

Breaking Down Barriers to Writing

Jason Fatz



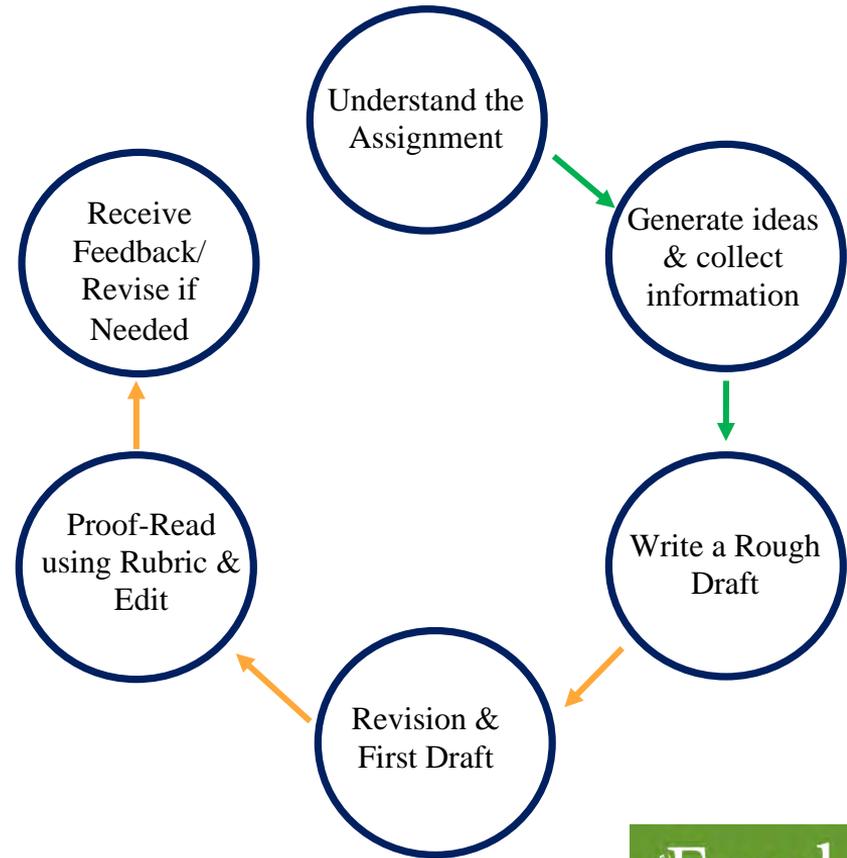
Poll: What's your biggest frustration

Students...

- Can't write a proper sentence
- Don't know how to write a hook / can't get started
- Doesn't even know what a thesis is
- Don't write in their own words, it's all copy and pasted
- Cite everything or nothing
- Don't read the rubric

Start with the basics

This is not a natural process for most students so deliberate metacognition must be used.



Work smarter not harder

How is teaching writing similar to marathon training?



In writing there are two approaches

- 1) Finding your voice (speed)
- 2) Writing correctly (stamina)

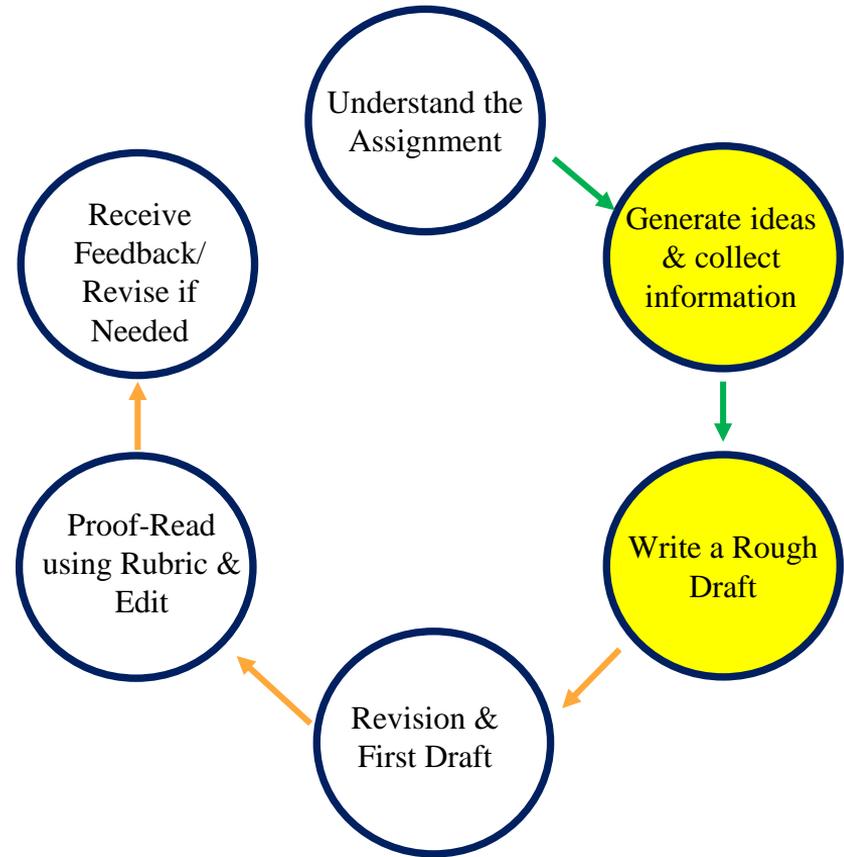
You can't focus on both at the same time!



Focusing on each one separately results in greater improvements to both.

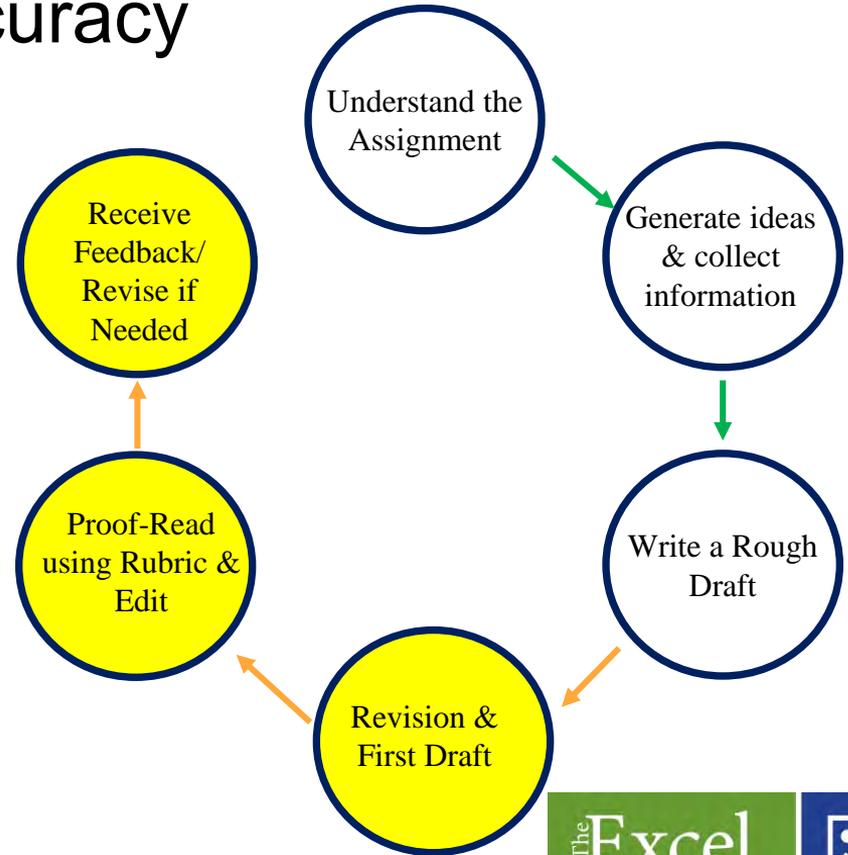
Developing student voice

- What are your thoughts?
- Scaffolding
 - Breaking down complex prompts
 - Constructing a paper vs writing top down
- Sentence stems are helpful here
 - “This goal is important to me because”
- Preserve the stream of conscious



Writing for grammatical accuracy

- Review the writing process
- Model First
- Don't start with a blank page
- Sentence frames are helpful here



An Important Question to Ask

What is the focus of this assignment?

- Are they developing grammar or processing? (What to say vs how to say it?)

You can do both, just not at the same time, follow the writing process

- What is perceived as resistance is often derived from a lack of clarity

Prewriting - avoid the blank page

Begin with questions

Collect information using graphic organizers

Expectations - show them before you ask them to do it (GRR)



Example

Setting up writing using a graphic organizer.

Quote	Historical Context and the idea it represents	Where I see it in my life	Where I see it in society
"you don't work, you don't eat"			
"a city upon a hill"			

Discussion (Breakout rooms)

What strategies are built into the assignment to enable student success?

Review the assignment and consider

- How the graphic organizer sets up the assignment?
- How does the rubric support specific writing goals?
- How this may help a struggling writer understand the desired end?

The [American ideals](#) example

Other Obstacles / Frustrations

Students...

- Can't write a proper sentence
- Don't know how to write a hook / can't get started
- Doesn't even know what a thesis is
- Don't write in their own words, it's all copy and pasted
- Cite everything or nothing
- Don't read the rubric

Students can't write a proper sentence

Solution

- Sentence frames
 - One implication of _____ is that _____.
- Rant strategy

“rants offer a clear demonstration of how powerful people make judgments—often harsh ones—based on grammar.”

- Kenneth Lindlom and Patricia A. Dunn



What's a hook?

It's the first sentence a student has to write, but it requires the most creativity. This results in writing paralysis and a blank page.

A strategy:

- Have students find an image that fits their view of the topic.
- Students describe the details of what's happening in the image in a sentence or two. One rule - don't use the topic!

* Just because the hook comes first, doesn't mean they have to write it first.

Student doesn't even know what a thesis is!

The main problem is students simply don't know or don't understand.

Solution:

A great place for a sentence frame

Separate the thesis from the introduction

Comparison/Contrast Template 3

While some differences between _____ and _____ are _____, the similarities are _____.

evident
noticeable

striking
pronounced
salient

Examples

While some differences between Japan and the United States are evident, the similarities are salient.

While some differences between high school and college are evident, the similarities are striking.

Evidence and Analysis

Students don't write in their own words, it's all copy and pasted

Solution: handwritten answers - or limited space in response

Students cite everything or nothing

Solution: Break down the process

Evidence for argument:

Citation: ()

Commentary: (Explain how the evidence above supports your topic sentence)

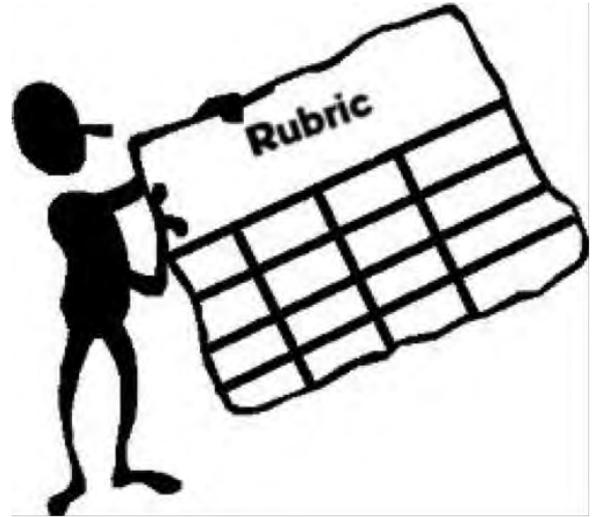
Students don't read the rubric

Solution: Improve the quality and practice of using rubrics

Rubrics should be:

- task oriented and specific
- understandable to all users
- used throughout the process
- modeled and practiced

It's even okay to let students help in creating the rubric.



Key Takeaways:

- Frustrations affect both teachers and students
- No assumptions of knowledge
- Rigor doesn't mean making it harder, it means raising expectations
- What is perceived as resistance is often derived from a lack of clarity

CONCLUSION

Writing can be an intimidating task for some students and accelerated schedules may leave limited time to comprehensively improve. It is possible to break down writing barriers quickly using selective strategies, precise rubrics, and deliberate focus.



Questions

jfatz@goodwillmemphis.org

