

# Drafting and Revision

Below are the drafting and revision stages we will be going through in our class for any piece we hope to submit for publication and, more importantly, a grade. There is a bit of flexibility and ambiguity to each stage because there is no perfect formula, no panacea for the illness that infects our initial drafts. Only with patience, diligence, attention to detail, experimentation and some other stuff I'm forgetting about will you get where you want to go with your writing.

Following this list of stages you will find a checklist of items you will need to include or actions you must complete before you can submit a piece of writing to your teacher.

## **Draft 1 – “Just get it out!”**

This draft is written in pen or pencil or the juice of crushed berries you found while scavenging in the woods. It can be written on a piece of notebook paper, a napkin, a scrap of paper, your best friend's spleen, a chunk of bark, in rocks on an exposed hillside or whatever is handy at the moment of inspiration. In this draft, you don't worry about grammar or syntax or style or editing or whether or not that burning smell is the poodle you placed in the oven (“just for a second”) to dry out. This draft is only for you; just get your idea down in writing.

We call this “me-to-me” writing.

## **Draft 2 – “Make it make sense.”**

After you've let that first draft sit for a bit (an hour, a day, a week, 7 to 10 years with time off for good behavior . . . even though you are completely innocent and have no idea whose leg that was in your suitcase or how it got there), this is the draft where you work on any major structural or stylistic flaws in the piece (plot holes, inconsistencies, poorly developed characters, etc.) No need to fine tune, just make sure the piece is fundamentally sound.

As you revise it, consider what you want your piece to do.

This is still essentially “me-to-me” writing.

## **Draft 3 – Make it readable.**

Now type it up and revise the grammar, punctuation, syntax, spelling – all the mechanical stuff that is going to annoy your peer editor because it's just rude to make someone who is doing you a favor trip over all the silly little stumbling blocks that you could have easily cleaned up before you gave it to him. Missing one or two typos is okay, but your piece shouldn't look like it was typed by a monkey who was all thumbs.

This is also the place to think about the flow and coherence/cohesion of your piece. Before you give your piece to your peer editor think about who this piece is for and PUFT it; write down what you want the reader to Picture, Understand, Think, and Feel (and possibly Do). You'll be using this for comparison when you get your peer editor's notes.

In this draft you move from writing to and for yourself to thinking about your first audience: your peer editor. We call this "me-to-u" writing.

**Peer editing occurs here.**

#### **NOTE TO THE PEER EDITOR:**

**Your job is to help the writer get to the next revision/draft. At minimum you should PUFT the piece by writing what you actually Picture, Understand, Feel and Think (and want to Do) while and after reading the piece. You are the first audience and the writer will compare your PUFT with what he was trying to do . . . so be honest – if you don't picture anything, then tell the writer that.**

**Draft 4 – "Here, take my advice, I won't be using it."**

This is where you consider what your peer editors PUFTeD and suggested. (Note that I didn't say friends – your friends are lovely, but they may not be the best editors . . . they may be too kind, you may be too sensitive to their comments, they may be illiterate.) Even if you don't agree with their ideas, maybe you just try them out to see what happens; you can always go back to your previous draft. From talking with your peers you should have some understanding of the emotions, ideas and actions your piece elicits. Are these the emotions, ideas and actions you wanted to elicit (compare your PUFT with theirs)? Are they better than your original intentions? What can you do to enhance these responses? If it isn't clear from your peer editors' comments, go back and ask them.

This drafting stage can be repeated several (2, 3, 70 . . .) times until you figure out what works and what doesn't – and how to fix it – or until you exhaust your supply of peers. Do your best to consider your audience and purpose as you revise. Try to see your writing from their perspective.

We call this "me-to-You" writing. The capital "You" is your teacher. So try and get inside his/her mind (it's a mess in there we know, but do your best.) Ask yourself this question: "What is my teacher likely to ask or tell me about this piece?" Surprise him/her and revise that before s/he sees it!

Once you have done all this it will be time to give your piece to someone who will really tear it apart.

**Teacher editing occurs here.**

## **Draft 5 – “I should just quit!”**

Once you have, with the help of your peers, revised your piece to the point where it is as good as you think it can possibly be, it is time to bring it to a professional. That person would be your teacher. Unbelievable, I know, but these people are trained to help you see what you may not see about your writing and to help you figure out ways to improve it.

Once you’ve gotten feedback from your teacher, ignore it because that guy is way too old and uncool to know anything about decent writing. Besides, you’re an artist, you don’t have to listen to anyone about your art – they can’t judge you. Your art is perfect just the way it is.

And that’s where we get the term “starving artist” and the guy at Starbucks who keeps telling himself it’s just a temporary gig until he figures out what he really wants to do with his art.

So maybe you should listen to your teacher; try out whatever he suggests. Again, you can always return to previous drafts. In this stage it is imperative you realize you are no longer writing just for you, that art is a form of communication and cannot be art if it does not reach an audience.

From here on out you are in “me-to-You” writing land. And even though it has often been said that no piece of writing is ever truly finished, this is the draft you intend to submit for publication – if for no other reason than so you can be done with it long enough to go back to showering, sleeping and eating regularly – so you must go about the business of compulsively revising until you feel secure in the knowledge that what the reader is getting is what you intend for them to get. That can take a heck of a lot of revising, but you’re a writer dammit! And your ideas are worth it.

**Heartbreak and disappoint occurs here . . . unless you are unusually persistent and a little bit lucky.**

## **Draft 6 (optional) – “I will never surrender!”**

If your piece does not get published, try to glean from the responses why it was rejected. Reexamine the publisher’s product(s). What audience do they cater to? In terms of style and content, what types of things do they usually publish? What kinds of writers do they usually work with? Do you have any friends or family members who work there? Of course you’ve already considered these questions before you sent your piece off initially, but sometimes we have to look again to see what we should have seen the first time. And sometimes it helps to put a piece aside for awhile and revisit it later.

If you can’t figure out what needs to be done to your piece to make it more publishable, consult members of the publisher’s intended audience and solicit their feedback. Or consider other venues for publication . . . or getting a real job.

Whatever you do, keep trying. Most professional writers have received more rejection letters than they care to count. Some have even wall-papered whole rooms with them.

## Instructions for Submitting a Final Draft

Before you hand in any piece of writing, you must make sure:

- your final draft is typed.
  - font: 12 pt, Times New Roman
  - spacing: 1.5 for narrative pieces; for poems – 1 space between lines, 2 spaces between stanzas
- your final draft is free of any grammar, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling mistakes that are not stylistic elements of the piece.
- the first page has your name, the date, the assignment, the class, and your teacher's name in the upper left hand corner (each subsequent page should have your last name and the page number in the upper right hand corner).
- your piece has a title at the top of it (**boldface**, 12pt font), four spaces down from the last line of the header.
- you have handed in all drafts (1 – 5, and perhaps several of each) as well as editing notes/evidence of editing. These should be stacked in the order in which they were written with the oldest on the bottom and the most recent on top.
- you include your process reflection paper just below your final draft.
- your pages are stapled together (upper left hand corner).
- present everything as neatly and as organized as possible.