
Working Tools of the Craft

by Bruce D. Heald

Each new semester, when I walk into the class, I ask myself, *“How can I shape an environment that will encourage these students to become confident and effective? How may I focus their attention from what they already know about themselves, and their writing ability, to a climate of mutual trust, where each student feels comfortable and free to experiment, to create and communicate new ideas with the exposure of new strategies for writing?”*

More often than not, many students carry into the room unnecessary baggage of negatives about their writing ability; thus, in their minds, the whole experience seems to be unnecessary and of overwhelming drudgery.

After a brief introduction, I inform the class that their instructor, text and the college environment is only a catalyst for their creativity--the sole purpose of encouraging, motivating and helping them develop their self-confidence, and the ability to communicate through this writing process. Thus I sculpture each lesson to the situation centered around generating ideas and a cooperative effort to fine-tune the students' writing skills; the *Working Tools of the Craft*.

To discover one's ability is to explore all facets of purposeful writing. What matters for each student is mastering knowledge and discovering his or her own ideas, expressing them in a sequential pattern, logically, which they are comfortable with.

I enjoying sharing with my students many of my own compositions, but I inform them that most of my

writing is tailored to a specific audience: *The Weirs Times*, Guide books, historic short stories, and books which reminisce about the early settlers of central New Hampshire. Thus, it is imperative that I research my expository and narrative writing through observation, reading from historic journals, conversations-then use my imagination to create a texture of transcendentalistic writing suited for that period of literature. I find, however, that when I share my material and how I orchestrate a style, free communication quickly develops with my students.

For each assignment, I assist them with generating ideas, planning, shaping, drafting, revising and editing. We continually focus on writing as thinking and rethinking. Because I assume that the best writing grows from an abundance of ideas and options, they provide additional options for each stage of this process.

Throughout the semester, I find it useful to challenge their thinking and creativity through reading and peer editing other students' work in class, which helps demystify writing for apprehensive students. I constantly encourage them to think of writing as a recursive process. Their description of the process of each writing assignment demonstrates recursiveness, as does their treatment of the process for each chapter in their text. Through the course of time each student begins to think about the discrete subprocesses and clear-cut steps within his or her writing. Unknowingly, they may be thinking about it as linear rather than a recursive process. At this point I find it most valuable to instruct each writer to describe a typical writing session, either in composition or as part of a discussion.

From each of my original essays, I ask students to analyze their own writing processes. Many of them will think that they don't have a writing process; however, I assure them that everyone has a style or manner of writing, and that there are similarities as well as differences in these processes, and that they should be cultivated and polished, that some work is better than others, and that this instructor will respect their procedures, whatever they may be. I always take this opportunity to let my students know that much of the work of this course will be to help them strengthen and vary their writing skills through study and practice of various options for writing.

I always try to reinforce with my students that writing isn't built on lockstep stages; we don't always proceed in a straight line. Writing is a way to generate ideas. Work with other writers and let them assist in polishing your work. I inform them that I have four different publishers that edit my work constantly, and that I learn from their input; I discover ideas from their suggestions. I ask students to exchange their work with other students, to give and receive reactions.

Throughout the course, we as a class will share useful hints for ways students may help one another discover ideas as they write, rewrite and edit their papers. These are the *Working Tools of the Craft*.