

Composing Styles

Good writers are aware of their writing habits and preferred composing style. They take responsibility for decisions about how to manage their writing process and are flexible: depending on the writing task or situation, they can modify their preferred approach to get the job done whether writing college essays, business memos, collaborative reports, etc.

The Four Composing Styles

Type One: Heavy Planners

Heavy planners usually think about ideas and plan their writing so carefully in their heads that their first drafts are often more like other writers' second or third drafts. As a result, they often spend less time revising than other writers. Some heavy planners write this way because they prefer to; others develop this strategy out of necessity. For example, students who are also working parents may have to steal odd moments at home to work on their writing. They may have to learn to use every opportunity to think about their writing while they drive, eat, or spend time with their family.

Advantages:

1. possess great mental discipline
2. are efficient writers who spend less time drafting and revising than other writers do

Disadvantages:

1. can lose ideas to unexpected interruptions
2. are less likely to benefit from exploration of new ideas that result from extensive drafting and revising

Type Two: Heavy Revisers

Heavy revisers prefer to find out what they want to say through the act of writing itself. When faced with a writing task, they prefer to sit down at a desk or computer and just begin writing. Writing out their ideas in a sustained spurt of activity reassures them that they have something to say and helps them avoid frustration. Heavy revisers typically spend a great deal of time revising their initial drafts. To do so effectively, they must be able to read their work critically and be able to throw out large portions of their first drafts if necessary.

Advantages:

1. are able to write quickly and capture lots of ideas on the page
2. can discover new ideas and improve their writing through rereading and rewriting

Disadvantages:

1. must be able to ruthlessly critique their writing, cut large sections, or start over if necessary
2. must be careful to allow enough time for revision, or the quality of the work may suffer

Type Three: Sequential Composers

Sequential composers devote equal amounts of time to planning, drafting, and revising. Rather than planning their writing mentally, as heavy planners do, sequential composers rely on written notes and plans to give shape to their ideas. Unlike heavy revisers, they need to have greater control over form and content as they draft. Allotting equal amounts of time to planning, drafting, and revising helps them deal with writing anxieties: generating notes and plans gives them the confidence to begin drafting, and they generally draft more slowly, rereading and revising their writing as they go.

Advantages:

1. possess more control over the writing process
2. are realistic about the time and effort it takes to effectively manage a writing task

Disadvantages:

1. can develop rigid writing habits
2. may waste time developing detailed plans when they are actually ready to write

Type Four: Procrastinators

Procrastinators avoid writing, putting it off until the last minute. All writers procrastinate sometimes, but procrastinators make a habit of waiting to write until there is only enough time for a final draft.

Advantages:

1. are able to write under pressure

Disadvantages:

1. have minimal chances of success
2. have difficulty managing the writing process efficiently and effectively
3. create added stress!

Self-Reflection

- So which of these writing styles best describes the way you typically write?
- What planning and revising strategies do you use?
- If you're a procrastinator, what are all the ways you procrastinate?
- If none of these styles seems to fit you, how do you write?
- How would you like to change your writing habits?

The content of this handout was adapted with changes from the following source:
Ede, Lisa. *Work in Progress*. 5th ed., St. Martin's, 2001.

This handout was created by the Writing Centers at YVC.
Yakima Campus, Glenn-Anthon 125 | Grandview Campus, Grandview Main 101
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