

MAJOR STEPS AND ACTIVITIES OF THE WRITING PROCESS

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Rezumat : *Articolul dat abordează procesul de scriere în situația academică în calitate de proces cu multe etape. Inițial se descrie etapa preliminară a procesului de scriere, care include tehnica de generare și organizare a ideilor. Urmează descrierea etapelor succesive ale procesului de scriere, și anume, elaborarea și revizuirea, finalizând cu etapele de redactare, corectare și prezentare a lucrării scrise.*

Cuvinte cheie: *proces de scriere, generare și organizare a ideilor, elaborare, revizuire, redactare, corectare, prezentare.*

“Academic writing, especially through the vehicle of revision, is an engaging intellectual endeavor that encourages students to stretch to the maximum”.

(Lynn Quitman Troyka)

Students learn by reading, observing, asking questions and practicing. Writing is also an essential source of knowledge. It is a way not only to

express students' thoughts, it is at the same time a means which helps them to clarify, understand and perfect their ideas. As Sheridan Blau mentions, "writing is not just the making of sentences and paragraphs, it is the making of meaning" (Blau et alia, *Blue Level* 1992: 9). The same author states: "Writing is an extension of the processes of thinking and speaking, and it provides you with new strategies for understanding, creating, and communicating ideas" (Blau et alia, *Blue Level* 1992:10). In *Glencoe Writer's Choice* writing is described as "a way to explore students' thoughts and mental images. It is also a way to discover more about yourself and the people and experiences that helped make you who you are" (*Glencoe Writer's Choice* 2001:58).

The work of a writer may be compared with an artist's work. After an artist has started working on his creation, he experiences new visualizations and decides to rework, moving on from those new visions. Thus, his final work is a product of many starts and stops. It is a composition of all the various ideas that come to the artist's mind during the creation process. In the same way, a writer explores his/her ideas in the first draft, perfecting it, or even setting it aside, and starting anew.

The writing process is not a linear, step-by-step process. It is a recursive process. Writers usually go back and redo some parts of their writing with the purpose to improve and fine-tune it. Lynn Q. Troyka states: "Writing is an ongoing process of considering alternatives and making choices. Understanding writing as a multistage process allows you to work efficiently, concentrating on one activity at a time, rather than trying to juggle all the facets of a writing project simultaneously" (Troyka 1996:17). Hence, the better students understand the writing process, the better they will write and the more they can take pleasure in writing.

Also, like no two persons look or act exactly alike, in the same way no two persons write alike. Each writer, including each student writer, acquires his/her writing style. Thus, the writing process will vary greatly at different writers. And although writers approach the writing process individually, most writers pass through four basic stages: *prewriting*, *drafting*, *revising* and *editing/proofreading*, terms shared by most academic writing authors (Lynn Q. Troyka, Ann C. Brown, Joy M. Reid, Sheridan Blau et alia, *Glencoe Writer's Choice*, etc.). It is essential for student writers to know the steps and activities of the writing process, so that they can go back without

difficulty and improve their work at an earlier stage to finally develop an excellent written product.

As it was mentioned before, the writing process is not linear, it has a recursive nature. Most writers encounter difficulties in expressing some of the ideas, try to shape sentences in order to transmit their ideas in a most accurate way, struggle with words for their proper connotations to suit each writing situation. All this takes time. Student writers are advised to resist hurrying and not to get disheartened. They should be encouraged to move ahead and remember that good writing never occurs by magic. It is, as stated above, an endeavoring procedure, a multistage process that calls for students to work systematically in order to produce a satisfactory and convincing piece of writing.

Thus, the first step in the writing process is *prewriting*. Prewriting is the time to explore and gather ideas from various sources. During this stage student writers discover what they already know about the topic they are going to develop and consider what new information they need to obtain. The prewriting stage involves two techniques: *the idea gathering technique*, also called “*invention technique*” (Troyka 1996:23), and *organizing ideas*.

Student writers can generate ideas from their own knowledge and experience, discussion, or listening to talks, interviews or opinions related to their topic. Some ideas come from contrasting old and new ideas and uncovering some original ideas for their writing. Often students gather ideas by applying certain techniques to trigger their own creativity, such as freewriting, brainstorming, mapping, using incubation or journalist’s questions.

After students have gathered the ideas on their writing topic, they need to organize them, or to “shape” them, term stated by L. Q. Troyka (Troyka 1996: 23). As student writers organize their ideas, they should remember that creative writing is often associated with the form of an essay, having a beginning, a development of ideas and a summing-up. Thus, to organize, or to shape the ideas students need to *group* and *sequence* them according to the structure of an essay.

When grouping ideas students “make connections and find patterns” (Troyka 1996: 31), i. e. students should put each related idea into its own group. After grouping the ideas, students should sequence these groups of

ideas: they should determine what group of ideas they would like their audience to read or hear first, second, third, and so on.

The next step in the writing process is *drafting*. Drafting means writing the generated and organized ideas in sentences and paragraphs. The first draft is a preliminary one. While writing it students shouldn't worry about grammar or style correctness. This draft is not a perfect one, corrections are done later, during the next step of revising. Lynn Quitman Troyka perfectly delineates the essence of drafting: "The direction of drafting is forward: *Keep pressing ahead*. If you are worried about the spelling of a word or a point in grammar, underline the material to check it later – and keep moving ahead. If you cannot think of an exact word, write an easy synonym and circle it to change later and move on. If you are worried about your sentence style or the order in which you present the supporting details within a paragraph, write *Style?* or *Order?* in the margin and return to it later to revise – and press forward. If you begin to run dry, reread what you have written – but only to propel yourself to further writing, not to distract you into rewriting" (Troyka 1996: 49).

During the next step in the writing process – *revising* – students are to make sure that their writing is accurate and well ordered, and that it meets the proposed aim. To achieve these goals the student writers may need to evaluate their drafts. It is important for students to take time to read the first draft carefully and make the necessary changes that will improve the content, unity and coherence of their writing. Student writers should allow sufficient time for this stage of the writing process. From my personal experience, it is namely this step that is neglected or paid not due attention by many students. When asked about how much time they spend on a certain writing assignment, some students said that they usually write one single draft the night before, or just in the morning before the deadline. However, specialists in academic writing say that students need to "expect to revise" (Troyka 1996: 51). "Finishing your draft just a few hours before it is due will usually not allow sufficient time to efficiently reread and revise your essay", says Janine Carlock, Maeve Eberhardt et al. (Carlock et alia 2016: 52). Lynn Q. Troyka states that, "experienced writers know that the final draft of any writing project shows on paper only a fraction of the decisions made from draft to succeeding draft. Good writers can truly *see* their drafts *again* and rework them so that they evolve and improve"

(Troyka 1996: 51). The process of revision must continue until a student writer is satisfied that his/her piece of writing is the best that he/she can make within the deadline limits. L. Q. Troyka makes an appeal to academic writing students: “Keep in mind that academic writing, especially through the vehicle of revision, is an engaging intellectual endeavor that encourages students to stretch to the maximum” (Troyka 1996:50).

Revising, a writer works to perfect a draft at different levels: at paragraph/essay level, and then at sentence and word levels. The major activities during the revision process are: *adding* (inserting new words, sentences, paragraphs), *cutting* (getting rid of what goes off the topic), *replacing* (substituting new words, sentences, paragraphs), and *moving material around* (changing the sequence of ideas/paragraphs, moving sentences within paragraphs or to other paragraphs).

In order to help student writers to focus their attention during the revision process, academic writing authors suggest revision checklists. Practically every handbook on academic writing includes such checklists, which are rather detailed and comprising. However, students may adapt them to their writing assignments, or they can compile their own checklists. Following the items in the lists, it will be easier for student writers to concentrate as they evaluate their writing during revising. At the same time, the revision checklists should start with larger structures (paragraphs and whole essay) and continue with smaller parts (sentences and words).

The last steps of the writing process are *editing* and *proofreading*. Some authors speak of editing and proofreading as parts of the revision process. However, I share the idea of those academic writing authors (Lynn Q. Troyka, Joy M. Reid, Janine Carlock et al.) who consider that revising is usually separate from editing and proofreading. While revising the writer focusses on the content, on the meaning that he/she intends to transmit. When editing and proofreading the writer concentrates on the surface features, such as correct grammar and spelling, punctuation, typing errors.

Thus, during *editing* student writers are expected to check the technical correctness of their writing. Here they focus on grammar, spelling, punctuation and on the correct use of mechanics (numbers, capitals, abbreviations, etc.). In other words, during editing the writer fine-tunes and polishes his/her writing. Editing is decisive in writing. It takes patience. Some students “rush” editing, even if they have payed due attention to all

previous steps of the writing process and think that they have developed a good piece of writing. Careless editing distracts the reader and this, as Joy M. Reid says, may “lessen” a student’s “authority as a writer” (Reid 1988: 82) and cause a lower mark as a result. Therefore, student writers shouldn’t haste while editing.

Once students have edited their writing, they can check the final version, that is, they can *proofread* it. Proofreading means to read the final draft carefully for typing errors or handwriting legibility. An effective proofreading technique is to read the written work aloud, or to start reading from the end. Some authors suggest that in such a way, students will not be disrupted by the content of the work. If there are many errors on a page students are advised to rewrite or retype the page. No matter how much effort a student has involved at all steps of the writing process, if his/her final draft doesn’t look accurate and orderly, the student will not get to his/her reader(s) successfully.

Finally, certain authors involve one more step in the writing process – *presentation* (*Glencoe Writer’s Choice*, Sheridan Blau et al.). This is the final stage, during which students share their completed works with others. Students can make an oral or a visual presentation, or they can submit their writing to the teacher. Also, students are encouraged to share their works at every stage throughout the writing process, not only after they have completed the final draft. Often this is done when students share their writing with their colleagues during peer editing.

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