



HOW TO NOT GIVE UP WRITING

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I was always frustrated with writing. That really bothered me because I wanted to be a writer. I wanted to express my good ideas, but it wasn't happening with writing. I hated high school, so I avoided writing for the three years I spent there. In community college, I struggled through essays. I passed English Composition I and tested out of English Composition II, but I was yet to be satisfied with anything I wrote. The quarter before I graduated I was in an honors-level class. I had to write a research paper. A couple of days after I handed it in, my professor asked me if I knew how to write a college-level essay. I didn't know if I did, but judging by his question, I figured I didn't. He sighed and gave me a B-.

Outside of school, I was done with college-level essays. I worked on some fiction that I always imagined writing. It was hard at first. I never wanted to write. I was always putting it off. I had to force myself to start and I spent months writing before I went back to reread. It all sucked. I started over and rewrote the first 70 pages of the novel. I reread it again, and it still sucked. My writing sucked.

When I came back to school at Evergreen, I wanted to give writing another shot. I was excited and intrigued by the Writing Center. I stopped by a couple of times and asked some broad questions about writing, hoping I would find the key to writing well. I was given a copy of *Inkwell*, which I read, also looking for this key.

Now, a couple of years later, I'm excited to write my own article for *Inkwell*. When I was thinking about what to write, I remembered the frustrations I had with writing, and the hopes I had placed on *Inkwell*. I thought about helpful writing techniques I could share. I considered writing about basic essay structure. Ironically, I got stuck. I couldn't finish that article. I couldn't figure out how to explain what helped me get comfortable with writing.

I was looking through the *Inkwell* I was given on my first visit to the Writing Center, but I couldn't really find any articles telling me exactly how to write. What the articles *did* show me is that everyone has a different way of taking ideas out of their head and putting them on paper. You need to discover what steps get your ideas out. It takes a bit of self-reflection. I realized that writing is a process, and so is learning to write.

Writing doesn't usually look presentable until late in the game. It isn't fair to judge a piece of writing without taking into account what stage it is at. Each step has its place.

Writing starts before you even sit down to write. Coming up with ideas, researching, studying, and just plain thinking: these are all part of prewriting. Even with great ideas and research, I feel I can't sit down to write a draft. Some people find it helpful to simply start writing; I usually need to organize ideas and see how to put them together. After that, I can finally produce a draft. This can be the most embarrassing part, because it looks like it is trying to be writing, but isn't developed yet. It is a first draft. I can let it look bad. I can take risks.

An unrefined first draft is not a reflection on me as a writer. This draft can be revised. I can organize these ideas and make them clear. Would they make sense to someone else? Do these ideas flow like a mixtape? When I get these ideas lined up, then I can work on the words. Do these words express my ideas? I hang out here. I work on it all I want. Draw in the details, tighten up the corners. Then I can do all that spell-checking and grammar stuff. I don't even let myself do that until I think I am done. Proofreading, grammar, and checking spelling is important, but not while I'm still working on ideas or tuning my words.

I struggled before because I was giving up writing when I wasn't practiced enough. It was just like when I was a kid and wanted to learn to play the electric guitar. I couldn't play any Def Leppard songs after a month, so I gave up. I didn't understand that gaining skill requires a continuous learning process. I was giving up in the middle, when it is okay for my writing to still be developing.

Applying a process to my writing changed the way I looked at it. For my college papers, I concentrated more on organizing the ideas, and that helped me to recognize the use of introductory paragraphs, theses, and conclusions—all things that used to make me feel uncomfortable. For my novel, I needed to shape what writing I had already put down. The ideas were there and fine, but the wording could be arranged to sound better.

Learning to write is hard to explain. But by understanding the process involved, I could figure out where I needed to grow and what parts of my writing weren't working for me. I could focus on growing strong where I felt weak. If I could make small parts of my writing better, overall I'd become a better writer.

Even now, having written quite a few pieces I am very proud of, it is hard for me to believe I am a writer. Sometimes I will get stuck on a piece, like I did on the original version of this article. It is times like those I revert back to the idea that I can't write. I get through because I believe that everyone is a writer, and I am no exception.