouldn’t that defeat my whole purpose?

Uh oh. That Peter Elbow feeling is creeping in. What’s happening? What’s happening? I don’t know what I want to write. What’s happening? OK, just keep calm and #TrustTheProcess. Write your way through this. Try recasting that previous paragraph.

Here’s the truth of the matter: writing is *really* messy because it happens in different ways for different folks for different reasons. Most likely, you’ve learned that there’s a process to writing, from brainstorming to drafting to revising to editing. And there totally is. Sort of. In reality, writing isn’t a clean, linear, step-by-step process. The act of writing is a never-ending

negotiation of social dilemmas, a rollercoaster of emotional hurdles, and a carousel of scattered technological tools.

Boom! There it is! That last sentence will work great as my thesis statement. It's got grammatical parallelism. The "Rule of 3" gives it that feeling of completion. It slips right off the t—actually, wait a second. It doesn't cover the more practical putting-words-on-the-page part of how writing happens. OK, no problem: I'll treat it as my "working thesis statement" and tweak it as needed. For now, I'll just keep getting ideas out and see where they take me.

Chances are, you're not aware of *just how messy* writing is, and there's a good reason why: as Writing Studies researchers Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle remind us in *Naming What We Know*, "people tend to experience writing as a finished product that represents ideas in seemingly rigid forms" (15). As consumers of information—whether we're reading a scholarly journal article or watching the nightly news—we usually don't get a glimpse of how writing *actually* happens behind the scenes. (Remember: news anchors are usually reading a *written* script off of a teleprompter. And yep, that 100% counts as "writing.") By teaching you about how writing happens—in all of its weird, messy, nightmarish glory—I hope to heighten your awareness of the choices at your disposal.

THE RHETORICAL SITUATION

Believe it or not, before you even put a word on a page, writing has already *started happening*. As ideas start popping into your head, you're already thinking about how you might use language based on what's called the rhetorical situation. Every piece of writing is always *written by* someone, *written for* an audience, and *written with* a goal or purpose in mind. And it all starts with a concept called exigence: why a writer is writing a particular text in the first place. Throughout college, exigence is frequently provided by your instructors in the form of an assignment prompt. You've been *prompted* to write something—a rhetorical analysis, a literature review, an op-ed, an annotated bibliography, an "IMRaD" report, or some other genre—and you, in turn, respond.

How much further in depth should I go on exigence? I've got to be mindful of my 5,000-word limit here. Let's see where I'm at. Wait, what?! 1,000+ already?! Alright, well since I just offered some college-y examples of exigence, maybe I can briefly touch on how exigence functions outside of college, then keep this piece moving.

Beyond college, people experience countless new exigences every day that spark their need to write. Suppose you're seeking employment and,

while scrolling through job openings on LinkedIn, you find a sweet gig to apply for. Well, stumbling upon *that* particular job description becomes the exigence for writing the application materials necessary for that position—most likely, a resume and cover letter.

*That should do the trick. Alright, now what's my next section? Time to pivot to genre? After all, there's never **not** genre. Or should I talk about brainstorming? Well, to a large degree, all that ultimately stems from our identities and lived experiences—who we are, what we've done, what we care about. But of course, that's related to stance. And stance brings us back to genre conventions and disciplinarity—which comes back to identity. Geez, this is more interconnected than I realized. Help! I'm trapped in an M.C. Escher drawing!*

I need to take a step back and get a bird's eye view. OK, so whatever I'm doing right now—literally, right now—needs to be the focus of the next section: as I'm trying to collect my immediate thoughts, I'm simultaneously planning out my long-term goals for the piece. What I'm doing is dancing in between first- and second-order thinking.

FIRST-ORDER THINKING AND SECOND-ORDER THINKING

True or false: You know *exactly* what you're going to write before you've written it.

False! Unfortunately, as a writer, you can't sit around expecting all the random information that's floating around your brain to suddenly morph into a perfect essay, *then* rush to your laptop, and *then* transcribe all that seamless language onto the page. That's just not how writing happens. Instead, *the act of writing* helps writers figure out what they actually want to say.

That's why brainstorming is such a crucial “step” in how writing happens. Contrary to popular belief, brainstorming—or related techniques like mind maps, concept clouds, or stream-of-consciousness freewriting—is more than the first “step” in the writing process; it's something that writers keep coming back to.

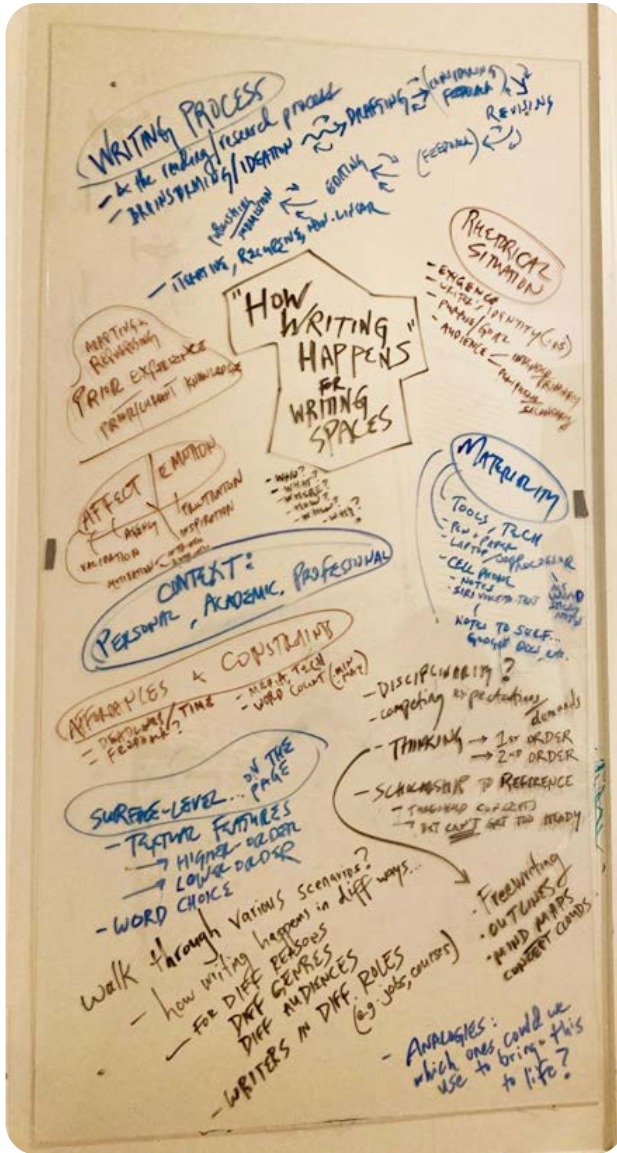


Figure 1: Zack’s “How Writing Happens” Brainstorm on a Dry Erase Board. Arranged as an informal mind map with clustered bubbles and bullet points, the center of the board contains the phrase “How Writing Happens for Writing Spaces.” Various ideas splinter off of the center idea such as “Writing Process,” “Rhetorical Situation,” “Materiality,” and “Affect and Emotion,” each of which include some brief language for how the concept could be explained in the chapter. Photograph by the author (DePiero).

There's this fascinating concept called first-order thinking that we engage in by capturing whatever crosses our mind: quick impressions, fleeting feelings, or random-but-maybe-relevant thoughts. As writers, we can use first-order thinking to generate interesting ideas worth writing about—and letting those ideas build off of each other—so that, later, we can shape them into something more polished. In fact, some writers (I'm not going to name names!) embrace the spirit of first-order thinking to the degree of bypassing any honest effort for correct spelling or proper punctuation.



At the very very beginning, before I jump into the “hey I’m starting this all over again”/ elbow stuff, Ryan and I need to set up the whole piece so students understand what we’re doing from the start. And really, what we’re doing is modeling how the writing process actually plays out. In real time, it’s draft stage. So I think we need to say something like: Here we are, we are both writing researchers, we are both writing professors, but we still struggle through drafting out our work. And we actively seek out feedback from one another because that’s how we can get the most out of what we’re riding.

Figure 2: Zack’s “How riding happens ideas” voice-to-text memo created on the “Notes” app of his iPhone. The note contains misspelled language and very little punctuation. The exact language follows: “How riding happens ideas. At the very very beginning, before I jump into the “hey I’m starting this all over again”/ elbow stuff, Ryan and I need to set up the whole piece so students understand what we’re doing from the start. And really, what we’re doing is modeling how the writing process actually plays out. In real time, it’s draft stage. So I think we

need to say something like: Here we are, we are both writing researchers, we are both writing professors, but we still struggle through drafting our work. And we actively seek out feedback from one another because that's how we can get the most out of what we're doing." Phone screenshot by the author (DePiero).

Now would be a perfect place to reference Lamott's "Shitty First Drafts." That title, alone, is a crowd-pleaser. Gets at the whole messiness theme too. If my memory serves me correctly, though, it's a short piece. Is referencing the title enough? Maybe it's worth finding a juicy line from the piece to quote. Wouldn't hurt to go back and give it another quick look.

Anne Lamott, a narrative nonfiction author, discusses her own writing process in a piece titled "Shitty First Drafts." She says, "the only way I can get anything written at all is to write really, really shitty first drafts [...] All good writers write them. This is how they end up with good second drafts and terrific third drafts" (93). Lamott's advice is this: get your writing to *start* happening by using first-order thinking for your first draft.

Of course, if there's a first-order thinking, there must be a second-order thinking, right? Bingo! Second-order thinking is more analytical, organized, and logical. It emerges when we're in the throes of drafting and we stop to wonder, "Does this sentence build off of the previous sentence?" or "How could I support this claim with more persuasive evidence?"

But part of the reason that writing is so messy—and so resistant to a clean, step-by-step process—is because we constantly move in and out of first-order thinking and second-order thinking. Sure, during the early stages of the writing process (e.g. brainstorming, drafting), we tend to engage in much more first-order thinking because, naturally, we're ultimately interested in finding the best ideas that are worth writing about. And the flip side of that coin is true, too; during the latter stages of the writing process (e.g. revising, editing), second-order thinking is useful for polishing those ideas. But we rarely ever set either entirely aside.

Let's revisit that dry erase board and take stock of where I'm at. I've tackled a couple of the major areas—the rhetorical situation, first/second-order—and I've alluded to the range of emotions that writers experience. Check, check, check. So what's left? Oh, pretty much everything? Awesome.

Probably need to hit more on the material and social aspects of writing. Ryan will be helpful in helping me think through that—definitely looking forward to his feedback on that front. Can't breeze over genre, obviously. I've got to tackle how/when/why writers use sources: summarizing, paraphrasing, quoting. I've got some good stuff lined up for that: Bazerman's "Conversational Model," Stedman's "Annoying Ways People Use Sources." Those two texts have been influential to what I do in my writing classroom. You know, what I'm

doing right now is, really, bringing my identity as a writing researcher/teacher forward within the piece. That should be a section in its own right.

WRITERS' IDENTITIES AND STANCES

Brace yourself for an incoming message from Captain Obvious: writing doesn't happen without *you* because, after all, *you're* the one writing. Simple enough!

Or is it?

Consider this: every piece of writing is unique because every writer inhabits certain identities. This impacts *what* you write about and *how* you write about it. In the Writing Studies field, this concept is sometimes referred to as *stance*. Mary Soliday, author of *Everyday Genres*, describes stance this way: “No [written] content is free floating but must be governed by [the writer’s] angle of vision, or stance [...] writers do more than present information: *they perceive and judge it in some way*” (37, italics added).

Let's use social scientists as an example. Researchers from fields such as communication, education, or political science have been trained to investigate what people think, feel, or do, and why. And since we human beings are so complex, social scientists are skeptical of making sweeping, definitive claims about entire populations, especially when they're working with data that they've collected from surveys or interviews. Social scientists bring a “confident uncertainty” to their research: they're confident in the limitations of their knowledge—and this stance usually carries over in how they write. To convey their uncertainty, social scientists tend to use hedged language and qualified claims. (In fact, I did this in the last two sentences with the words “usually” and “tend.”)

I'm running up against the word count wall. Got two major sections I absolutely need to include: “Using Sources” and “Genre.” Let's think this through. Is there any logical relationship between these sections? That'd help me decide what might come first—what builds off of what. Seems to me that “Genre” should come before “Using Sources” because different genres necessitate using different kinds of sources—while other genres don't require/integrate sources at all.

GENRE CONVENTIONS

Let's recap. You're writing something. And you're moving in and out of first- and second-order thinking—jotting down some ideas, doing a little drafting—and you've felt some mixture of confusion and curiosity, anxiety

and excitement, and most likely, countless hours of self-loathing. You've got a purpose(s) for writing, and you're writing with some kind of audience(s) in mind.

Now if you turn your attention to the page itself, you might notice that you're not just writing *anything*—you're writing a text of a particular *kind*. It fulfills a distinct social action, and it's even got a certain look to it. What I'm getting at here is the elusive concept known as *genre*. Whatever you're writing—whatever anybody has ever written—can be considered some kind of genre, and this concept is absolutely crucial for your writing development, especially beyond this writing course.

To help my students grasp genre, I pose what I call the “genre question”: what makes this thing *this thing*? This question encourages students to identify the *conventions* of a genre—its essential characteristics, features, ingredients, or traits. For instance, let's say you had to request a letter of recommendation from a professor. Before you begin writing, it would probably help to consider the question: what makes a letter of recommendation request *a letter of recommendation request*? And if you looked at a handful of samples, you'd likely find some patterns:

- an opening salutation (“Dear”)
- a friendly beginning (“I hope your semester is going well.”)
- a reminder of your relationship with the professor (“You might remember me from your ENGL 101 course.”)
- your purpose for writing this email (“Would you be able to provide a letter of recommendation?”)
- background info on your specific purpose (“I found a job that sounds exciting.”)
- your rationale for why this particular instructor would be a good fit
- details about your accomplishments in the course
- a deadline (“The deadline for this application is May 1.”)
- a closing salutation (“Sincerely,”)

Each pattern is a convention of the genre. They're not rules, though, because rules are rigid. Conventions are flexible: different writers might decide to bend or defy a particular convention for good reason, and that's yet another reason why writing is so messy.

USING SOURCES

Behold, we're at the heart of how writing happens in academic contexts: the never-ending tango between reading and writing. Charles Bazerman, a leader in writing research for over four decades, refers to this tango as the “conversational model,” and I'll let him describe what that means in his own words: “The conversational model points to the fact that writing occurs within the context of previous writing and advances the total sum of the discourse” (658). The texts that we *read* inform the texts that we *write*. As the thinking goes: the more you've read about a topic, the more you'll know about that topic, and the more you'll have to say about that topic. And depending on how precise you want to get—whether you need to record the *exact language* that somebody used or whether you're better off capturing the overall gist of a piece—you can paraphrase, summarize, or quote other writers.

In another *Writing Spaces* piece titled “Annoying Ways People Use Sources,” Kyle Stedman draws an analogy between writing and driving. Similar to the way that “drivers rely on their turn signals to communicate their intentions to other drivers,” Stedman suggests that, as a writer, you need to send “signals to your readers about your intentions” (255). So suppose you want to use a direct word-for-word quote from another source in your paper: you can keep readers in your rearview mirror by “prepar[ing them] for the quotation, quot[ing], and then analy[ing] it” (246). Call it a “Quote Sandwich”: the bread-meat-bread combo is your setup, then the quote, then your analysis.

CONCLUSION: “TOP 10” STRATEGIES FOR REVISING AND EDITING YOUR WORK

And, well, that's how writing happens! Sort of. A little bit. Until I revise this draft.

*Speaking of, I've got this nagging idea in the back of my mind that I just can't shake—writing isn't just messy because it's an iterative process. Writing is especially messy because **throughout** that entire iterative process, there's a constant balancing act between competing forces that are simultaneously in play: first-order thinking vs. second-order thinking, summary vs. analysis, description vs. evaluation, nuance vs. gist, confidence vs. uncertainty, passion vs. reason, risk vs. predictability, affordances vs. constraints, higher-order issues vs. lower-order concerns, and of course, the mother of all Writing Studies*

dualities, process vs. product. Hmmm... have I found my new working thesis statement?

But before I wrap up, I'd like to pass along my "Top 10" list of practical strategies that might help you minimize all this messiness.

STRATEGY #1: HIT PAUSE ON THE INTRO

When you start working on a paper, you don't *have to* start with the introduction. Really, I swear. Introductions are tricky, and it might help to hold off until you've gotten a clearer sense of what you're writing about. *Then* you can go back and hook your reader with a compelling introduction.

STRATEGY #2: MAKE A PLAN, THEN SET YOUR PRIORITIES

Whether you're a go-getter who begins writing immediately or you're a procrastinator who keeps putting it off, you're bound to feel anxiety until your work is done. That's why managing your time is essential, and to do that, successful writers plan out their work. Step #1: Create a "To Do" list of what you want to accomplish. Step #2: Determine the appropriate order of operations that will help you prioritize what needs to get done. Step #3: Repeat steps #1 and 2 as needed.

STRATEGY #3: EMBRACE SOCIAL INTERACTIONS

The last time you wrote a research-based assignment, did you interact with anybody while you were working on it? Your teacher? Classmates? Friends, family members, or roommates? Believe it or not, by simply talking about your ideas, you'll access stored-away language associations floating around your brain and, in the process, open up new possibilities for whatever you're working on. In fact, this is precisely what your campus Writing Center tutors are trained to help you do.

STRATEGY #4: FIND YOUR HABITS

How do you get started? With pen and paper? Google Docs? In the morning? Or closer to dinner time? Do you write in intense 20-minute bursts, or slow and steady? We each have our habits and superstitions: as long as writing *is happening* for you, it's all good. Pro athletes try to put themselves "in the zone" before a game, and many writers do the same when they're getting ready to write. Whether you prefer up-tempo music, Mozart, or total silence, put yourself in your ideal environment to maximize your success.

STRATEGY #5: UNDERSTAND HOW (AND WHEN) OUTLINES MIGHT WORK FOR YOU

Outlines are useful tools for bringing “second-order” thinking to your work. Tread lightly, though: for some folks, outlines can feel restrictive, particularly if you’re not quite sure what you want to say just yet. If that’s the case for you, you could still try making an outline *while* you’re writing something. Once you’ve gotten going and drafted out some paragraphs, you’ll be better positioned to determine what you’re trying to say, so you can decide which organizational approach makes the most sense for your piece.

STRATEGY #6: TRY A REVERSE OUTLINE

Reverse outlines: say *what?!* The next time you’ve written something that feels “all over the place,” turn what you’ve already written *into* an outline. That’ll help you determine how (or if) your paragraphs are connected to one another. This strategy could reveal new possibilities for re-arranging your work.

STRATEGY #7: EXPERIMENT WITH DIFFERENT STYLES

Writing doesn’t happen without you putting your unique mark on it. Like our wardrobes, we dress our writing in our own stylistic quirks. Left to my own devices, I adorn my documents with backslashes, dashes, and exclamation points. I’ll bust out a backslash when there are a couple of similar-but-not-exactly-the-same words/phrases that could get my message across. I use dashes—the most under-appreciated punctuation mark—so that readers can follow the foundation of my sentence structure a bit more easily than, say, if I buried my sentences with, oh, I don’t know, too many commas. And I use exclamation points because my writing voice closely mirrors my real-life voice; I’m an excitable dude!

Experimenting with different styles can help you find out which “clothes” you feel most comfortable in. Whenever you encounter a piece of writing that you admire, pause and think: what do I like about this, exactly? Step into the “reading like a writer” shoes that another *Writing Spaces* author, Mike Bunn, suggests in “How to Read Like a Writer” so that you can consider how you might make similar decisions in your own work.

STRATEGY #8: COPY-AND-PASTE A SENTENCE 3X, THEN PLAY “SYNTAX TETRIS”

Sometimes I get stuck on a sentence. I know I’m presenting the right information. My word choice is solid. The sentence just doesn’t feel smooth: the structure or *syntax* of the sentence might be an issue.

When that happens, I summon my inner video-gamer and remember an old-school classic: Tetris. Tetris is, more or less, a game of moving shapes around until they fit in neatly with one another. The core parts of a sentence—the independent clause(s), the dependent clause(s), and/or the introductory clause—function in the same way.

So here’s what I do: I copy and paste a not-quite-right sentence three times, then for each version, I move the parts around and adjust the punctuation as needed. I might even break it up into two separate sentences. Once I have three different versions, I’ll pick whichever one sounds the best. Here’s an example:

- Version 1. When everything feels fine except for the structure or *syntax* of the sentence, I start playing a spinoff one of my favorite games from growing up: “Syntax Tetris.”
- Version 2. I start playing a spinoff of one of my favorite games from growing up, “Syntax Tetris,” when everything feels fine except for the structure or *syntax* of the sentence.
- Version 3. I start playing “Syntax Tetris”—a spinoff from one of my favorite games from growing up—when everything feels fine except for the structure or *syntax* of the sentence.

STRATEGY #9: DON’T SWEAT THE SMALL STUFF

Have you ever wondered: what writing errors do college students commonly make? If so, you’re in luck: two Writing Studies researchers, Andrea Lunsford and Karen Lunsford, pursued this question in their study “Mistakes Are a Fact of Life” and identified the top five most common errors:

- wrong word
- missing comma after an introductory element
- incomplete or missing documentation
- vague pronoun reference
- spelling error

What’s the take-away here? Errors will also be a fact of *your* life as a writer. If you spend most of your time behind the keyboard nervously try-

ing to avoid “errors” at all costs, you’re probably *still* going to make some, and it’ll also slow down your writing. So do yourself a favor: keep your eyes on the prize and stay focused on higher-order issues like your argument, claims, evidence, and organization.

STRATEGY #10: STEP AWAY FROM THE KEYBOARD

The next time you’re feeling stumped or strung out, take a break. After all, writing doesn’t just “happen” on the page. Ideas can seemingly spring out of nowhere when our minds are focused on other tasks. In the case of famous horror novelist, Stephen King, the big ideas underlying his best-selling books came to him “[w]hile showering, while driving, [and] while taking [his] daily walk” (169). Day in and day out, King’s four-mile walk brought idea after idea until, well—until he got hit by a car.

I told you: writing is a nightmare.

(Stephen King survived! He’s OK! He used his recovery to reflect on his career in *On Writing*, a memoir about his craft. So I suppose writing isn’t *just* a nightmare; it can be therapeutic too.)

PART 2: RYAN’S FEEDBACK TO ZACK

Yo buddy,

This piece is shaping up! Got a few thoughts for you to consider as you take up the final revisions. I tried to (1) avoid the classic “add these 17 things and also cut 2,000 words” feedback that I seem to keep getting from reviewers and (2) balance out my praise and criticism so that you’re relatively even-keeled when you finish reading it. Let me know what you think!

I wonder if, space permitting, it might be wise to say a little bit more about Peter Elbow’s work at the very beginning—before you offer that example of him freaking out. I don’t think undergrad readers would be familiar with him, and his work is just so pervasive in secondary and post-secondary training on writing instruction that it might be worth it to emphasize just how *accomplished* this guy is, and just how wild it is that someone so accomplished can still struggle like that. In other words, building him up could get you a bigger payoff. But otherwise, I love the intro.

In the “Using Sources” section, I think there’s more connections between Bazerman, Stedman, and the quote sandwich than you have written so

far. And how does that connect with the student audience that the *Writing Spaces Author Guide* asks you to consider? (And see my final comment about embracing the complexity of this conversational model of writing.) Also, perhaps you could condense this section a bit further. After you've... added in what I've asked you to add in...oh my, I've become what I hate! I'm like Anakin Skywalker hanging out in the desert! Building sandcastles! Noooooooooo!

Strategy 2: Outlines don't work for everyone?! How dare you, sir?! No, I'm kidding. You're making great points here and it might help to ask not just *whether* outlines work, but *when*. In fact, I was working on two different pieces a few weeks ago, and I used an outline for one but not the other. There were good reasons for both. So a bit more about the "when" might help.

Strategy 4: I really like what you've done on this—you really tie writing style to particular choices on the page. What counts as "style" can sometimes (or even frequently) drift in conversations about it, and that explanation will help the readers using this essay to keep their attention grounded in particular writing choices. Nicely done!

I thought I'd end this feedback by annoying you a bit. You do a good job throughout emphasizing that writing is messy, and that it really isn't something that can become un-messy. But as you try to make this a useable document for undergraduates, you may—without intention—end up simplifying some aspects of writing that you're trying to leave robust. How can you give your readers useful approaches for tackling the messiness of writing without problematically simplifying the act of writing in your proposed solutions? The Roozen and Erickson digital text, *Expanding Literate Landscapes*, might be a good place to start as you're trying to double-check this. They have a lot of video interviews with writers that capture the richness of writing, so you can help first year students think through their composing choices against that backdrop.

—Ryan

PART 3: ZACK'S REVISION PLAN FOR DRAFT #5

Wooooo! I get the sense that he legitimately digs it!

So I'm with him on Elbow, 100%. Great point. If I can make the case that even the King of Freewriting struggled with—you guessed it, freewriting!—I

think it'll help students understand just how tough writing can be. Beyond that, too, Peter Elbow has been super-influential in how I think about teaching writing, so I might consider adding something about that. Overall, that should be a quick fix.

And yeah, I agree: slowing down on the "Using Sources" section would probably help. Sigh. There I was, talking about using your turn signals, making sure that people can follow along with you—guess I sped through that one. Maybe I can find some examples of what all that looks like in practice: paraphrasing, summarizing, quoting, etc. In fact, one area where I may have fallen short here—and the Writing Spaces editors will be the final judge on this—is whether my piece would benefit from integrating students' work: their writing, their voices, etc. That "Using Sources" section could be an opportunity to do that.

When to use outlines, huh? Damn, that's a tough one. I'll have to mull that over.

Roozen! How could I have guessed Ry would reference him?! And isn't that yet another element of how writing happens? We reference the people whose work has meant the most to us—at least in academia. Roozen is right up there on Ryan's Mount Rushmore of Writing Studies scholars with Bazerman and Prior.

Overall, Ryan's feedback sounds reasonable: I want this essay to be practical and usable, yes, but I also want to present—to the extent that it's possible in a published piece—an authentic account of just how messy writing really is. So I'll check out this Expanding Literate Landscapes piece to see if that sparks any new ideas. I'll comb through this piece a couple more times for any moments when I'm sort of giving off the impression that writing is "cleaner" than it actually is.

Finally, I can't forget: in the week since I sent this out to Ryan, some new ideas came to mind. I've been wondering: what's the writing process like for writers who are writing in a second/non-native language? And how does co-writing impact each person's approach? The mere fact that I hadn't considered these questions until my 4th draft is a useful reminder that time is the ultimate X-factor in how writing happens. As writers, we all need time to let our writing simmer.

REVISION PLAN

QUICK FIXES

- Elbow: boost him up even further
- trim up any excess language

MEDIUM FIXES

- “Using Sources”: how can I slow down?
- “Using Sources”: integrate students’ voices?
- revisit the *Writing Spaces* “Author Guidelines”
- brush up on the new MLA guidelines (*Ugh!*)

TIME-INTENSIVE REVISIONS

- revisit Ryan’s “when to use outlines?” comment
- find/read/annotate some pieces on outlining in FYC courses
- check out Roozen and Erickson’s *Shaping Literate Landscapes*
- include new areas? L2? Collaborative writing? Digital texts?

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TEACHER RESOURCES FOR “HOW WRITING HAPPENS”

OVERVIEW AND TEACHING STRATEGIES

This essay addresses the messy realities of writing that students (and all writers) face. Contrary to the experiences that students may have had when preparing to write for standardized tests, writing—inside and outside the academy—takes on different forms, purposes, and audiences. It is also nonlinear: as writers, our ideas take shape and transform over time. Furthermore, writers must negotiate various social interactions and emotional states, all while juggling their work across a range of technological tools. By understanding a wider range of approaches, students will have more awareness, agency, and ownership of their writing processes.

In first-year writing courses, this essay could be paired with reflective assignments that focus on the writing process, revision, and metacognition. In *writing about writing*-focused courses, specifically, the various ideas surveyed in this essay (e.g. free-writing, stance, revision) could provide a springboard for a literature review about composition scholarship. Instructors might consider pairing this essay with other *Writing Spaces* pieces such as “The Inspired Writer vs. the Real Writer” by Sarah Allen, “Looking for Trouble: Finding Your Way into a Writing Assignment” by Catherine Savini, and “Find the Best Tools for the Job: Experimenting with Writing Workflows” by Derek Van Ittersum and Tim Lockridge.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does writing “happen” for you? Set the scene. What **talk** (conversations with friends, classmates, tutors), **tools** (word processing programs, writing devices), and **texts** (books, articles, and websites) are around as you write?
2. Writing can be an **emotional rollercoaster**. What have been some of your highest highs? What have been some of your lowest lows? Which emotions tend to play the most significant role in your writing process, and why?
3. We’ve suggested a handful of **practical strategies**, from freewriting, to reverse outlining, to playing “Syntax Tetris.” Which ones have you found useful, and why? Which ones are you unfamiliar-

- iar with, and how could you use those for an upcoming writing assignment?
4. Consider how you might use this article as a springboard for an **extended research project** (e.g. a literature review). Out of the many ideas that we've introduced in this piece—for example, managing emotions, and talking with Writing Center tutors—which ones strike you as the most interesting, and why? Formulate a research question(s) that could help you dive deeper into the Writing Studies field.
 5. Find someone whose writing process you'd like to learn more about. Collect some writing-related artifacts connected to their **personal life** (e.g. journal entries, "to do" lists, social media posts), **professional life** (e.g., community outreach advertisements for a public relations representative, a housing description for a real estate agent, or lesson plans for a teacher), or if they're a student, their **academic life** (e.g. an in-process draft or final submission, feedback to a classmate's draft, an email to members of a club/organization). Use that data to ask questions that pique your curiosity as it relates to how writing happens for them. That data could become the basis for what Writing Studies researchers call a text-based interview, and you could ask them to walk you through the various decisions they made while writing each of those various documents.