

Writing Workshop Presentation: Writing on a Specific Topic

Linda Shamoon, March 24, 2006

1. When writing on a particular project, it is common to:

- Encounter blocks
- Get buried in details
- Feel writing anxiety
- When facing writing challenges, notice other options of how to approach writing
- Two cognitive ways to approach writing (high anxiety vs. plan-full)
- Positive cognitive approach depends on confidence and experience in writing

2. It is useful to talk about High Anxiety Writers vs. Others

- Inexperienced writers tend to have a lot of anxiety about writing
 - ⇒ Have negative feelings, experiences and achievements around writing
 - ⇒ Avoidant behavior re writing (avoid resources and opportunities to write)
 - ⇒ Wait until last minute with minimum resources; then write abundantly & quickly
 - ⇒ No time to revise and organize
 - ⇒ Work only with surface features (get 1 sentence just right; polish up words & sentences)
 - ⇒ Avoid big ideas and overview
 - ⇒ Lack writing repertoires (only see little chunks of writing process)
 - ⇒ Only engage editing repertoires
 - ⇒ Invoke idiosyncratic and contradictory rules
- Experienced and productive writers often have less anxiety about writing
 - ⇒ Spend a lot of time planning, reading, thinking
 - ⇒ Get to know topic, details, thoughts, patterns,
 - ⇒ Take note of particular way people write and talk about issues
 - ⇒ Sink into one's own voice about topic
 - ⇒ When ready, slip into own writing
 - ⇒ Have a flexible plan for writing that can lead to more discovery
 - ⇒ Let text emerge that has some shape and can take productive form
 - ⇒ Share draft with others for feedback re hearing the line of thought:
 - * Ask: Is it engaging? Is it enough to keep the reader interested?
 - ⇒ Take feedback and own determination and move to complete project

3. Need 2 kinds of support:

- Circle of writers who meet regularly with emotional support
- Find productive readers of written drafts
 - ⇒ notice highlights and big picture directions seen in the writing
 - ⇒ Minimize fine-tuning and over-editing the writing

4. Dr. Shamoon shared a writing scenario that was initially presented by Dr. L. Bloom, a writing specialist in Connecticut

- Fictitious name and case used to depict a challenging academic writing situation
 - ⇒ "Sarah" got job as faculty member based on dissertation strength

- ⇒ Sarah had not completed last chapter of dissertation that was thus far brilliantly written
 - ⇒ Two years later the last chapter was still not written
 - ⇒ Sarah struggled to find the time to write (correcting, lecturing, meetings)
 - ⇒ She tried to keep track of the current literature re her project
 - ⇒ It made her own project seem miniscule and trivial; she was overwhelmed
 - ⇒ Roberta says that Sarah could have had many more urgent demands on her time
 - ⇒ There was less structure and deadlines for her projects and more requests from others
 - ⇒ Padma says it is too easy to get called into different directions away from a project focus
- Dr. Bloom challenged Sarah to:
 - ⇒ Pare down her goals
 - ⇒ Take narrowest slice of project that would work
 - ⇒ Back away from extra work
 - ⇒ Focus on own projects
- Dr. Shamoan offered suggestions:
 - ⇒ Professionals need to narrow down; they already have a large base
 - ⇒ In contrast, students often need to broaden as they have less experience
 - ⇒ Don't let sources and references over-shadow one's own project
 - ⇒ Harmful to be overly generous with committees and helping others
 - ⇒ Focus on writing as a central priority (like exercise and diet)
 - ⇒ Some disciplines present greater demands for service (nursing, social disciplines)
 - ⇒ Engage in time management that privileges what we need to write
 - ⇒ Do not engage in excessive editing
 - ⇒ Gain more control over time
 - ⇒ Take stock of roles and values
 - ⇒ Minimize how much you are spending time meeting others' expectations
 - ⇒ Focus more on addressing your own goals
 - ⇒ Find a tie in with your writing that keeps it involved with the rest of your work
 - ⇒ Do alternate kinds of writing (research, applications, public interest, manuals)
 - ⇒ Broaden and free-up writing process and achievements
 - ⇒ Different forms of writing can feed back into each other
 - ⇒ Outside writing can come back and improve our research writing
- In Dr. Bloom's writing scenario, "Sarah" was able to finally complete her dissertation
 - ⇒ Took Dr. Bloom's suggestions and focused on getting the last chapter finished

Dr. Shamoan ended by opening up the floor to input from us about challenges in our writing