

Eleventh Grade Writers on the Topic of Writing
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Throughout the few years I've been teaching, my students have taught me much more about writing than I've ever taught them. When I get too caught up in MLA style documentation or topic sentences, they are always there to remind me that writing is about expression. When I get wrapped around the details, a student always comes along and refreshes my outlook with the glow that comes from writing something that turns on a light inside. When I get too focused on myself, students never fail to remind me that it's all about them. I've put together a few of the more articulate pieces my students have written on the topic of writing. I hope they will be as humbling for you as they have been for me. All excerpts are presented "as is;" I did no editing of the students' writing.

Anson Poe, in the introduction to his multi-genre paper.

To the reader of this paper:

Well, you may have already read my research paper on the many evils of the Ford Motor Company. It was pretty darned serious. The research paper leaves almost no room for creative freedom, which is what I'm all about. Writing research papers gets me all worked up inside. In short, they really bum me out. I admit quite readily that I do not enjoy writing seriously in the least. It sure doesn't stop me from trying, I mean, after all, I do want to get something out of classes and eventually get around to the whole graduating, going through college, getting a job, and settling down business, but I sure dislike being serious about everything.

That's one of the problems with the world today, no one can take a joke anymore. ... My research paper was serious. I fought hard with myself not to include any Ford jokes while I was writing it (Friggin' Only Runs Downhill. Ha ha). Now, I get to vent. ... Enjoy this paper, all of you Ford haters out there, and to the rest of you, good luck, and keep on pushing.

Nora Kischer-Browne, in her writing process paper

I have had both good and bad experiences with writing, but I consider myself lucky in that most of my experiences have been good ones. Those include liking the written word in and of itself as a medium for expression and imagination, appreciating it as a subject and medium for humor, and getting feedback from the people who read my works.

The bad experiences are mostly comprised if run-ins with deadlines and the rigidity of scholastic writing. I tend to be a talkative, expressive, emotional person who fully appreciates the occasional perversity of rationality and its benefits otherwise. I am hell-bent on self-improvement, which is occasionally a detriment to my performance. ... Due

to these factors, I tend to approach most writing as a performance art rather than a hermit's occupation.

I write because I have to for school, or I feel a story needs telling or that a concept needs explaining, and that an audience might find it interesting or enjoy the tale. ... How I write depends on what the writing style is. Fiction I approach with great gusto, poetry with a need for expression, and scholastic papers with, admittedly, caution.

I brainstorm before I write, keeping mental note of good ideas. ... This creates a mental "tree" of ideas, and to make a first draft, I merely prune this tree and perhaps let the budding tips grow a bit more. To identify needed revisions I use a word-processor and edit as I go, for the most part. I have an internal watchdog, so to speak, that whines whenever a grammatical, ambiguity, or spelling error is detected. My revision process involves tossing this little doggie a bone.

Jessica Bertram, in her writing process paper.

At home and school I have a lot of things going on. I am always somewhere, doing something, and so I never really get a whole lot of time to work on homework. When I am assigned to write papers and I have to sit down, I *really* have to sit down. I won't start a paper until I know I have a few hours to work on it, because once I start I want to get as far as I can with it. I have a lot to do. I am an athlete at school, I participate in drama, and I am also a student. At home, I am a family member, and I am given a lot of responsibility that [I] sometimes don't want to be given.

When I get to choose topics on my own, I choose topics that interest me. I write in my own journals, and I write or have written some stories. No one has read what I have written, and no one but me will most likely ever see what I have written. ... Most of the time I write to clear my head of things I would like to say or things I would like to do. When I am upset or sad I write just to get whatever is on my mind out in the open without having to actually talk to someone about it. I like to write when I am comfortable. I don't like to let other people read anything I write, just because I don't want to know their opinion about my work when they don't know anymore about writing than I do.

Audrey Hesse, in her writing process paper.

The deadline is tomorrow and my piece of paper is blank with only my name at the top. My name is Audrey Hesse, and when I'm pressed for time I procrastinate. Although this is a hypothetical situation, it is very realistic. My writing style varies under different circumstances. Sometimes it is dull, without a purpose, and occasionally it is thoughtful.

My writing suffers when my time frame diminishes. First off, I have no passion or voice in my compositions. I frankly hate critical or personal response papers. When a person reads one of my papers like this, they are left with a dull feeling.

Anjelica Crawford, in her writing process paper.

The biggest influence on my writing style and process is my personality—who I am, and the way I think. I am not a strategic or organized thinker. When I write, I simply write down things that I think of in the order in which I think of them. ...

My past writing experiences influence my writing also. In the past I have never had a particularly bad writing experience, which is why I am positive about writing and have a good attitude towards it.

I have written many different styles of writing, such as research papers, biographies, poetry, songs, and short stories. I mainly write research papers and biographies because they are assigned in school, but the other types of writing I do are for recreational purposes. I enjoy writing in my free time because it can be relaxing. Because I enjoy [writing], the end product tends to be better than if I didn't like to write.

Katie Hoodjer, in her personal essay

I have been sitting here for twenty minutes, and there's not a word on my paper! Well, that is if you don't count my name. We were assigned to write a journal today. This journal could be anything our little hearts desired. As my peers sit around me with 1...2...and even 3...pages completed. I sit here, with my name on a vacant sheet of paper.

As I sit here, attentive and prepared to write, not a single phrase to base my paper on comes to mind. I could write about thunderstorms, smoking, or what if it really did rain cats and dogs. But no, I have writer's block. The only thing that comes to mind is: BAM you're dead, BAM a dog strikes you, or BAM the thunder rolls....the end. What sort of class is this anyway? The teacher isn't supposed to give you freedom. I need structure and order in what I write.

Freedom may not be that bad of a thought after all. Freedom helps us learn how to become more responsible and become more skilled at writing. Plus, at least I'm not stuck writing about the mind-numbing life of some dead guy or the lifespan of green grass.

That's it! What does freedom mean to me? What an amazing topic for a paper. People might actually be fascinated, and I would have the chance to enlighten them with my outlook on the topic. That is a wonderful subject and cures my writer's block. I may now commence my journal writing experience. BAM you're free...the end.

Oh no, it has happened again and the dark cloud of writer's block covers my head. I can't believe I do not have anything to say concerning freedom. Now, with the hours ticking away, only my name remains on my paper.

Writer's block is a horrible and frustrating feeling! I have a first draft of my paper due tomorrow and I have the feeling of failure as I try to consider a topic to write on. Maybe if I use 75-point font no one will notice my lack of imagination.

As I sit here. Yet stressing about the assignment due tomorrow, the thought of my yet-to-think-of journal topic lingers in my mind. This should be as easy as one, two, three...but it isn't. What could I write about? My life crisis as of this moment?

Jessica Bertram in her writing process paper.

Within my own writing process, you will most likely not find it to be a straightforward path of writing. The road that I write along is very tumultuous. An easy way to describe what tumultuous means is, a bumping – bouncy – winding right next to the Cliffside of California – hope that you have your seatbelt fastened – don't look down in to the abyss of darkness below – writing style.

Journals are the easiest way to write, you can write anything in a journal. I have written poems, short stories, beginnings of a novel, sketches, and journal entries as well. I write because I love creating other worlds, places for myself and other people to go. ...

I try to organize my thoughts by using webs or outlines. Unfortunately, I somehow forget about all that I organized. I end up just going off the top of my head. It's like I have my outline in my head, and anything I write leads to the next thing on my outline. When I write outlines, my brain seems to think that way is just absurd, and horribly boring, the straight path to writing. My brain likes adventures and curves that create a different pattern in the stereotyped stories of the day. My brain enjoys a good maze.

There really is not a pattern to my writing, literally, mazes, and I am the only one who knows the way out. Sometimes, I even get stuck. ...

I like there to be noise, people talking. I usually turn on my radio and have the TV going. I don't like using computers unless I have to when writing. I love the feeling of a pencil in hand and paper in lap. Sometimes I can't write as much as I want as fast as I want, so I can be behind. Much like a traffic jam. It goes, but much too slow for the time you have.