1 Writing Processes and Differentiated Instruction

Many people, including teachers, hold two major misconceptions about writing. The first is that writing is a *deliberate, linear process.* The second is that, because of the first misconception, writers should write in a deliberate, linear manner. Teachers who hold these misconceptions must teach their students to write in this way so that the students become successful writers. Quite the opposite result occurs. This narrow, one-dimensional view of how writing happens hampers instruction and prevents many students from learning to write well. Thus, at the outset, it makes sense to set the record straight about writing processes—in the plural form of the word—and about how a multidimensional view of writing can lay a foundation for differentiating writing instruction, especially for students who are visual, auditory, or kinesthetic learners.

Visual, auditory, and *kinesthetic* are the identifiers that I will use throughout this book to designate learning styles that are dominant for certain students. Most researchers also would note that a student's preferred learning style, or styles, may be situation- or topic-specific. In other words, the student may be an effective linguistic learner when confronted with certain information but may learn more effectively using visual or auditory approaches when confronted with other information. Therefore, these identifiers should be viewed as cues to guide the teacher in thinking about instruction and in differentiating instructional strategies to help students work to their strengths, but not as learning labels for students.

ASSEMBLY-LINE WRITING

Linear and *deliberate* may not be commonplace descriptors, but they also are useful. These terms describe how many people think about writing, even though they may use other words. *Linear* refers to the act in which the writer starts (or should start) with an idea, takes pen in hand or taps on a keyboard, and winds up with that very idea set down in a predetermined form—as a poem, a story, an essay, or some other product. *Deliberate* implies that the writer does not (and should not) stray from the path to this product destination. The idea must never change, nor should its intended form. An essay may not transform itself into a story or a poem; it must remain an essay. This is assembly-line writing. Adopting this view of how writing happens forces the writer into the role of an assembly-line worker, one who takes an idea and moves it along the line through a series of preset actions that will result in an acceptable product.

Does this process work? Can a writer produce a successful piece of writing in this manner? The answer to both questions, of course, is yes. For some writing and for some writers, this is the most effective process to use. But it will not work for all writing or all writers. It may not work even for most writing or most writers. And it will not serve all students when used as the philosophy undergirding writing instruction, especially when the students are visual, auditory, or kinesthetic learners.

In the past 25 years, the writing process in most classrooms from elementary school through college has become institutionalized. Few teachers have escaped the drill that writing should be taught as a process, and the steps in this process are well known: prewriting, drafting, editing, revising, rewriting—with a few variations. This approach was proposed as a more productive alternative to teaching writing by merely assigning a topic and then correcting (or beating until it bled) the student's written work with the notion that the student would then take the piece back and improve it. A great deal of ink was spilled over the distinction between the old instructional mode of assigning writing (and leaving it to the student to figure out a successful process for achieving a good result) and the new mode of teaching writing as a process.

Although process writing, as it came to be called, was proposed with the notion of having flexibility built in, some teachers and textbook publishers leaped at the chance to codify the process, inadvertently rendering it rigid and rote. The writing process is a formula, and the formula works reasonably well for students when they are expected to produce formulaic writing, often the kind that is expected on standardized tests. In the current atmosphere of high-stakes testing, this instructional course of action can be seductive. After all, it is difficult to argue with rote writing if teaching

students to write in this manner works to ensure test success. On the other hand, rigidly conceived process-writing instruction garners criticism as yet another form of teaching to the test, something that curriculum theorists and practitioners agree tends almost always to narrow the curriculum and to reduce real learning.

TEACHING WRITING FOR MEANING

The effective teacher knows that spelling taught by rote is useful only for passing the test on a Friday. Indeed, an all-too-common lament is that students do not spell the same words correctly in their written work that they do spell correctly on a weekly test. There is little automatic transference of spelling skill from the one situation to the other. Transference skills must be deliberately taught. Some good rote spellers may become spelling bee champions. But most students lose words learned by rote unless they take other actions to make the words useful, such as defining them, using them in meaningful sentences and stories, talking about them, and so on. The process of constructing new knowledge, along with the ability to use that knowledge in various new contexts, simply takes more than mere memorization. The same can be said for writing.

Students who learn the typical process-writing formula can reproduce it when called on to do so for a writing test. Doing so will achieve success if that is what the test requires. But not all tests require only that. The formula will not produce successful writers per se if success is defined as the ability to take an idea and truly work with it to produce a thoughtful, original piece of writing—in other words, to write for meaning. Passing a test is important, but the larger goal is learning to write well. When it is reached, passing the test becomes automatic.

An apt characterization of deliberate, linear writing is *transcription,* the simple transfer of an idea from the writer's mind directly onto the page. Transcription is a useful skill, and it should be taught. But it is not all that should be taught. Transcription is to writing what addition is to computation, a tiny (albeit important) part of it. Real writing—complex, meaningful writing—is akin to calculus. I will argue throughout this book that all students can become better writers if teachers attend to writing instruction as multidimensional and nonformulaic. Even students who seem to be natural writers, who learn effortlessly how to write well, will be better served by instructional approaches that also accommodate the visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning styles of students who are less likely to be natural writers.

Only some writing is best created in a plodding, straight-line sort of way. And only some writers should write in this way, and then only for

specific purposes. Visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learners need to approach writing with the understanding that their initial idea likely will change shape as they write. And all writers can benefit from the creative wrestling that such a premise entails. Ideas are malleable and slippery, shape-shifters that mutate as we think about them. The most effective writing processes are thoughtful and open, admitting and embracing the slipperiness of ideas. The most successful writing usually results after trials, errors, and corrections.

An idea with which a writer begins may look very different by the time the writer finally sets it down on paper. The writer may try out one way of writing about the idea, have a new thought, and go back to start again. The process may include rethinking, replanning, crossing-out, and rewriting in any number of ways. The student writer, like the successful adult writer, must be free to shape and reshape the work repeatedly if that is what is needed to produce an effectively written piece. And even this final product may be more like a pencil sketch than a bronze sculpture. An idea on paper is still an idea: still malleable, still slippery. Any number of writers take up pieces that they supposedly have finished and rework them weeks, months, or even years later. Walt Whitman was notorious for tinkering with his published poems before they were reprinted in later editions. During his lifetime, *Leaves of Grass* was perpetually in progress. It went through eight editions between the original publication in 1855 and the final one in 1891, issued shortly before Whitman's death the following year.

Allowing and encouraging students to explore all the byways on the road to a product is contrary to the notion that writing is a deliberate, linear process. But it is more often the way in which real writers work, and the goal of writing instruction should be to produce students who can write as real writers do, not merely as automatons who can pass tests. Real writers also can pass tests—and they can do much more.

LEARNING STYLES AND DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION

Stanford University professor Eliot Eisner (1983) points out that teachers who truly master the art of teaching are those willing to build a continuously expanding repertoire of instructional strategies in order to teach all learners most effectively. Teachers who understand the dynamics of learning styles can tailor instruction that will bring out the best efforts of students learning to write. The strategies explored in the chapters that follow focus on visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning styles—in other words, styles related to sensory stimuli.

Education consultant Marilee Sprenger (2003) writes of "differentiation through sensory pathways," using "visual," "auditory/verbal," and "kinesthetic/tactile" as descriptors of ways (paths) by which students take in information or process sensory stimuli. Scientific theorists believe that the human brain differentiates such stimuli to understand them. She explains:

> Each sense has a passageway. The thalamus sorts information and sends it to the top layer of the brain, the neocortex. The neocortex has an area for each type of sensory stimuli. The visual cortex processes visual information, the auditory cortex processes sounds, and the somatic cortex processes touch. The information from each is then sent to the rhinal cortex. Here the senses are put back together into one representation. (p. 35)

This basic biomechanical information is helpful in understanding why providing stimuli according to a student's dominant sensory pathway can affect learning.

Brain theory, however, is only one of many learning theories that point in the same general direction—toward identifying students' preferred learning style, or styles, and then structuring teaching to match. Educator and author Gayle Gregory (2005) is particularly helpful in identifying a number of theoretical and philosophical formulations that can help teachers understand the need to differentiate instruction according to students' learning styles from various points of view. Gregory points to the work of researchers in psychology and education such as Carl Jung, Anthony Gregorc, David Kolb, Bernice McCarthy, Don Lowry, Richard Strong, Harvey Silver, and J.R. Hanson.

Gregory also identifies Guild and Garger's (1985) four modes of thinking—cognition, conceptualizing, affect, and behavior—as a useful framework that teachers can use when considering how to differentiate instruction to meet students' learning needs. These modes can each be characterized by a question:

- *Cognition:* How do I know?
- *Conceptualization:* How do I think?
- *Affect:* How do I decide?
- *Behavior:* How do I act?

According to Gregory, "In most cases, learners will have a dominant style within a mode that is visual, auditory, or tactile/kinesthetic" (p. 25).

Gregory also links differentiation of instruction to theories of intelligence, including Art Costa and Bena Kallick's (2000) "12 intelligent behaviors,"

Howard Gardner's (1983, 1999) "multiple intelligences," and Robert Sternberg's (1996) "triarchic intelligence model." Within Costa and Kallick's models of behavior (persistence, questioning, metacognition, and others) reside the ways in which students go about persisting, questioning, and so on, some of them being visual, auditory, and kinesthetic. Similarly, Gardner's intelligences specifically speak to ways of processing stimuli in intelligences that are verbal/linguistic, musical/rhythmic, visual/spatial, and bodily/kinesthetic. And finally, visual, auditory, and kinesthetic (and other) learning-style preferences reside within Sternberg's delineations of practical, analytical, and creative intelligences.

This overview barely touches on the myriad underpinnings of learning-style theories. Even so, it should be easy to see that if teachers want all students to learn how to write well, it will be necessary to develop a differentiated or multidimensional approach to teaching writing processes—again with an emphasis on there being more than one process—that will match students' learning styles.

STIMULUS, PROCESS, AND PRODUCT

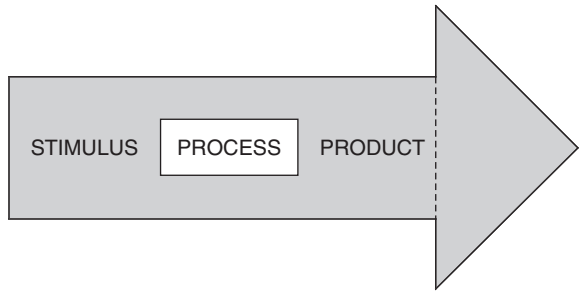
Let's go back to writing instruction in particular. A helpful way to think about writing processes is to consider how writing really happens. Conceptually, there are three phases: stimulus, process, and product. Figure 1.1 shows these phases as a sort of arrow. The head of the arrow is marked off by a dotted line to indicate that the continuum of phases may or may not repeat as the writer develops the written work.

While this three-phase model is neater than most writing, it provides a general idea of how the act of writing usually proceeds. What actually happens as the writer moves through each phase reflects the idiosyncrasies of the writer. These idiosyncrasies embody the learning styles of the writer.

Stimulus

Writers do not produce writing out of thin air, and ideas do not arise from spontaneous generation. Students write on topics they are assigned or in response to thought, conversation, observation, reading, playing, or some other initial spark that lights the creative fire. I use the term *creative* here in its broad sense, meaning the urge to create a piece of writing in some form, not necessarily creative writing as it usually is characterized. Such a stimulus may be anything but esoteric. Students write in response

Figure 1.1 Stimulus, Process, and Product



SOURCE: An early version of this figure was included in Walling, D. R. (1987). *A Model for Teaching Writing: Process and Product.* Fastback 256. Bloomington, IN: Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation. Used with permission.

to teachers' assignments, just as adult news reporters, columnists, and business writers write in response to assignments made by their supervisors. The student's assignment may come in the context of a classroom project, or it may be a test prompt.

Students who feel drawn to writing will respond to self-selected stimuli. They may write notes to one another, letters and e-mail to family and friends, stories, poems, and scripts. They may keep a diary or journal. These students will benefit from multidimensional writing instruction, but they are already headed for writing success. They have demonstrated self-motivation to write. A multidimensional instructional approach will give them additional tools for expression that will enhance their ability to write.

On the other hand, some of their peers will not be stimulated to write. They may be moved to respond to stimuli in other ways, such as by drawing, singing, dancing, or acting. These are the visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learners who are the focus of this book. If these students are to learn how to write well, the teacher must meet the challenge of finding ways of helping them use their preferred learning styles, which may not include written expression.

Process

Another way of stating that last point is that the teacher must help visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learners use their talents and interests in ways that support the act of writing. The process phase can be divided into mental and physical components. If we were to characterize the shaft of the

arrow in Figure 1.1 as a kind of highway with two lanes, one mental and one physical, then we might also envision that the writer/driver on this highway from stimulus to product should be free to change lanes at will.

The mental component includes activities such as brainstorming, analyzing, rehearsing, organizing, and evaluating. The physical component includes activities such as writing or keyboarding, acting out, talking to oneself or others, moving about, drawing, or other physical responses to the stimulus and to the mental component of process. The writer/driver on this highway might even straddle the line, so to speak, as in stream-of-consciousness writing, when thoughts are recorded as they occur to the writer.

Much of the later chapters of this book will be devoted to exploring how teachers can use a variety of instructional strategies to help visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learners—and all learners—fully explore processes that will result in the development of successful writing.

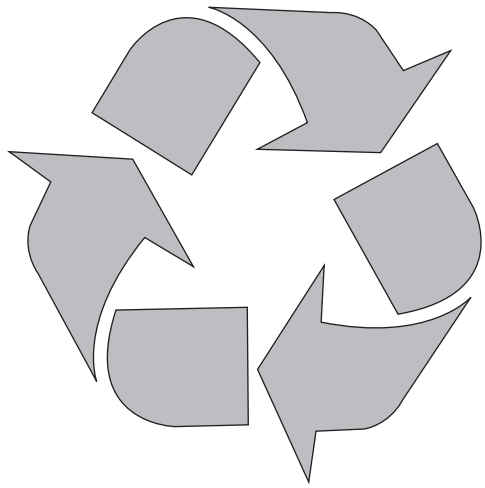
Product

The term *product* in this context means a piece of writing, not necessarily a finished composition. The product may be merely notes or random jottings. It may be an outline or a list of ideas, a word map or graphic organizer, a diagram or graph. Whatever form it takes, this piece of writing is the tangible, recorded response to the process phase. Indeed, if the process has been captured visually, that visual component can be described. If the process has been recorded aurally, then it can be transcribed.

If the product is a finished piece of writing—by whatever agreed-on standard constitutes *finished*—then that is the end of the highway, the dotted line on the arrow shaft in Figure 1.1. If the product, such as a graphic organizer or an outline, is an intermediate step, then the product continues as the arrow tip, pointing to a new stimulus for the next cycle of development. As this recycling occurs, Figure 1.1 expands to look more like the standard recycling symbol (see Figure 1.2). Each intermediate product becomes the stimulus for another process component, which leads to another product. This product also may be either intermediate, continuing the cycle, or final.

Writers, whether they are students or mature writers, will develop the final piece of writing through fewer or more cycles, depending on the processes they choose (or are encouraged) to employ and the nature of the final product they want to create. And so at some point the recycling will end—unless, like Walt Whitman, the writer chooses to revisit a work even after publication.

Figure 1.2 Recycling



LEARNING STYLES SELF-ASSESSMENT

One way to set the stage for multidimensional writing instruction is to help students gain a sense of their preferred learning styles. Students who struggle with writing often are not aware that they may be approaching the act of writing in ways that are counterproductive. Their teachers may be frustrated as well because they do not know how to help them in their struggles. For example, if a student says, "I can't follow an outline. I always think of new things as I write that aren't in my outline," then the student probably is not going to experience success using a strategy that is essentially linear-logical. The simple, but wrong, answer is, "Do a better outline." The outline is not the real problem; using the wrong process strategy is. This student may need to brainstorm a graphic organizer, rather than an outline, as a starting point.

"But," the teacher may protest, "I'm supposed to teach students how to make an outline." Starting with an alternative is not to say that an outline might not be useful to the student or should not be taught, but an outline might be better employed as a way to analyze the organization of a draft later in the writing process. There is no rule that a traditional outline must be used as a starting point. If the teacher's goal is to teach outlining, that goal can still be accomplished by using a formal outline at the revision stage, rather than at the planning stage. (More about this strategy in Chapter 6.)

Figure 1.3 Student Learning Style Self-Assessment

Learning Styles Self-Assessment Inventory

I like to:	*No (0)*	*Sometimes (1)*	*Often (2)*	*Usually (3)*	*Always (4)*
1. keep a journal					
2. write letters or e-mail friends					
3. create sculptures					
4. do math					
5. solve puzzles					
6. make schedules or timelines					
7. listen to music					
8. play an instrument or sing					
9. record sound effects					
10. read and follow maps					
11. write stories or poems					
12. draw maps or house plans					
13. make designs					
14. play chess or checkers					
15. dance					
16. play a team sport					
17. paint or draw pictures					
18. do experiments with plants					
19. knit or weave					
20. work in a group					
21. help friends with problems					
22. tutor a classmate					
23. read books					
24. discuss social issues					
25. give directions					
26. take care of someone					
27. think about my goals					

Figure 1.3 (Continued)

I like to:	*No (0)*	*Sometimes (1)*	*Often (2)*	*Usually (3)*	*Always (4)*
28. cook and prepare meals					
29. write about my life					
30. draw or paint self-portraits					
31. ride a bicycle					
32. grow plants					
33. work in a garden					
34. study animals					
35. go on hikes					
36. act in skits and plays					
37. write music					
38. take care of a pet					
39. go fishing or hunting					
40. sing for myself or others					

Items Keyed to Visual, Auditory, and Kinesthetic Learning Style Categories:
Visual: 3, 5, 10, 12, 13, 14, 17, 30
Auditory: 7, 8, 9, 24, 36, 37, 40
Kinesthetic: 3, 15, 16, 19, 28, 31, 33, 35, 36, 39

Scoring Directions:
To compute the ratings for each category, add together the ratings for each item in the category and divide by the number of items in the category. The higher the average rating, the more likely that a visual, auditory, or kinesthetic intelligence or learning style will influence a student's success.

As teachers think about how to approach writing instruction in ways best suited to visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learners, a useful starting point is some form of student self-assessment of preferred learning styles. Figure 1.3 offers an example that can be used across a broad range of ages and grades, from upper elementary grades through high school.

This learning styles self-assessment inventory is not intended to be rigorously scientific. Rather it is meant to serve as an instructional tool and

Figure 1.4 Self-Assessment Response Form for Young Students

Directions: The teachers should read aloud a selection of the items, from the Learning Styles Self-Assessment Inventory. Students mark their responses by circling a smiley face, indicating whether they dislike, are neutral about, or like the activity. Below is a sample twenty-item response form.

1	☹	😐	☺
2	☹	😐	☺
3	☹	😐	☺
4	☹	😐	☺
5	☹	😐	☺
6	☹	😐	☺
7	☹	😐	☺
8	☹	😐	☺
9	☹	😐	☺
10	☹	😐	☺
11	☹	😐	☺
12	☹	😐	☺
13	☹	😐	☺
14	☹	😐	☺
15	☹	😐	☺
16	☹	😐	☺
17	☹	😐	☺
18	☹	😐	☺
19	☹	😐	☺
20	☹	😐	☺

can be readily adapted to work with younger students or adults. The idea behind using an inventory of this type is that, for students and teachers alike, making activities visible that are associated with how students learn best is educationally valuable. Humans willingly engage in activities they like, and they like those that they are somehow satisfied by, usually because they produce feelings of success or accomplishment. The inventory can be viewed from a general learning perspective or directly associated with visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning styles. (For two other learning-style surveys for students, see Gregory, 2005, pp. 28–33.)

The inventory also can be shortened or lengthened provided that at least the targeted learning-style categories are included. Figure 1.3 shows how to group the items related to visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning styles, as those are the target styles for this book. Other, more adult activities can be substituted in the inventory for work with adult literacy classes, for example. Teachers of younger students may want to shorten or simplify the inventory, and the youngest students might need to have the statements read aloud to them while they circle smiley faces (see Figure 1.4), instead of making check marks.

Using any self-assessment inventory proceeds from the notion that effective teaching requires that students and teachers work as partners. The teacher might determine which students learn better through visual strategies, for example, simply by observing the students in action and carefully analyzing their work. When students become involved in this assessment process, they discover information about their own learning. Such self-knowledge can be empowering, as the most successful students are those who at some point in their schooling take control of their own learning.

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