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The Steps of ING

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A senior writing major at Florida State University when she wrote this essay, Rebecca Bybel was enrolled in a theories of composing course and actively investigating her own writing practices.

Every writer develops a pattern or structure to follow when endeavoring to put words together. Some are blessed with having words from divine sources flow through their fingers whenever summoned. Others procrastinate over writing the intended piece until its due date draws near and they feel the paper's hot breath across the back of their necks. This can be the only way to motivate some people to write, and perhaps they do their best work under strict time constraints. Some writers have told me that their environment must be completely quiet so they can concentrate when composing, while others claim that if they don't have background noise while writing their minds will wander. Although learning about other writers' composition processes can offer insight and ideas about new techniques to try in one's own process, in time each author finds his or her niche and personal voice. Through the years I have found certain patterns in my writing methodology and have tweaked it to a science, which I have named the Steps of ING.

Step #1—Daydreaming

All of my writings must first be instigated by a daydream. Being in nature provides my primary inspiration for creating passionate topics. Sometimes it is difficult to get away from reality to hang out with the trees and the birds, to escape the noise of student-land and breathe slightly less polluted air. Just by

walking outside I feel an amazing difference in my creativity and attentiveness. Even sitting on my porch allows me to be closer to nature than I am while sitting at my desk. If I am given a specific subject on which to write, I usually spend hours gazing off into nothingness trying to come up with ideas on how to make my version of the assignment different from anyone else's in the class.

Step #2—Scheming

Scheming occurs after the writing subject has been determined by the first step of daydreaming. I have my topic and am so passionately in love with it that I begin to scribble furiously on any paper in sight. This usually happens directly after daydreaming, therefore also taking place in an outside setting. I have done this step while on my front porch, but an abundance of spiders has forced me to camp out elsewhere. Lake Ella has been my scribbling sanctuary for my past four years. A fake lake, sweaty joggers and benches, you can't beat it.

My scheming can best be equated to free writing. I simply write about my chosen topic for as long as I feel inspired, and go off on as many tangents as I need to get my thoughts down. Structure, formation, word choice, sentence balance, sentence placement, and overall readability are all things that I pretend do not exist. It took a long time to teach my internal editor to shut her mouth during this process, and it's something I have to keep in mind every time I write. My critical brain and creative brain do not play well together, so I try to train them to keep away from each other. The critical brain can be so demanding too.

There is no use for me to try to type out a first draft. My creativity in this stage flows solely through a pen or pencil, never a keyboard. Computers come in to play at a later stage. There's something about being able to take a pen to paper and draw a line through a word or two. The words are still visible if I ever decide to put them back in. Once I erase something on a computer, it's gone. It's too permanent for a first draft, or for first scribbles. On paper I can circle certain phrases, make frowny faces beside others, or draw arrows to indicate whole paragraph movements. Possibilities with the pen are endless. Keyboards and computers are much more restricting at this scheming stage.

Step #3—Transcribing and Deleting

This is one of my least favorite steps of the process. I first set up my paper to stand vertically on my computer desk so I can glance from the schemed paper to the computer monitor efficiently. Then I try to make sense of all the written scribbles made in the previous stages so I can transcribe them onto the computer. And then I type. And type. And edit. And make all the corrections that I had avoided doing in step #2. I consider structure, formation, word choice, sentence balance, sentence placement, and overall readability. I dread this stage because this is when my creative brain takes a break and lets my critical brain

take over. My creative brain and I have the most fun, so I hate to see her go. This is also one of the longest steps in my method. I remain dedicated to the paper for hours, not stopping to eat, shower, or take a phone call. Distractions really bother my critical brain because she is very focused, the opposite of my daydreaming creative brain. Also a perfectionist, my critical brain drives me to sit at the computer until the all the paragraphs flow in perfect order, the sentences have a beautiful construction, the words sound poetic and inspire emotions—until she is happy.

Step #4—Seceding

Since my critical brain and I have been working so closely together for long periods of time on the transcribing and deleting step, I find myself wanting to get away from the piece for a while. This also lets me get back in touch with my creative brain. I like to keep a balance between my relationships with the two brains. While seceding I like to write other pieces, usually just for myself, and mainly poetry. Creativity has a free rein during this down time, and my internal editor takes a vacation. I think this step is one of the most critical in my process as it allows both, equally important, writing contributors in my head to recharge for a while. If one gets overworked, she becomes burned out and will not function to its fullest ability. Seceding is like giving the critical brain a three day weekend.

Step #5—Reconvening

This step occurs when my paper and I come back together after a few days apart. My outlook toward the piece is fresh and more optimistic than it would have been had we never separated. Time apart helps me avoid becoming bitter toward the paper and dreading picking it back up. It's sort of like the way I feel after I've been away from my boyfriend for a weekend. Because we see each other every day, if I'm gone for a few days it helps me appreciate his face even more the next time I see it. A few days away from an essay allows me time to focus on other school or personal issues for a while. My attitude about and interest in the paper gets rejuvenated.

If I have written the paper for a class, this is the stage when my classmates or teacher will critique it. If that's the case, then I will most likely repeat steps #2 through #4 in making future drafts of the paper, or for as long as it takes me to reach the final ING step.

Step #6—Gleaming

This is my moment of triumph when I hold my final paper in hand and smile. All my daydreaming, scheming, transcribing and deleting, seceding, and reconvening have produced a product of which I'm proud. It's my favorite

stage, though it's also a fleeting one. The gleam lasts as long as the positive feedback endures. When the negative comments or suggestions start coming in from classmates or teachers, the process begins all over again.

Sharing Ideas

- What are your steps of ING? Where do Rebecca's general writing process and your own (or your writing group's) converge and diverge?
 - Put Rebecca's chapter and Nathan Timm's chapter (Part III) in dialogue (as they were when they wrote these as part of the same course). How do they seem similar or different as writers? Again, compare their reported advice/processes with your own.
 - If you're not sure how best to characterize your process, keep a journal through your next entire paper draft. Use this in one of two ways: to write a process narrative like those shared by Amanda McCorquodale and Scott Arkin, other classroom authors in this book, or to illustrate your own process in a narrative modeled on Rebecca's.
 - Not all writers compose in the same manner every time they write. Argue with Rebecca's observations. For what types of writing or what writing situations might her process be less than effective? How will her process need to be translated for an essay exam, for instance?
 - Describe your actual scene of writing. Now, create an ideal scene—if you could design the very best writing environment for yourself, what would it look like, who would be there? Inside or outside? What furnishings, what technologies? Alone or with others? Justify your choices; describe in some detail.
 - Draw some parallels between this author's advice and the advice offered by other chapter authors. Is Rebecca Bybel's scheming the same or different from Amy Hodges' invention (Part II)? How does her deleting stage connect to revision as discussed by Toby Fulwiler (Part II)?
 - Make up your own terms for the steps of the writing process that you generally follow. Share with classmates and develop your own class-negotiated descriptions of what you do when you compose.
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