

Graduate Student Writing: Challenge and strategy

Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
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Objectives of the session

- to review recent writing research and theory
- to consider how theory and research might help us think about graduate student writing
- to review a variety of writing strategies
- to identify supervisors' problems and concerns
- to share best practices and successful techniques

Some basic assumptions

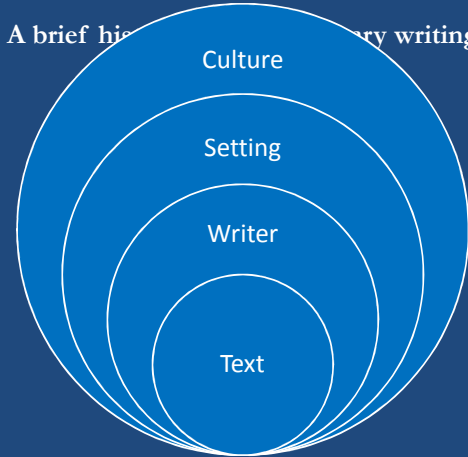
- writing is hard intellectual, social, and rhetorical work
- student difficulties with writing are as varied as the students themselves
- the conventions of writing range from the grammatical/linguistic to the rhetorical/disciplinary
- students are all wounded writers
- there are no easy answers or quick fixes

Challenges of supervision

- what do you find most difficult about supervising graduate writing?
- when in the writing process do these problems occur?
- why do you think they occur?
- do they occur with every student?
- have you found solutions to them?

A brief history of contemporary N.A. writing research and pedagogy

A brief history of contemporary writing



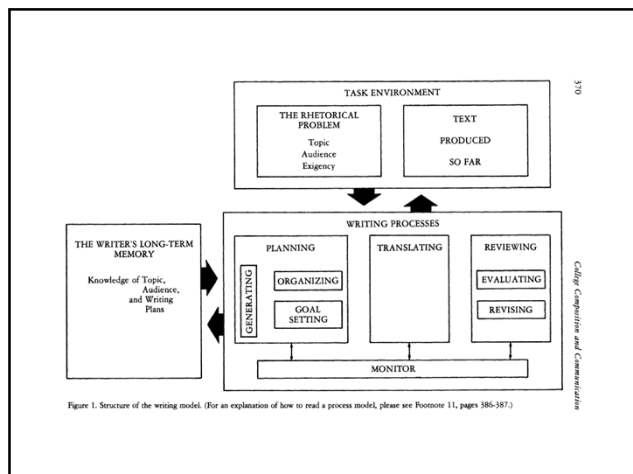
Reinventing the rhetorical tradition

The canons of classical rhetoric

- invention
- arrangement
- style
- memorization
- delivery

Writing as a process

- complex, multi-stage activity
- pre-writing, writing, re-writing
- invention, discovery, exploration
- writers set goals, plan, consider readers
- writing is recursive
- writing needs incubation, evolution
- writing needs discussion, feedback



Writing as a situated social act

- writing makes things happen, it *does* something
- texts respond to and anticipate texts
- writing is inseparable from other activities and routines; it's a situated social practice
- texts and textual practices are repeated, regulated, "genred"
- genres are local, linked, evolving
- learning to write happens *in situ*
- mentors are essential when learning to write

In summary, writing is now seen as...

- generative, heuristic, inventive
- knowledge-making
- staged, dialogic, recursive
- situated, local, instrumental
- discipline specific, goal oriented
- genred, evolving

So what?

- how can we make use of these insights?
- break the writing process into parts
- be sensitive to the evolving text/thinking
- help students understand the complexity of their task
- help students locate themselves in the discipline's conversation
- help students with the craft of writing

Strategies for writing: Getting started

- brainstorming, freewriting
- setting goals

Strategies for writing: Setting goals

- what is the purpose of the text?
- what should each section/chapter do?
 - chapter one? lit review? methods? discussion?
- what should sections of chapters do?
 - introductions? summaries? conclusions?
- what about tables, charts, appendices, etc.?
- use active verbs to set goals: argue, propose, explain, describe, demonstrate, prove, contrast

Strategies for writing: Getting started

- brainstorming, freewriting
- setting goals
- planning

Strategies for writing: Planning

- articulate the problem to be solved
- review progress, look ahead
- prepare a writing schedule (weekly, monthly)
- set deadlines and turn-around times
- distinguish types of draft (rough, second, final)
- set new goals, plan after each meeting

Strategies for writing: Getting started

- brainstorming, freewriting
- setting goals
- planning
- considering readers

Strategies for writing: Readers

- who will read the text? how will they read it?
- what are their expectations/standards?
- are there also implied readers?
- what are the discipline's expectations?
- any other readers?

Strategies for writing: Getting started

- brainstorming, freewriting
- setting goals
- planning
- considering readers
- considering structure

Strategies for writing: Considering structure

- what sections/elements are typical?
- what is the logic of sequence?
- graphic representations: outlines, charts, maps, trees

Strategies for writing: Getting started

- brainstorming, freewriting
- setting goals
- planning
- considering readers
- considering structure
- talk, talk, talk

Strategies for writing: Talking

- vary types of feedback
- start with positive comments
- encourage elaboration, re-statement
- talk to anyone, everyone

Strategies for writing: Drafting

- start anywhere
- ignore the editor
- articulate problems, blocks, uncertainties
- draw, graph, chart, outline ideas and links
- review plans, goals, outlines often

Strategies for writing: Revising, editing

- re-visit goals, purpose, outline, introductions
- re-consider readers
- read aloud
- handbooks
- multiple readers

Strategies for writing: Other possibilities

- writing groups
- journal clubs/reading groups
- sample papers on file/website
- attention to texts *as* texts
- peer tutoring
- manuscript dissertations

Establishing a relationship

- what are your expectations?
- what are the student's expectations?
- what is your role?
- what will happen during supervision sessions?
- how long will feedback take?
- how will the student receive feedback?
- will you talk about your relationship?

Some helpful books

Aitchison, C. & Guerin, C. (2014) (Eds.). *Writing groups for doctoral education and beyond: Innovations in theory and practice*. London, UK: Routledge.

Aitchison, C., Kamler, B. & Lee, A. (Eds.) (2010). *Publishing pedagogies for the doctorate and beyond*. London: Routledge.

Giltrow, J. (2002). *Academic writing: Writing and reading across the disciplines*. 3rd ed. Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press.

Hyland, K. (2004). *Disciplinary discourses: Social interactions in academic writing*. Ann Arbor, MI: U of Michigan Press.

Kamler, B. & Thomson, P. (2006). *Helping doctoral students write: Pedagogies for supervision*. London: Routledge.

Thank you

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