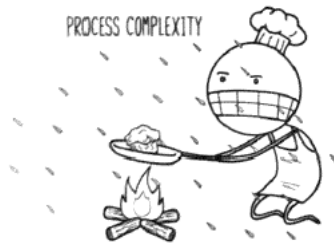


Writing & Reading Strategies



This cartoon shows someone trying to bake a cupcake over a campfire, in the rain. When it comes to writing and reading, process matters. Don't be like cupcake guy. . . . Use better strategies.

1. When you have a paper due, the best strategy is to (check all that apply).

- Try to be as efficient as possible. Come up with a thesis first, then make a meticulous outline. Spend hours crafting the perfect first paragraph, then the perfect body paragraphs, then the perfect conclusion. Realize that everything you've written is boring and/or obvious, that your sentences are nonsensical and riddled with bad grammar. Mentally berate yourself for not being smarter. Decide you're just not a good writer and/or you don't have good ideas.
- Remember that academic writing is always a *response* to something, and that usually, it is a response to other academic writing. Therefore, you first need to figure out what you are responding to. Gather quotes from sources that interest you and "write back" to those quotes—not by summarizing them but by asking yourself what about them is provoking, debatable, or has unexpected significance. What opportunities does the author overlook and what do they not consider? What ideas can you add to make their argument better, or how can you prove that they're wrong? Make notes. Recognize that this stage in which you sketch out ideas and collect necessary material is an essential part of the process.
- Gather your notes and look for patterns. Build bridges between concepts to create new ideas.
- Write a terrible first draft that is *at least twice as long* as the final paper needs to be. Write quickly and don't judge yourself as you write—understand that you are mining for ideas, and this draft is just for you.
- The next day or in a different setting/frame of mind, review your terrible first draft and mine it for usable ideas. Write a second draft, and, if necessary, a third. While it may seem inefficient to write in this way, trust that the opposite is true. Writing drafts quickly and without self-judgement works *with* rather than *against* your brain's essential nature. When you write in this way, you surprise yourself with ideas you wouldn't arrive at in another way.
- Run your paper through grammar check and edit your paper for sentence-level errors. Understand that everyone makes these errors, and that even professional writers can't afford to skip this step. It may help to read your paper backwards, sentence-by-sentence. When you read sentences out of context, you're more likely to catch surface-level errors.

2. When attempting to read a difficult piece of writing, which of the following contribute to the best approach? (check all that apply)

- Give up immediately. This article/book/essay just isn't for you.
- Start with the first word and read to the last word. When you have read the piece once, you're done. Put it away and don't look at it again.
- Don't be a naïve little bunny; start by doing a "pre-reading." Do a google search for online summaries and reviews. Read what other people have written about the piece. Arm yourself with an overview of the piece *before* you start reading. In addition to reading any online reviews, read the piece's abstract or book cover, study its title and subheadings, and read the first and last paragraphs to form a prediction of its argument. A good "pre-read" will help you learn the piece's main argument, but if it's an interesting piece, that is only the tip of the iceberg. You still need to read it.
- Take a big breath. Understand that sometimes academic writing is dense and needs to be read slowly and that you are not alone in the struggle. Look up any words or terms you don't know and write the definitions somewhere you can reference them easily. Review these definitions until you remember them effortlessly.
- Armed with new information, read the piece as many times as you need to or have time for, continuing to look up terms and expand your base knowledge until you feel confident that you understand what the author is saying. Use the next class period to bounce your interpretations off your teacher and make sure you are not missing something essential.