WRITING AS A 'PROCESS'

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'Process,' applied to writing, is a term, a concept, and a general idea about how writing happens. It is not, as is sometimes supposed, a method for teaching writing in cut-and-dried stages. But it provides teacher and student with invaluable pointers on how to go about each piece of writing and how to change direction when things are going wrong.

Moreover an understanding of 'process' brings a notable bonus to any classroom: it provides young writers with a language for thinking and talking critically about what they are doing while composing.

The diagram, however, presents the terms in a formal-looking linear way. But the final writing *is* linear - that is, flowing along smoothly in lines - the 'process' is far from linear. Rather, it is recursive, in the sense that writers read back and write forward again and again as they work towards the end. The extent of this careful, recursive back-and-forth and the amount of re-drafting will of course depend on the purpose of the writing - very little for the writing of a shopping list, for instance, but a good deal for the writing of a letter to a Senator.

In any school week, a student could be asked to write in many text types or 'genres' of writing. The extent of the process underlying each piece of writing will depend on its specific 'writing context' and purpose for the writing. For example:

- *Context 1.* A letter to a local newspaper. This calls for meticulous pre-writing preparation, then drafting, revising, polishing, and finally perhaps arranging for typing and posting.
- *Context 2.* A description of the playground at lunchtime. This calls for a draft which may on this occasion only be revised on the page before being filed for possible further revision if a need arises.
- *Context 3.* Field observations made during a science mini-excursion to the neighbouring park. This calls only for notes which may be left in the notebook exactly as they are, to be used in a later discussion (though on another occasion such notes might be written up and 'published').

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[1] This is a revised version of a chapter first published in *Every Child Can Write* (1981) Sydney: Primary English Teaching Association

The point is that all of these are examples of 'process' — and so *is every* piece of writing a more or less extensive instance of process.

Why then do we say that the recent idea of 'process' has brought to teaching the most illuminating insights we have ever had about how-writing-happens? Because it brings an awareness of the feel-think-write-revise struggle that underlies writing: that no one gets writing into 'publishable' form at the first attempt. Teachers realize that the one-shot draft of the old order of composition writing was absurd. Effective writing needs pre-writing preparation followed by a sequence of composing behaviours which, through interactive 'rehearsing, drafting, revising' at last achieve meaning clearly, concisely, correctly and in a manner persuasive to a specific audience.

In the following pages, 'process' is discussed in some detail under convenient headings—convenient for diagramming and discussing. But they are not to be taken as 'stages' through which writing neatly moves, nor as 'steps' in a method of teaching writing:
- real writing does not happen as a mechanical series of stages
- many of a student's pieces of writing, week by week, will not pass through a 'full' or 'extended' process.

However, once these qualifications have been made, the central fact about learning and teaching writing is this: *regular experience of the 'full' process of writing is important for every student.*

To teach writing effectively involves being sensitively aware of the *nature* of the writing process in order to be able to support students at any point as well as provide them with a great *variety* of 'writing contexts'.

PRE-WRITING

What we do before students write is usually more important than anything we do after they write.

In the past little was done *before* students wrote. They were commonly told,

> Here is your composition topic. Let's discuss it for five minutes…. Now, spend a few minutes planning and then start writing [for so many minutes]. I'll collect the work for marking. See that you take more care this time with spelling, punctuation, sentences and paragraphs.

'Process' research makes it clear that no writer performs well at such abrupt notice and our students should certainly not be expected to do so. We need to allocate adequate *time* to writing, and this must include an appropriate period of pre-writing preparation.

'Pre-writing' begins with a purpose for writing. Once the decision to write has been made, a writer begins to think about *what* to write, and *how* to start. But in practice this decision often involves many false starts and even stops. Doubts such as: ''Where do I start?' …'I don't know enough' …'I won't be able to write well enough' are common behaviours. Seen positively, they are the writing process already moving. With support from the teacher students will begin to move from broad concern with a *subject area* to the expression in a sentence of *an intended topic,* and then to carefully *limiting the topic* after considering what the readers are likely to expect.

What the teacher must nurture in the pre-writing period is a great effort of original thinking by the student, the dimensions of which must never be underestimated.

What students *do* as part of the process of getting ready to write will vary greatly. However, generally four behaviours are commonly present when the student moves towards writing.

1   **Thinking**. Writers must have time to think. Even more importantly at this early stage, they need *time for thoughts to come.* Many of a writer's best thoughts come at odd moments. (A. E. Housman's best lines often came while shaving!) Major pieces of writing should therefore be projected well ahead of deadline (if any) so that thoughts can accumulate.

     When a classroom becomes a purposeful 'writing community' which writes regularly, students get many of their 'mental flashes' outside school (on the way home, watching TV, before falling asleep, etc.)

2   **Talking.** Talk is the natural recourse of anybody who has a problem. In classrooms where a flow of work-talk is normal, most students will talk in the pre-writing period to grasp the dimensions of a problem, to gain some insights about it and to connect some ideas.

     The relation of talk to writing is not simple. It varies from one writing situation to another and from student to student. Sometimes talk is essential for creating a favourable set towards writing; more often it is desirable but not essential. Students who want to get on with writing should not be compelled to talk at length first.

3   **Reading.** Every 'writing classroom' should simultaneously be a 'reading classroom.' The literature the students are continually reading from the class and school libraries will enter into their thinking as they prepare for writing. They will also refer to this literature for models which guide them in shaping their stories, poems and other literary forms. When they are writing in the informational curriculum areas, they need non-fiction literature to use for models of exposition as well as for information.

4   **Note-making.** All teachers should cultivate some note-making from reference books, and this is an obvious activity in preparation for the writing of informational texts in areas such as social studies or science. Much less in evidence is the advice to students to note down thoughts of their own ('flashes,' 'inspirations') which occur in the prewriting period, often at random times.

Note-making is a good point at which to leave this discussion of 'pre-writing', for the pen is now in the hand and the child *is* writing, though not yet attempting the first draft. But in life a neat separation of 'stages' is seldom possible. The writing process tends to be continuous. The child who is 'making notes' may find that the latest note is in fact a good 'lead' that gets the writing of the draft under way — 'pre-writing' has flowed into 'draft writing.'

DRAFTING

The ideal draft is written straight through at a single sitting without any crossings-out. Executed with a knowledge and confidence born of perfectly adequate preparation, it achieves a prose that is concise, lively, persuasive . . . But alas this seldom happens, and then only in short, inspired pieces.

Even when the preparation has been extensive there is a big obstacle at the outset: 'Beginnings are terrifying', says writer Donald M. Murray. 'You have to capture the reader instantly.' And Laura Huxley says of her novelist husband Aldous: 'He always has trouble at the beginning. He breaks off, starts again, changes — dropping the idea that seemed so good a few weeks ago.' How much more difficult are beginnings for children, who write at shorter notice than novelists!

What can we do to help them begin? We must provide time - time to think, time to talk, time to read. Having said that, we must also help our students understand the discipline of working to deadlines.

Some students will want to start writing at once; some will fret, chat, doodle and otherwise stall for inspiration; some will try out 'leads' in the hope of hitting on one that will launch them; some will 'brainstorm', jotting down anything that comes to mind in

whatever order; and some will methodically work out a plan. In a good 'writing classroom' all these will be regarded as legitimate options which are constantly being tried, compared and criticized. This is vastly superior to an all-or-none procedure such as, 'Make a plan before you start writing.' Abundant evidence shows that compulsory planning can be counter-productive for some students in many writing situations.

As well as differences in getting started, there will be widely differing styles of moving through the draft. The range of styles can be indicated by a continuum which stretches between 'splurgers' at one end and 'agonisers' at the other. The first are the writers who 'hit the page' confidently and keep going until the end; the second start, have doubts, try other beginnings, then edge forward with continual crossings-out and recastings. Every writer can roughly locate himself or herself somewhere along this line, while expecting to vary somewhat from one piece of writing to another:

splurgers   *agonisers*

It seems justified to infer that 'splurgers' are a happier breed of writer — which is an insight of importance for teachers. We can gently encourage our 'agonisers' to experiment at times with drafting quickly, stopping as little as possible to make revisions, in the knowledge that there is plenty of opportunity to revise at the end.

Every teacher knows the restlessness, chatter and resistance of a class that is about to write. By degrees a settling takes place; and then absorption. If a bell interrupts before the end, the previously reluctant writers show a pained reluctance to 'come out of it', to stop writing and return to ordinary consciousness. Where have these writers been?
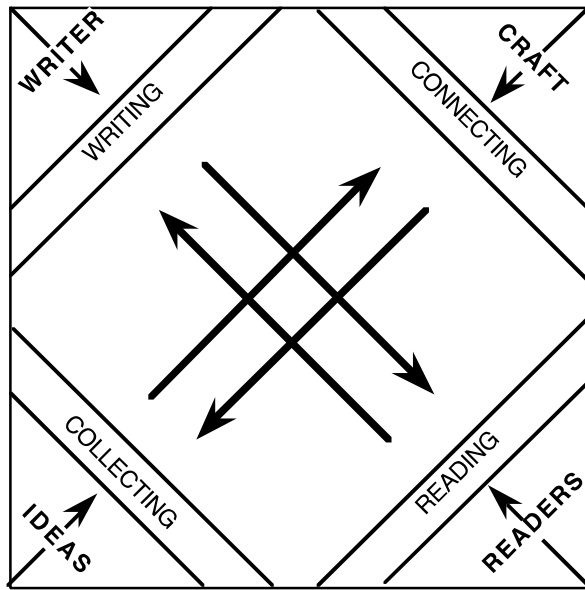
N.B. Writing is made through a complex of interactions, many of them instantaneous

Donald M. Murray sees the writer (whether drafting or revising) trying to integrate 'four primary forces' — *collecting* and *connecting, writing* and *reading.* 'As we collect a piece of information, we immediately try to connect it with other pieces of information; when we write a phrase, we read it to see how it fits with what has gone before and how it may lead to what comes after.'

The continual complex interaction of the 'four primary forces' shows that the sensory, mental and physical operations underlying writing do not take place in a simple, forward-moving way. The recursive element in writing is especially intriguing to young writers: we continually *read back* while writing, and then wait for the creative source to 'tell' us what to say next. To write is to do a great deal of incidental reading. '*We writeread* or *readwrite',* says Murray.

All modern 'process' research confirms that the act of first-draft writing should be carried out in conditions of great freedom:
.. freedom to go about it in one's own way
.. freedom to be carried in an unintended direction
.. freedom to stop, discard, and start all over again
.. freedom to enjoy production of original expression
.. freedom to enjoy communion with the creative 'still centre'
.. freedom to 'splurge' in the hope of improving fluency
.. freedom to concentrate on ideas without having to be concerned with handwriting,
   neatness, spelling, punctuation, grammar or any other 'correctness' factor.

To propose such freedom does not mean a sanctioning of sloppy writing. This is an early stage of the writing process and there will be time later for discipline, editing, proofreading. Writers young or old need to give undivided attention at this early stage to the discovery of ideas.

At present some teachers consider that one draft followed by a little editing and rewriting is as much as the timetable and students' interest will allow; where this is the attitude, free origination is vital during drafting, and the follow-up will be limited to a disciplined tidying and correcting. We shall see in the next section that a more enlightened attitude to revision is possible. But whether a little revision is carried out or a lot, the case for freedom in draft writing remains unassailable.

REVISING

'Rewriting is the whole secret to writing.' That is the opinion of no less a writer than Mario Puzo, author of the best-selling *Godfather*.

Revising is the main technique of every writer who wishes to write well. If this seems to be an exaggerated statement, it is only so because the traditional, school approach to writing (determined largely by exam pressure) has been that of 'one-shot drafting.' That is, students were expected to produce a final product at first writing. This made quality writing unattainable and produced generation after generation which, with the exception of an able minority, said, 'I can't write, I hate writing.'

Now our understanding of the writing process enables us to say, 'Every child can write!'—provided we teachers don't leave them stuck with the belief that their first drafts are all they are capable of. We have to show them that everyone's first draft is by its nature rather unsatisfactory, and perhaps even rough and messy. We have to explain again and again the truth of Donald Graves' statement that

> Writing only truly becomes writing in revision. A professional's
> first draft *is* often not much better than anyone else's. It is chiefly in
> revision that the professional's experience and craftsmanship
> show.

His research has established that children, given gentle encouragement, can begin to revise from age five or six, and that when they thus begin early, they accept revision as perfectly natural and necessary.

With time and opportunity to revise in a 'writing classroom' which expects it, students learn to revise by revising, as an aspect of 'learning to write by writing.' There are also many tips or hints the teacher can give them, and we shall discuss some of these below.

On the other hand, classes that are new to the idea of revising need the utmost help from their teachers throughout a lengthy transition period from their past habitual one-shot drafting to full acceptance of revision as an integral part of the writing process.

What is revision?

'Revision' is the generic term for many behaviours that enter into the writing process. Since there is no simple agreement on the meaning of a variety of terms for these behaviours, the proper course is to define one's use of some of them at the outset.
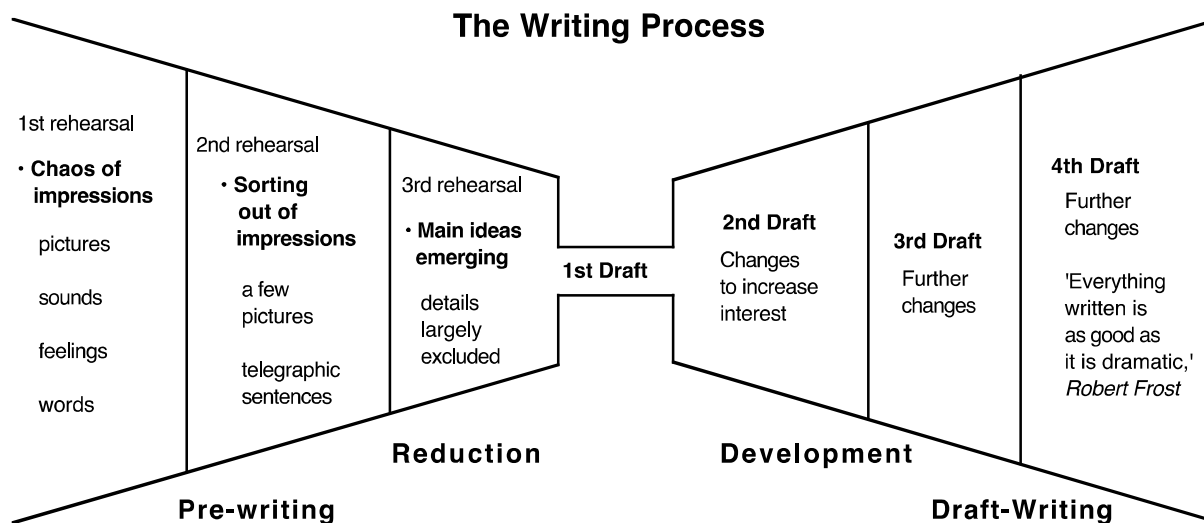
- *Revising* (re-vision) is seeing-it-again, a second, critical look—or third, or umpteenth. Donald Graves says that the development order in which young children learn to revise is: (l) add, (2) cut, (3) reorder. In a little more detail, revision can be explained and dramatized for older children in this way:
  You *add* words to fill out meaning ('expansion')
  You *change* words to achieve exact description ('specifics')
  You *delete* words to tighten your sentences ('economy')
  You *sharpen* punctuation to make reading easier ('readability')
  You *rearrange* words, sentences or paragraphs to produce a more convincing order or sequence of explanation ('logic')
  You *correct* any slips or omissions ('proofreading').

- *Editing,* in commercial publishing practice, is what a specialist editor does to a writer's manuscript (MS) to make it ready for typesetting. It may result in changes to content as well as structure and mechanics; but publishers try to avoid the expense involved in making major revisions of content or structure. They send back a clumsy MS for further revision (self-editing) by the author. When this has been done, the MS goes to a 'copy editor', whose job is limited to checking surface correctness and smoothness and to 'styling', which secures conformity with the standards and conventions observed by the particular publisher (*e.g. program* or *programme,* double or single inverted commas, indented or full-out paragraphs, method of footnoting). In school practice, 'editing' — when the term does not extend to 'self-editing' — is the revision carried out on any aspect of a student's writing by peers, older students, parent aides or the teacher, if possible with the student observing.

- *Rewriting* is the term usually reserved for the final writing—the form in which it is presented to the intended readers (or to a typist or typesetter). But rewriting may also be carried out on a much-revised draft so that it can be seen clearly and then subjected to further revision.

- *Proofreading* is simply the final checking of the rewritten draft before presenting it to the readers. More likely this now means using the word processor and spell checker.

The necessity of revision

The one-shot draft, except in rare and brief instances, is only half-shaped thought. It has emerged too recently from the mind's rambling stream-of-consciousness to rate as *writing,* a language form which differs from inner-speech and conversational speech in significant ways. *Revision is what turns a draft into writing;* it is as much a 'basic' of writing as punctuation or proper syntax.

In collecting first drafts for marking as finished writing under the old 'composition' order, teachers not only condemned themselves to mainly dull reading and heavy correction, but they limited students to what many writers regard as the most irksome part of the writing process. Writing usually gets easier and more interesting once we have the first draft in front of us. The hard work finished, we then revise to achieve clarity, interest, liveliness.

So what can a teacher do? Explain that no one gets it right the first time. Not even Mem Fox or Katherine Patterson or Mario Puzo. But look at the positive side of what has happened: 'You have really done some surprisingly useful thinking, to cut all those impressions down until you've discovered some essentials. True, they are *bare* essentials, but now in revision you can start to build on that bareness— build something lively that will capture your readers. Your first draft was all reduction; now revision can be all development, and then you'll know that of course you can write.'

The Writing Process

1st rehearsal	2nd rehearsal	3rd rehearsal	1st Draft	2nd Draft	3rd Draft	4th Draft
• **Chaos of impressions**	• **Sorting out of impressions**	• **Main ideas emerging**		Changes to increase interest	Further changes	Further changes
pictures	a few pictures	details largely excluded				'Everything written is as good as it is dramatic,' *Robert Frost*
sounds						
feelings	telegraphic sentences					
words						

Reduction   **Development**

Pre-writing   **Draft-Writing**

Writing, like the potter's clay, only becomes a thing of usefulness or beauty through repeated smoothing and shaping. Even professional writers are seldom brilliant in their first drafts; it is the work and experience they pour into revision that enables them to

achieve quality. Hemingway, for instance, had to rewrite the ending of his novel *A Farewell to Arms* 39 times before he considered it right.

Introducing a class to revision — or 'editing'

The term 'editing' as a general synonym for 'revision' is the one that is most used in schools. Obviously there is more to revision/editing than 'fixing up' the surface features of a piece of writing but students new to the idea of revising tend to attempt little more than proofreading. So they need to be helped to see that *revision is an unlimited striving to improve both the surface and the depths of a draft.* Modelled Writing is one instructional strategy that teachers can use to help students understand the revision process.

In general, though *don't impose editing.* Instead, try first to get them interested in writing itself, wait till they are writing fluent first drafts of many kinds (notes, letters, stories, articles, journals, etc.), and then gently introduce editing practices. The process will gather momentum as students begin to realize that first draft writing can always be improved, that proficient writers write that way, and so on — the whole approach we have been discussing. Teachers need continually to promote writing, its importance and the many purposes for writing, sometimes demonstrating explicitly significant aspects of the writing process, discussing features of various many genres of written text, and offering interesting avenues of 'publication'.

When the class is showing interest and there is a lift in the fluency of drafting, then editing practices can begin gently to be indicated:
.. spotlight spontaneous efforts at revision
.. put short pieces on the board or overhead and collectively edit them
.. show the value of reading the writing aloud in order to detect flaws
.. arrange 'writing partners' to secure critical peer-reading
.. show you expect that anything handed in for marking and everything that is
   published will be carefully checked and rewritten.

The class will be on the way to becoming a 'writing community' but individuals will still need a great deal of support and explicit teaching about writing and 'how writing works'.

Ways to help a class develop in editing ability

1   Self-editing tips
The novelist Ernest Hemingway said, 'You learn to write by applying the seat of the pants to the chair'. That's a nicely colloquial way of expressing the ancient Roman insight, 'By writing we learn to write'. The teacher should, however, be able to add some gentler and more specific advice. Here are some thoughts that might help a young writer with self-editing:

- 'You can do some revising as you draft, but I advise you to experiment occasionally with writing straight through, and only then turn to revising it.'
- 'Think hard about your readers. Acquire the art of *reader awareness.* Read your draft from the perspective of the reader.'
- 'For careful revision, read your piece over several times—fast and slow, silently and aloud.'
- 'Ask yourself questions like: Does this bit make sense? Does this sentence sound right? The first question checks the logic and flow, the second checks the grammar.'
- 'Put aside your draft till tomorrow. You will then see it more clearly. You may also find that your mind has continued to work on it—has thrown up new ideas.'
- 'Try reading your piece onto tape and then play it back. Listen for rhythm and for any jarring or falseness in your *writer's voice.*'
- 'Ask your writing partner or someone else to criticize your piece. Tell them you are not a temperamental writer—that only criticism is of any help to you.'
- '*Make it messy to make it clear!*—this *is* a great slogan because it suggests that a revised draft should be covered with words added, words crossed out, arrows switching sentences, and so on. Then it is ready for a careful rewriting.'
- 'Put your draft away and *speak* it from memory to your writing partner. Then get it out again and read it. You will see it with fresh eyes.'
- 'If you're dissatisfied, why not just throw that draft away and start a new one?'

2 Individual conference

Regular one-to-one 'conference' between child and teacher *during the process of writing is* by far the most significant single form of help in developing editing skills that a teacher can offer a student. In the conference, the teacher is interested, supportive, keen to help the student value and use well what the student knows, and careful not to take 'ownership' of the writing away by giving too much direction or advice. Generalized responses are avoided; specific questions, teaching points and expressions of approval are preferred. Conferences usually last for only a few minutes, but good classroom management is nevertheless called for to achieve individualization in a class of 30. Some typical comments and questions:

..'What is the purpose of this writing? Who are your readers?'

.. 'That's a good opening sentence.'

.. I like your use of the word *muddle.*'

.. 'You've paragraphed well … one for each new idea.'

.. 'Very interesting. You've taught me a lot about frogs.'

.. 'Read that the way it's written. Isn't something missing?'

.. 'Do you need that sentence? Haven't you said that before?'

.. 'Read that again … M-m-m, just tell me a bit more.'

.. 'What word could have been used instead of *rain?*'

.. 'That's a long sentence. Read it again so I can hear where you pause.'

3   Open (or public) individual conference

Occasionally the teacher makes whole-class use of an interesting draft, after securing the student's agreement to take part in an open conference. If possible the draft, or part of it, is written up on a board or transparency, or it is duplicated for everyone. At first the teacher and writer converse, and the class looks on; then the class might help with comments on what they like and what might be developed. Some attention is always given to *how* this writing was produced—that is, the process behind the writing - as well as the purpose that the writing was trying to achieve. For instance if the purpose of the writing was to entertain or inform or persuade, ask the class to discuss whether this purpose was achieved and if not, how could the writer edit the text so that it does achieve its set purpose for its intended audience.

4   Writing partners

Everyone, child or adult, needs a writing partner, a caring, patient, helpfully critical person who will really look deeply at one's writing and come up with detailed comments. The teacher needs to promote this arrangement with enthusiasm—it can have powerful effects! In general, friendship pairing is satisfactory; but as the teacher gets to know the students, some changes may be diplomatically effected, for example, by having a stronger writer help a weaker for a time. A teacher who does some writing along with students can sustain interest in 'partnering' by rostering the children to be his or her partner for one week each.

5   Group conference

In a class where groups are functioning successfully, a group can be asked to conference together on its members' writing, sometimes with and sometimes without the teacher. Or specific writing groups might be formed. They will conduct sessions in much the same way as the whole-class 'open individual conference' above. For example, teacher or group leader, speaking after Adrian has read his piece:

.. 'What does Adrian's description tell us about whales?'
.. 'How did it make you feel?'
.. 'What do you think of his opening?'
.. 'Do you like, *the whales wallowed lazily in the water.*'
.. 'Notice how Adrian has started this sentence …'
.. 'Have you any suggestions for Adrian?'
.. 'How might he have changed the final sentence for stronger effect?'

6   Class or group demonstration

The teacher asks the class or a group to compose collectively a draft of a persuasive letter, a narrative, or report, writing it up on the chalkboard, chart paper or overhead

projector. Everyone then writes an improved version. Next, the students use their work to suggest changes, again collectively, with the teacher writing them up, producing a 'draft revised on the page', replete with additions, cuts and rearrangements — an edited draft exemplifying the slogan, 'Make it messy to make it clear!' Finally, the class can write out a fair copy of either this piece or their own still further revised version.

7   Checklists and personal lists

Checklists may be useful for teachers, but do they ever look anything but boring to children? Especially when lengthy! Why not avoid teacher-originated lists altogether by asking the class or a group to brainstorm 'Points to Watch in Checking My Draft.' Then get agreement on eliminating obvious points, and thus refine the list to 6-8 points that really mean something to the children *at this stage.* Priorities might be seen as falling under three heads. *(mnemonic:* three Ss):

- *Statement:* Is the overall effect clear, interesting, lively?
  Does it achieve the intended purpose for the intended readers?
- *Structure:* An introduction, body, conclusion?
  The best possible sequence of sentences and paragraphs?
- *Surface:* Words: aptness; economy; spelling?
  Sentences: punctuation; correctness?
  Paragraphs: indented; each a good grouping of sentences?

The best list is one compiled by each student — a cumulative list of newly acquired skills, under a title such as 'Things I Can Do'. It might be kept at the back of the Writing Folder or Notebook. Most obviously it will include the mechanical skills but can also record control over content and genres ('I wrote about space', 'I wrote a poem/joke/play/letter-to the-editor').

8   Teacher's written comments

The teacher's written comments can be slanted towards *help with editing* rather than *correction.* Not perhaps as effective as an individual conference, these comments can attempt the same purposes—to be constructive, specific, etc.

PUBLISHING

The essence of 'publication' is *finding readers.* This means teachers and students
    understanding that
- the place of 'publication' and readers in the writing process
- many forms of 'publication' are available and a writer should choose the one most appropriate for the genre and intended readers.

1   The place of 'publication' and readers in the writing process

The publishable 'product' of writing should not be counterposed to the 'process' which produced it. Yet some teachers, in their first enthusiasm for the relevance of 'process', are heard to proclaim, 'Writing is a process, not a product.' This is wrong. Writing is both process *and* product. The product is what emerges from the process and it cannot be predicted (except very broadly) before the process is worked through.

More exactly, the product is part of the process, the end part that has lent the earlier parts much of their *purpose*. Why do we write? Seldom only for self-expression or purely disinterested discovery—and even then we write in order to 'publish' the product to the self. Even when we write for ourselves as in 'a list', 'journal' or 'notes' there are many purposes for our writing and we seldom go beyond a first draft. The writing has served its purpose as a memory jogger or memory keeper and thus is complete.

However we also write to entertain, inform or persuade others, namely *readers*. The principal purpose underlying the writing process in this context is to publish a finished product for readers—the purpose is not to produce writing, but to produce reading!

Obviously, then in these contexts, writers need readers at the end of the writing process. This is why 'process' needs a 'post-writing' stage just as it has needed a 'pre-writing' stage. The writing does not end for the writer with the last full-stop. There remain the arranging of the published format, the delivery to the reader(s), and above all the response of the reader(s). The essence of 'publication' is finding readers, and a writer is fortunate who finds responsive ones, able to be specifically helpful with detailed comments as well as being broadly encouraging.

The intended readers have really been there from the pre-writing stage, in the imagination, looming ahead in the writer's thoughts, influencing what is about to be written and why. Just as we only talk when there is a real person to talk to, and the relationship determines *what* we say and *how and why* we say it, so a writer similarly needs the intended reader or readers because this relationship helps the choice of *what* to write (genre as well as information) and *how* to present it. The trouble with most school writing in the past has been its vagueness; written for no particular purpose and audience, it could only be bland.

So teachers need to encourage students to understand the 'writing context' by asking these pre-writing questions:

.. Why are you writing?
.. What is your topic? (or broad area, or working title)
.. Who are your intended readers?
.. What form might your writing take? (genre)
.. How do you propose to reach your readers?

There will be nothing binding about the answers at this stage. They will be hypothetical, provisional, subject to change at any subsequent stage of the process.

Mature writers set great store on developing the imaginative faculty called 'reader awareness', a sense of the intended readers' interests or problems, which the writing must try to meet. But young writers easily lose sight of their readers while struggling to gather ideas. They perpetrate what Linda Flower calls 'writer-based prose', a first or early draft which is close to the writers' 'inner speech'; it needs to be put through a revision process which edits it into 'reader-based prose.' These terms are helpful in drawing attention to the importance of 'intended readers' and 'reader awareness' throughout the writing process.

2   Many forms of 'publication' are available and a writer should choose the one most appropriate for the genre and intended readers

Not publication for its own sake! Nor to make a 'lovely display'! But, yes, publication designed to attract real readers! Readers are more than 'audience'. Audiences are all too shapeless entities who ask for nothing. We need, instead, readers who demand interesting reading matter - which is the same as saying, interesting writing.

There are many forms in which that our students can write. Most of these, once written in the classroom, can be conveyed to readers ('published') in some pleasing manner. The choice is great, and on every occasion there is a need for ingenuity in devising a form that will capture the attention of the intended readers. Let us glance at a few of these.

- *Books.* Small 'books' written, illustrated and crafted ('manufactured') by the writer have become by far the most popular and useful form for publishing school writing. They carry 'full process' original writing on any aspect of the curriculum for which there is a demand by readers, and they are shelved in the classroom or school library or the library of another class.

- *Articles.* Useful articles researched and written by students may be circulated individually or gathered under a thematic title in a magazine.

- *Letters and Cards.* Every classroom should have its own Mail Box for in-class letter-writing; and the writing of letters to persons further afield needs to be continually encouraged. Similarly there are many opportunities for sending, not commercially produced, but student-made cards - even on student-made paper!

- *Newspapers and News Sheets.* These are popular vehicles for classroom writing. Many formats and various contents are possible. In designing them the question needs to

be raised, 'Is this being done merely as a writing exercise for the participants or are we seriously trying to reach readers?'

- *A Class or School Magazine.* The value of either or both can be considerable.

RESPONSE (AND 'EVALUATION')

Response Is . . .

Response is a reader showing interest in a writer's work. A writer needs readers, and thoughtful readers can greatly help the writer. Readers are needed not as mere 'communication terminals' but because the writer, anticipating their interests, directs the writing that way selecting arranging and styling ideas accordingly. Adult writers are invariably sensitive to readers' responses: positive response is a powerful incentive to write again, while adverse response can bring despair.

Children are even more sensitive. They need, in general, acceptance and support as writers and they need, in particular, interested readers who will respond to their specific writings. It is the teacher's task to create that sort of environment for them — a 'classroom writing community' — by winning the students to the side of positive response to one another's work.

Response is then clearly accepted for what it is anyway, the part of the writing process which completes the post-writing stage (product/publication/response). It is the end part but in a sense it is also a new beginning, for the spirit engendered in the writer by the readers' response enters into the pre-writing stage of the next piece of writing.

The crucial importance of the teaching strategy termed 'in-school publication' lies in its promise to provide every young writer with a variety of interested, responsive readers throughout each school year — not only the teacher but classmates, students in other classes, and adults within the school community. This is the most valuable readership imaginable, for it interacts directly and often intimately with the young writers, in a manner that most writers in the wider adult community would envy.

'Response' and 'Evaluation'

Response is too human an act to be reduced to a technique. 'Evaluation', by contrast, has often been thus reduced; and, operated as a technique, it has failed to value many human qualities while busily computing a narrow range of testable skills. In the minds of many teachers, evaluation is associated with never-ending correction/testing/marking/examining - prodigious teacher-effort for little apparent gain in student-learning. Teachers generally accept the need for keeping *some* evaluation records, first, to meet the demands of principal, parents and next year's teacher for

information about the student's progress, and second, to make useful inferences periodically from the accumulating data.

Both 'response' and 'evaluation' carry many meanings, so it is worth distinguishing them.

For writing, let us make a simple distinction:
- *response* is part of the writing process and consists of spoken or written comments (not to mention non-verbal expressions) made to the writer during or soon after the writing of a specific piece;
- *evaluation* is a longer-term operation characterized by accumulation of written records and work samples, an accumulation that can be analysed from time to time to reveal patterns of growth which might not have been noticed by shorter-term response.

With little time in the school day, what can the busy teacher of writing do about response and evaluation? First, try to maximize *response,* in the knowledge that it can come daily, spontaneously from many readers, not only from the teacher. Second, keep *evaluation records* to essentials, in the knowledge that compiling them bites hard into available time.

The Responsive Teacher of Writing

It would be easy to list twenty ideal qualities of a responsive teacher of writing. Instead let us prefer to ask only that the teacher be a genuine *reader* of students' writing. Not just a proofreader, much less a faultfinder, but a reader interested first in the student's message.

A reader approaches a writer with respect — and questions. If the teacher and other in-school readers do this, they lay the foundation for the child's self-respect and confidence as a writer. They will be primarily looking for what the child *can do,* and will not allow weaknesses in the writing to overshadow their perception of the message; at best, indeed, they will believe, beyond the weaknesses, in the child's potential for development as a writer.

For the rest, the teacher will want to know
- when to respond
- what to look for, and
- what evaluation records to keep

When to Respond

In the past a 'composition' was only 'marked' when it was completed and handed in. Now, perceiving that response is part of the writing process, we can be much more flexible. Reading and response can take place 'in process' as well as when the writing is completed. Thus there may be:

- *'pre-writing response'* when a reader-to-be hears the writer's problems or plans and comments helpfully.
- *'in-process response'*
  to work-in-progress
  to a just finished first draft
  to a draft-revised-on-the page
  to a rewritten revised draft prior to final polishing
  — especially helpful, in the view of many writers young and old, is response to a first draft.
- *'post-writing response'*
  can come from a much wider readership than the teacher.

What to Look For

We must not smother a young writer in excessive talk about writing. There comes a point beyond which a reader's interest can cease to be helpful and instead become fatiguing or meddlesome or threatening— if, for example, it urges what may seem difficult to a child.

The best, most helpful responses of a reader to a young writer will probably be:

(a)   broad, brief indications of approval

(b)   specific questions on the given piece of writing.

The indications of approval would be directed at any manifestations of what are probably the four *attitudes* most likely to lead to development in writing:
.. willingness to *write*
.. willingness to *work at a subject*
.. willingness to *consider readers*
.. willingness to *use one's resources of written language to the limit.*

All four are states of interest or openness. They are invisible and unquantifiable and they are seldom done justice in schemes of 'evaluation'. But a responsive reader — especially the teacher — can readily notice them and praise them with a brief word or gesture.

Keeping Evaluation Records

Innumerable evaluation techniques are available, as every teacher knows. Most of them demand more time than a busy teacher can possibly give. Here then are just three kinds of cumulative records, together with the contention that they are not unduly time-consuming and yet are adequate for the twin purposes of, first, helping the student and, second, providing information about the student's progress to the principal, parents, and next year's teacher.

1   Keep an Anecdotal Record. This is a 'profile' or 'log' or 'informal assessment' — day by day jottings which record observations and intuitions about a student's strengths and weaknesses. It can be made as detailed and voluminous as a teacher's time and energy permit, commenting on attitudes and qualities as well as specific skills, and above all recording signs of growth.

2   Keep Work Samples. While each student's entire writing folder is the ultimate 'work sample', development shows more graphically if, instead, periodic selections are kept—say monthly. The best work should be sampled so as to show what the student *can do.* Highly desirable too is some sampling of examples of 'process', that is, the draft, revisions and final published form of a piece of writing. This is particularly valuable for explaining 'process' to parents. An additional work-sample method used enthusiastically by some teachers is the fortnightly or monthly 'Class Book': each child contributes his or her best piece of writing, which is inserted in an impressive, illustrated, well designed 'book'; the series of books accumulates in the classroom library as both reading material and evaluation record.

3   Students Keep Their Own Record. As but one form of self evaluation, each student keeps a growing list of 'Things I Can Do', not only the mechanical skills but anything seen as a new ability ('I told a joke', 'I wrote a story about space', 'I wrote a business letter', etc.). The teacher periodically reviews this record in conference with the student.

Questions on Other Issues of Response and Evaluation

1   Student-involvement in evaluation. The old order in which the teacher was the sole evaluator bred an unhealthy dependence. Let us instead set the students on the road to self-reliance. Of course this can only *begin* in the K-6 years of school and will continue throughout secondary.

2   Goal-setting Ask the students to choose and set personal goals about improving their future writing. Such goals should be few and specific, and they should be written down. A good method is to hold a class (or group) discussion of current writing problems, then ask everyone to set goals, which you might discuss later as you get round to individual conferences.

3   *Self evaluation.* As students begin to edit their own drafts — that is, 'self-edit' — this is obviously self-evaluation taking place. It takes place too when the teacher, in individual conference, questions the student about a piece of writing. Teachers can ask the child to prepare for a conference *by* underlining (or placing a stroke beside) the best phrases or passages, *by* placing a checkmark beside unsatisfactory writing which needs the teacher's help, *by* rating the whole piece as best/good/average/poor/bad, and *by* being ready to justify any of these aspects of self-evaluation. At the end of the year or end of a major writing experience, why not ask students to draw up their own Reports for sending to parents?

4   *Peer-evaluation.* Peers are *readers* responding very directly to one another's writing. If the teacher has cultivated an environment in which the children listen to, read and comment on one another's work, the learning rate rises sharply because they take even more notice of their peers' opinions than of the teacher's. We have already discussed the value of students working with a 'writing partner' or small group—revising and editing, for instance, can thus become more palatable to some young writers than when they work alone.