

**becoming reader**    *meghan mcnealy*  
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**foreword to**  
*becoming reader*

**W**hen we write, we often chew for hours, refraining from the swallow, the digestion, the expulsion. You take the bits in, roll them around on your tongue, and begin to identify the grapefruit, the coconut, the cardamom. It does feel good to chew, to meddle words in mouth and push them into cheeks for holding. When we read our own work, we ask ourselves to swallow and to encounter the traces of what was once in mouth. When we read our own work, we encounter what was once inside of us, and if it does not match the content of our desires, we turn away. We are reminded only of chewing. Reading is having slowly swallowed. You develop a palate, and you learn to like what works. You develop a taste for what nourishes you. You become reader.

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## becoming reader

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The final stage of our writing process is the integral moment of becoming, of morphing or transforming *from* the writer and back *into* the reader. Reading is the Other of writing, perhaps the opposite, yet also that which contains writing, which requires and allows for writing to exist. The completion of the writing process is reading, becoming the reader, experiencing our own work and owning, really knowing the text: "...[T]he text that contents, fills, grants euphoria; the text that comes from culture and does not break with it, is linked to a comfortable practice of reading" (Barthes 14).

To understand this completion, this "finishedness" of the text, is a tricky thing. Have we not been reading through the text all along, fixing and moving and pouring out since the first moments of the brainstorming? When can we call the text *done enough to read it*? Putting the

pen down. Taking off the writer-face, and sitting down with a text, a new text, just finished, just for us to read! Editing is done now; text is assembled and is *ready* to be *read*. When we read our own work, we allow ourselves to understand what we meant, to see where we meant something else, perhaps, or to inspire ourselves with a new idea completely, a new voice, structure, meaning, or practice. We see our ideas as they have fit themselves together into an entirety, a wholeness. When we write for a particular audience, we are testing the work by reading it, interrogating the words at their connections before any other reader gets the chance to do so, knocking on the wall of this work we have constructed, trusting the solidity, comfortable, knowing.

Becoming the reader of our own work is the way we get to know the work, the real work, the culmination of every step of the process, every moment



from revision, switching and changing, re-writing, pausing and thinking; this piece of text that we have created is the story of that process. Only we can understand that, and we can only understand it when we read the text. The writing, the whole process and the text itself, is an extension of ourselves. Each word and phrase is determined by our voice; we must know this voice and be proud of it. Reading is taking ownership of a text; we project ourselves onto any text we read, and that text paints itself back onto us; we form relationships with a text when we read it. The effect of forming this relationship with a text that we have written is astoundingly important, phenomenally vital, and stupendously powerful. This is true no matter what type of writing we are referring to, always. In order to come full circle in our writing process, we must make time to converse with, analyze, investigate, critique, and question (read: *read*) the text we have created. All of the writing we do is our own, and reading our work gives us the freedom to keep going, to plunge deeper into our inquiry and expression. Reading our

work gives us the ability to understand our processes and practices at every step of each piece of writing, as well as the chain that each of those texts creates.

Once we have become reader of our work, it is likely to be beneficial to seek out a new reader, for the text to be read by new eyes, like a piece of music played on a different instrument. Tutors in the Writing Center are thrilled to read any piece of writing that happens upon them, but for them, *tutoring* does not mean just *proofreading*. Proofreading is a specific act, a special one, the final moments of the writing process, the readiness of the piece, and is most important when enacted by the writer. Tutors are interested in working with writers in a way that will support them in their whole process and in the particular stage they might be in. The proofreading stage could be very brief, perhaps minutes before the paper is due, or it could take a while, revisiting our lines and our words; it may even lead to discussion and conversation about the ideas and work as a

whole. Often, a tutor might read our work to us. Hearing our work read by another voice is a great way to get a sense of how our writing translates to another person, and how the writing *feels* when another person is sensing our voice, emphasis, and tone in the work.

The most important thing is that we read our writing, that we know it, hear it, sense it, sign it, reference it, remember it, and step away from it, look at it from a very different angle and become inspired by it.

#### Works Cited:

Barthes, Roland. *The Pleasure of the Text*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1975. Print.