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Demystifying Writing: Strategies for Developing Better Writing

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Abstract

Students are often afraid of writing tasks, regardless of whether they are writing in their own native language or are second language writers. I share examples of my own writing experiences and struggles, and then I argue how writing can be demystified, offering some strategies towards advancing one's writing skills: understanding writing, doing free writing, identifying writing weaknesses, practicing enormously, visualizing purpose and audience, revising writing, articulating writer's own voice, obtaining feedback, reflecting on own writing, and embracing mimesis approach. I discuss the strategies drawing on ideas from renowned writing theorists, including Elbow (1998), Harris (2006), Vilardi and Chang (2009), and Adler-Kassner and Wardle (2016), etc. This paper is particularly relevant to early career ELT teachers to understand and demystify the student writing process; however, it might also be helpful for any academic level of students to advance their writing.

Keywords: *Demystifying Writing, Strategies of Developing Writing, Student Writing Process*

Introduction

Whether it be first or second-language writers, they generally feel that writing in English is the most challenging task (Barkaoui, 2007; Cheung, 2016). Of course, "even in one's native language, learning to write is like learning a second language… No one is a 'native speaker' of writing" (Leki, 1992, p. 10). This statement is a highly significant observation. Regardless of whether students are L1 (first language) or L2 (second language), they need to follow a rigorous process in writing. Writing is learned through several recursive learning processes, and it takes considerable time to become a fluent writer. As an emerging writer, I have passed through several learning progressions and trajectories in English from my primary level education to my current Ph.D. journey in Rhetoric and Composition Studies.

As an ESL learner, I started to learn the English alphabet (A-Z) in grade four. In that grade, being able to copy the English alphabet and reproduce some minimal words would be "writing" for me. When I reached high school reciting grammatical rules,

essays, short question-answers, discrete-point grammatical exercises, reciting word meanings given in the prescribed texts, and being able to reproduce assigned texts, all rote learning, was "writing" for me (Paudel, 2020a). Even at the undergraduate level, I would recite essays and question-answers. At the schools and colleges, I attended, reproducing passages from prescribed texts in the exam papers were highly valued. Prior to my teaching career, I rarely wrote anything on my own, except reproducing some responses from prescribed textbooks for the final examinations. So, during my student life from school to master-level education, I did not write with power—my writing lacked the necessary control over words and sentences, targeting the audience and making my writing persuasive to intended readers.

When I began to teach at the college level, only then did I start to write on my own; I wanted to write, as described by Elbow (1998), getting power over myself, over the writing process, and without being intimated or helpless in writing, gaining an understanding of the process of writing. Similarly, I started to observe others' writing more, especially academic writing. I would observe (I still observe) how other writers compose written text. For some time, writing became, for me, an exercise in observation.

During my student life, up to the master level, I rarely received feedback on my writing. When I started to write for publication, only then did I receive honest feedback on my writing from peer reviewers. The first time in my life that I received comprehensive feedback on my writing was in a journal manuscript. There I received massive feedback in terms of grammar, coherence, cohesion, developing arguments, and the format of the manuscript. Though much feedback was offered to revise the manuscript, it was not damaging or humiliating to me—the reviewers provided feedback starting with my strongest points, which kept me encouraged to revise the manuscript. From the feedback, I identified my strength and my level of writing, and what I should do to improve my writing.

After teaching ESL for more than a decade and now completing the coursework of my Ph.D. journey, my perspective on writing has further developed. I have also fully understood writing as fluid (Paudel, 2020a). Now I believe that writing is not an act of an individual autonomous entity but rather is an expression of a collective entity—a writer's experience, culture, context, audience, genre of writing, people, race, politics, subjective position and a multitude of other factors come into play when writing (Paudel, 2020b). Among these, before starting to write, a writer should understand the genre of the writing, that is, what type of writing will be attempted, such as an academic journal article, argumentative essay, descriptive essay, expositive essay, narrative essay, research paper, report writing, instructions writing, letter, dialogue, and so on. Another vital aspect a writer should understand is the context of writing—for whom you are writing (audience) and the purpose of your writing (informing, persuading, etc.).

Based on my teaching experiences, writing experiences, and readings, I now understand that to articulate better writing, a writer should first understand and embrace several

writing processes. In this paper, I argue how writing can be demystified, presenting some ways of producing compelling writing.

Understanding the core concept of writing

To produce better writing, a writer needs to understand what writing is, what influences writing, how writing is composed, and what leads to better writing. Adler-Kassner and Wardle's edited book, Naming What We Know (2016) answers these questions. Drawing on ideas from the book, I have addressed a bit of the question below.

Writing is a social and rhetorical activity (Roozen, 2016) as writers articulate their ideas as per audience, society, purpose, situation, and other contextual factors that influence the understanding of writing. Considering these aspects, writers attempt to make meaning with their writing. Roozen (2016) writes that "Writers are engaged in the work of making meaning for particular audiences and purposes, and writers are always connected to other people" (p. 17). Writers knowingly and unknowingly strive to address the intended audience to convey their ideas through their linguistic repertoire. Factors such as what they are writing about (subject and content), whom they are addressing (intended audience), and what is their background and experience (culture, race, and education) play a decisive role in writing. Understanding such rhetorical aspects in writing assists writers in discerning the audience's needs, the exigence within which they are writing, the genre they should embrace, and rhetorical appeals (ethos, pathos, logos) they should utilize for accomplishing their communicative goals in their writing. Indeed, writing is, in all cases, a social and rhetorical activity, since without understanding and taking account of rhetorical and social aspects, it is almost impossible to convey the intended message through writing.

Scott (2016) argues that the writers' ideologies are inevitably replicated in their writing. Writers knowingly and unknowingly embed and reveal their ideologies in their writing. No writers can express themselves on paper without mirroring their ideologies. In their writing, they bring their ideologies, including religious, economic, cultural, mythic, linguistic, legal, and many other aspects. Scott (2016) argues, "Writing is always ideological because discourses and instances of language use do not exist independently from cultures and their ideologies" (p. 48). Of course, writing disseminates their cultural inclinations and ideological perspectives. Specifically, what is written speaks about their ideological views and intentions on the topic they are writing about. If we look at writing by lawyers, bankers, or company managers, we can see their ideologies in their genres, conventions, and vocabularies. Writing both creates and reflects their identities and enacts their ideological proclivity in their works and services. Indeed, ideology permeates through what is written.

Doing free writing

Various writing scholars argue the importance of free writing for advancing writing skills. Elbow (1998) writes, "Put your effort into experiencing the tree you want to describe, not on thinking about which words to use. Don't put your attention on quality or critics. Just write" (p. xiii). Elbow argues that as writers, we should first try to express what we feel about a particular subject and what we know without being worried about the language. Of course, we should draw ideas (content) about the topic first. Starting with whatever comes into mind would lead to better writing. Regarding creating and criticizing processes, Elbow (1998) states:

> *First, write freely and uncritically so that you can generate as many words and ideas as possible without worrying whether they are good; then turn around and adopt a critical frame of mind and thoroughly revise what you have written – taking what's good and discarding what isn't and shaping what's left into something strong. (p. 7)*

One of the obstacles in writing is the fear of appearing foolish: "What prevents most people from being inventive and creative is fear of looking foolish" (Elbow, p. 10). Free writing is the best way to start chasing away the fear of putting words on a blank sheet of paper or screen. This "[ultimately] improves your writing. It doesn't always produce powerful writing itself, but it leads to powerful writing" (Elbow, p. 15). Elbow argues that if writers are struggling to get the main idea in their writing, they should produce a lot of raw writing without being critical of their writing draft, and this helps them to figure out the main point of their writing: "Do more raw writing…This new burst of unworried words after you have been wrestling, helps you find that main idea" (p. 130). In fact, starting with whatever comes into mind would lead to better writing.

Private freewriting is one of the classroom practices that can help us express ourselves and make us confident in writing (Marshall, 2019). In private freewriting activities, we can practice writing without "being judged or graded, needing to think about spelling and grammar, making sense, staying on topic, being written for an audience, and more formal and correct than speech" (Elbow & Belanoff as cited in Marshall, 2009, p. 11). As "freewriting goes to the heart" (p. 13), we can express our own voice and true feelings through it. It has the power "to stimulate self-knowledge, sharpen focus, enhance creativity and promote fluency for individual writers while at the same time foster[ing] a unique sense of community in the classroom" (p. 14). Valuing our own thoughts, experiences, and feelings, private freewriting leads us to become better writers. I like the idea of "speaking himself" (Chaim Perelman as cited in Marshall, 2009, p. 18), that is, writing to ourselves being the audience. Writers are themselves an audience of their own writing. Aligning with Marshall (2009), I say, first, we should see for ourselves whether the writing persuades us or not, communicating clearly the intended message. Then we should presumably imagine whether our writing can persuade other audiences. If we are not persuaded, it is an open question of whether our writing may persuade readers or not. Private freewriting indeed helps students to express themselves and

gives them a chance to play with language. However, I am also attuned to the idea that "private freewriting is not and was never meant to be a substitute for carefully structured, revised, and edited writing. Rather it is a way to encourage and enhance writing in the long term by intuitive means" (Marshall, 2009, p.19). Free writing is a way to improve one's skill and ability to write well greatly.

Identifying weaknesses

Recognizing their own weaknesses helps lead writers to write with power (Elbow, 1998). Taking myself as an example, to attain this level of writing, first, I identified my own problems with writing. Before identifying my weaknesses, I often struggled to choose the right words, maintain coherence and cohesion, and produce grammatically correct sentences. I would present many ideas without putting them down coherently and cohesively, in grammatically correct sentences, and provide supporting details and arguments. However, once I identified my writing problems, then I gradually started to pay more attention to the weak areas in my final draft.

I would check whether the words, sentences, and examples are organized well, grammatically correct, and comprehensible to the intended readers or not. The present writing skill that I have is learned through the conscious attention that I have given to my writing weaknesses. Indeed, learning my own weaknesses and problems, targeting them, and treating them with care leads to writing with power. But, in order to do this, writers should have the desire to understand their own writing problems better and should carefully focus on these areas as well.

Practicing enormously

Practice (in the sense of repeated attempts to gain expertise) is the most important technique for improving writing. No matter how much knowledge a person has about writing, practice is always needed to produce better and more compelling writing. So, "When you try to write something right the first time, don't try to get it absolutely right" (Elbow, 1998, p. 45). The habits and strategies that writers have for composing a particular genre may not be particularly useful for composing other kinds of genres and writings. When they start a new kind of writing (e.g., rhetorical genre), they need practice to produce persuasive writing. It is wrong to expect a writer to produce better writing without having sufficient practice. When writers practice writing through repetitious tasks, they get a chance to test, invent, and even fail in their writing, and that makes them familiar with the writing conventions and mechanics of a particular genre. Even for an expert professional writer, it is virtually impossible to produce good writing in the first draft. As renowned writer Lamott (1995) observes, "Almost all good writing begins with terrible first efforts. You need to start somewhere" (p. 303). Yes, all writing should start with a terrible first draft, moving to an improved second draft, a better third draft, and multiple drafts, which can finally make a solid and compelling final draft. No writer is naturally born; all go through the practice stage.

Agreeing with Elbow (1998), I assert that writing takes time to improve. No magic wand turns one's writing into something compelling and persuasive overnight. Attempting to write the first time and for the first draft correctly is the "dangerous method" (Elbow, 1998). Writing is something that gradually develops through long recursive practice. Thinking of producing powerful writing in a short period is nothing more than a stupid illusion. In this world, unless magic happens, nobody gets mastery over writing without sufficient practice in his or her areas of weakness.

Indeed, to advance writing needs a sustained and extended period of practice. Talking about the need for an extended period of practice for writing, Elbow (1998) presents a part of a self-evaluation written by a student, Joanne Pilgrim. The student wrote:

> *I've learned the value of not expecting a twelve-year-old child to come out when you're giving birth to a baby; that any writing needs time after its birth so it can change and grow and eventually reach its potential. I've come to realize that you most probably won't find a pearl if you only pick up oysters once a year. So, I will try to write a lot – a whole lot – and not expect that every piece emerges as a gem (p. 6).*

As a child takes time to mature, learn to speak, eat, and play, in the same way, writers need time to develop their writing skills. It is an ability that slowly advances through sustained and dedicated effort. Furthermore, all writers should understand that, as noted by Elbow (1998), not all the writings produced become compelling and strong. Everyone produces strong writing at times and bad writing at other times. However, they also learn through their bad writing; they improve their writing little by little and become more able to write with power over the course of years.

Revising

Revising is the process of making writing better, where writers arrange, add, and amplify their ideas, examples, details, and arguments in their writing. Elbow (1998) argues that for revising, writers need to have ample practice and experience in writing; only then can writers effectively revise their writing: "[Revising] requires wisdom, judgment, and maturity. There is no way to get these qualities except through practice and experience" (p. 121). Yes, revising cannot be done best without having judgmental skills (what to include and what to remove from drafts) and experience. Revising is a messy job; it varies from one writer to another. Elbow states that the first job of beginning writers while revising writing should be to focus on ideas and purpose, and only then should they make an attempt to visualize and serve their audience.

Revising takes much time to know how best to adjust the writing to become one smooth, comprehensible, and well-organized work. One must pay special attention to what communicates better and what does not convey one's intended message. For this, writers should attempt to look through their intended audience's eyes to judge whether the writing is powerful enough "to change [readers'] minds" or not (Elbow,

1998, p. 122). In this regard, Elbow further writes, "the most trustworthy motive for revising is the desire to make things work on readers" (p. 122). The writing should have an impact on the audience's minds. But, for this, writers should have patience since achieving this goal takes time and hard effort. Especially for beginner writers, revising may take a lot of time and effort, often considerably more than what was required for the original composition. To make their revising better, writers may need to leave the writing aside a couple of days (or weeks, or even months or years) before revising: "Putting [writing draft] aside for a couple of days is easiest and best" (Elbow, 1998, p. 129). Leaving writing aside some days without revising gives writers a fresh look at their own writing and can spark changes in their writing from readers' perspectives. Elbow states that writers should "Learn when not to revise" (p. 125). His point is that a beginner writer should know what to revise and what not to revise. All sentences, ideas, and arguments may not need thorough revision. Indeed, if the writers' ideas are composed of appropriate words, sentences, examples, and arguments, writers need not revise their writing just for the sake of revising. For example, if some part of writing is already good enough to communicate ideas to their intended audience, the writers obviously should not revise that section.

Another important aspect that writers should deem essential in revising writing is visualizing their purpose and the audience. To articulate ideas well, writers need to visualize what they want to do with words (Elbow, 1998). They should be clear to themselves about what they want to convey to whom. Elbow (1998) asserts, "[Clear] grasp of your audience and purpose may focus your thinking in such a way that you immediately realize just what you need to say and how you need to say it" (p. 41). Visualizing who the audience is, what the writers want to get done through the words, what effect the writers want to make on the audience, what results the writers want to accomplish, and how to change the audience's mindset, all this is crucial in producing successful writing. Discussing the audience's place in writing, Flusser (2011) states, "[f]orgetting others while writing is the result of forgetting oneself" (p. 38), and thus Flusser also reiterates the importance of keeping one's audience in mind while writing. Certainly, envisioning the intended audience, purpose, and context keeps writers focused on lucidly communicating their messages.

Until a couple of years ago, I would not have considered the audience that much in my writing. Rather, I would put my whole energy into producing sophisticated writing. The reason I would put effort into producing "sophisticated" writing with advanced vocabulary, complex structure, and challenging ideas was the value people usually give to such writing in my country. Nowadays, I am becoming more and more aware of my audience, considering that writing is done with the primary aim of communicating with the targeted audience. Hence, to communicate ideas better to the audience, writers must take into account the audience's level of knowledge and culture and accordingly, should present examples and ideas so that their audiences understand and value the writing and are convinced to agree with the writer's ideas.

Therefore, reiterating Elbow's idea, I would say that while revising, writers should attempt to visualize their audience with as much precision as possible—who are their audiences, what kinds of language usage are they familiar with, what is their socio-cultural background, what kinds of examples and arguments do they understand, etc. All this must be taken into consideration. But, at the same time, attuning to Elbow's idea, I say that writers, especially novice writers, should not overthink their audience while revising their writing. Because in the process, they may lose their ideas and the purpose of their writing if they give all their attention to pondering the question: who will be my intended audience? So, while revising their writing, the first job of beginning writers should be to focus on ideas and purpose, and only then should they make an attempt to visualize their audience as far as possible.

One of the techniques that writers can embrace in revising state is reading out loud a prepared draft. Elbow (1998) argues, "The psychological transaction that helps most in cutting is to read your words out loud. Look for places where you stumble or get lost in the middle of a sentence" (p. 135). This assists writers in being aware of where they are lost in their writing. Radical revision is another strategy that helps in producing compelling writing. In this kind of revision, students (and other writers) do not simply make surface changes, such as syntactical and vocabulary, but rather they are required to make drastic conceptual changes in their writing. According to Lester Faigley and Stephen Witte, in this kind of revision, rather than making "conventional copy-editing operations" students make "meaning changes" either by "adding of new content or the deleting of existing content" (as cited in Moore, 2009, p. 121). Usually, changing content and concepts of written text is rather difficult, especially for novice writers, since they ordinarily view proofreading as synonymous with revision. In fact, I myself would also view it in the same way, narrowly: changing syntactical structure, words, organization, and grammar. Though it is a bit difficult in the beginning stage, a much deeper concept of revision is advantageous to students, as it leads them to change their thinking and revamp their writing. Moore (2009) writes that radical revision "[helps] students revise more deeply, for a more sustained amount of time, more effectively, and with more agency" (p. 123). This makes students ponder over the content and concept of their writing and re-envision their writing. But, if we are asking students to make radical changes in their writing, we should provide some prompts (radically revising essays: prompts for generating missing text; prompts for making connections; prompts for clarifying an essay's focus on argument; radically revising poems: prompts for reimagining; prompts for clarifying and tightening by cutting at least five lines from a poem) (Moore, 2009).

Understanding revision is a challenging job since instructors often see the product of the writing process only. The revision processes, sweat, and effort writers make to produce the final draft are most often hidden unless we demand documentation of the student's revision process. It is complicated to predict what troublesome stages our student writers go through while producing the final draft, since "it is also an activity that tends to be hidden from view…final form [comes]—with many of the hesitations, repetitions,

digressions, false starts, alternative phrasings, inconsistencies, speculations, infelicities, and flat-out mistakes of earlier drafts smoothed over, corrected or erased" (Harris, 2006, p. 99). Indeed, the final draft is the upshot of multiple unseen steps of revising. Since to get to the final draft revising goes through several concealed mental, psychological, and mechanical processes, we should never:

> *"[try]to conceive and draft an entire text from start to end in a single sitting, without pausing to consider [alternative]…ways of developing their ideas, or by worrying so much about issues of editing and correctness that they hardly allow themselves to think about anything else at all" (p. 102).*

Clearly, any significant writing goes through several revising processes to come to the final draft; it takes time to make it compelling, and thus, it is wrong to think too much about editing and correctness while preparing the first draft of writing. Worrying too much about editing and accuracy early in the process may be futile since initial drafts can be completely changed before we get into the final draft.

Scholars argue that writing "an abstract" in the revising stage leads to the production of compelling writing. Writing an abstract provides a "lucid overview" of writing the draft. Harris (2006) states that the abstract pushes writers to think on two levels: "(1) your project as a whole; and (2) how you develop your line of thinking" (p. 110). Indeed, an abstract gives a picture of the draft—the aim of writing, the method used in writing, and the materials (examples and evidence) used to craft the intended message to convey. It is certain that if the abstract is clearly written, it can provide a clear direction for revising writing, suggesting where the draft is effectively advanced and where it does not.

As in the case of abstract writing, conclusion writing is also considered an important aspect of revising. A conclusion leaves a clear message to readers, so great attention should be paid to producing a conclusion. Harris (2006) states, "the best kind of conclusion usually presents a powerful close to an essay or book [and] responds to two questions: *So what?* and *What's next?"* (p. 118). That is, the best kind of conclusion offers implications and future action for consideration.

There is no doubt that radical revision can help writers to construct better writing. However, at the same time, both instructors and students should understand that "[radical] revision is not a cure-all and it will not instantly turn inexperienced writers into expert or even experience writers, but it helps students create some scaffolding for the act of re-seeing…it's only one tool, of several" (Moore, 2009, p. 131). Absolutely, radical revision cannot be used for all as a panacea for articulating ideas better way, but, for sure, it can be used as a tool for supporting and re-envisioning students' writing, and for making conceptual changes in their writing.

Harris (2006) introduces the four moves of rewriting for revising writing:

- What's your project? What do you want to accomplish in this essay? (Coming to Terms)
- What works? How can you build on the strengths of your draft? (Forwarding)
- What else might be said? How might you acknowledge other views and possibilities? (Countering)
- What's next? What are the implications of what you have to say? (Taking an Approach) (p. 99).

The first move, "coming to terms," is about understanding terms and concepts of writing through shorthand writing, direct quote, and paraphrasing. The move is very helpful in defining writers' projects. For this, Harris (2006) provides the following three points to consider in a form reminiscent of a scientific report:

> *Aims: What is a writer trying to achieve? What position does he or she want to argue? What issues or problems does he or she explore?*
>
> *Methods: How does a writer relate examples to ideas? How does he or she connect one claim to the next, build a sense of continuity and flow?*
>
> *Materials: Where does the writer go for examples and evidence? What texts are cited and discussed? What experiences or events are described? (p. 19).*

The second move, "forwarding," deals with putting forward others' ideas/thoughts/views using terms and concepts in the writing (text). The third move, "countering," is about "reading against the grain of a text", that is, countering ideas and phrasings that strike [writers that often they find] mistaken, troubling, or incomplete" (Harris, 2006, p. 6). This move roughly corresponds to what in classical rhetoric is more commonly called "refutation." The final move is "taking an approach," which deals with "applying a theory or method of analysis advanced by another writer to a new set of issues or texts" (p. 7), that is, it is the practical application (and perhaps extension) of existing theory or method in one's own writing, drawing ideas from other writers, other times and other situations and making them one's own.

From the above description, it can be implied that revising is not "a mere fiddling with sentences, ...editing for style and correctness, but [something] that also, on the other hand, avoids lapsing into mystical exhortations for risk-taking or critical self-awareness or some other vague but evidently desirable quality of mind" (Harris, 2006, p. 99). Of course, revising is more than editing, proofreading, polishing, and making a smooth text flow. It's a rather critical awareness of writers that occasionally needs a complete revamping of a draft. Revising goes through rethinking and restructuring the draft in terms of ideas, along with relevant examples and supporting details. In Harris's terms, this phenomenon is known as making "global" changes in writing the draft. Since

revising is associated with the restructuring of writing a draft, often with additional ideas and examples, the task of revising does not turn out to be as simple as it may be initially described in textbooks and discussed in the classroom.

Articulating voice

Every writer has their own voice to articulate in their writing. Elbow (1998) states, "everyone…has real voice available; everyone can write with power" (p. 304). I completely agree with Elbow's point that anyone who writes has their voice in writing, no matter whether they are an inexperienced and unskilled writer or a master author. Voicing has such power that it draws readers' attention as well as makes them better understand the underlying meaning of the writing, making writing suitable to readers instead of mere mechanical language: "Writing with real voice has the power to make you pay attention and understand—the words go deep" (Elbow, 1998, p. 299). Elbow points out that writers should consider the level of readers while writing. Further, he states that writing should be appealing both in terms of content and style: "The most plausible answer is that for words to have the power, they must fit the reader. You must give readers either the style or the content they want, preferably both" (p. 279). Indeed, the writer should bring content that is suitable for the reader and use the appropriate style and tone in their writing so that they feel writing is useful and enjoyable while reading the writing.

We commonly find some people speaking artificially. This happens when speakers are over-conscious in their speech. I note that people who speak over-consciously typically do not reveal their real voice. Elbow (1998) states, "some people…have developed a habit of speaking in a careful or guarded way so that you cannot hear any real rhythm and texture. Their speech sounds wooden, dead, fake" (p. 290). Fake-sounding does not favor those who are listening to speech and reading. Fake words can be perceived by an audience as boring, annoying, and sometimes even insulting. However, surprisingly, sometimes people need fake-sounding words. Elbow (1998) writes, "It's no accident that the greatest number of fake-sounding people are in professions where they must constantly meet and impress an audience: salesmen, announcers, politicians, preachers [Teachers, too]" (p. 294). Certainly, this skill, convincing/making an impression in artificial ways, is sometimes needed, for some people may not always be able to spontaneously impress their audience through their own authentic voice. Thus, I say sometimes it is good to be artificial for a good reason. In fact, this is neither more nor less than one aspect of the art of rhetoric in practical use.

It is often said that badness in writing is unavoidable, no matter how experienced a writer is. Elbow (1998) says, "Getting rid of badness is an infinite and impossible task. There will always be bits of badness in your writing, lurking here and there for some sharp-eyed reader to find, no matter how hard you try to remove them" (p. 303). Of course, it is almost impossible to turn our writing completely good—It is the nature of writing. Bad writing is required to make our writing better. In my educational career,

I went through several bad writing trajectories, and that led me to reach this stage. Writing is never a finishing project. Most importantly, writers should strive to voice themselves in an understandable way to targeted audiences. Discussing how a real voice can be expressed, Elbow (1998) writes, "Be there! See it! Hallucinate! Hear it! Feel it! Be that person! Close your eyes and don't let yourself write down any words until you can actually see and hear and touch what you are writing about. To hell with words, see something"! (p. 336). I love these lines, as these could be helpful strategies for bringing out the real voice of writers.

Here I would like to present the idea of voicing in writing through my own verse-less poem:

Voicing in writing
Dear developing writers,
I am wondering about the power
Not for material power
But for writing power.

Read the book, Writing with Power
And found voicing the most important
Voicing is the DNA of writing
This makes us different from others
My target is also to be different.

To write voicing my thought
I want to sing my own song in my writing
I want to be real
Articulating my voice makes me real.

Without a voice, writing is a dead body
Like a body without breathing
When I do not hear breathing in writing
I rarely read the writing.

To make my writing compelling
I try to be real, writing words from the heart
For this, I start writing without an audience in my mind
I put the audience in my mind in revising the stage
This strategy helps me to be heard
This saves my writing from being woody.

Dear developing writers,
I do not like to be artificial
Like salesmen, announcers, politicians, preachers

I do not want to impress like them
I feel their voice is like an elephant's teeth
Showing one thing out, having another inside.

Dear developing writers,
Bad writing is natural
It is like death
As we bring death along with our birth
Like this when we write
We articulate bits of bad writing
Do not worry about it
It is the bad writing
That leads us to better writing.

Moreover, bad writing is subjective
Our writing can be sweet for somebody
While for some it may be woody
Pondering excessively about it meaningless
But we should always strive to be real
It is the voicing that makes our writing real.
(I composed this poem based on Peter Elbow's 1998, chapter "Voicing")

Receiving feedback

Feedback plays a crucial role in improving students' writing. Provided meaningful feedback and comments, students can see what they need to improve in their writing and how they should shape their writing. Talking about the importance of commenting on students writing, Sommer (2014) writes:

> *Comments create the motive for doing something different in the next draft; thoughtful comments create the motive for revising. Without comments from their teachers or from their peers, student writing will revise in a consistently narrow and predictable way. Without comments from readers, students assume that their writing has communicated their meaning and perceive no need for revising the substance of their text. (p. 333)*

The point is that feedback should motivate students to advance their work. Starting with a strong point in students' writing can motivate them to work further and put extra effort into the work. Similarly, offering feedback and commenting through soft language can stimulate writers to work more on the project. Contrary to this, if harsh language is used for providing feedback and commenting if an instructor's red-inked comments are as hot and angry as blood on students' paper, it is sure that that makes the students humiliated, demotivates them, and makes them less confident in their work.

Elbow (1998) asserts, "Some safe readers are tough and demanding but they listen hard, they respect us, they want to hear what we have to say, and in this way, they bring out our best skills in writing" (p. 185). Of course, writers need some safe readers to read their drafts and provide genuine feedback without humiliating and disrespecting their ideas. Safe readers' feedback surely helps improve writers' writing, motivating them to put in more effort. Damaging feedback and harsh comments are never good but only lead students and even working writers and scholars to hate feedback. Elbow (1998) states "One of the main reasons so many people hate feedback or fail to learn from it is that it makes them feel so helpless. Getting feedback has always felt like putting themselves entirely into someone else's power" (p. 247). This could happen if somebody is bombarded by negative feedback. But if writers receive some directive feedback, along with some positive feedback, that may not humiliate and discourage them. The feedback should make the writers feel that they can and should improve their writing somehow.

Writing instructors and reviewers/commenters should know how to make their feedback more effective and meaningful. The feedback that does not give a concrete direction does not yield a productive result. So, feedback must be concrete, to the point, and offered in simple language so that students can understand and work accordingly. Meaningful feedback and comments on students' writing make students recognize their writing weaknesses and know the specific sort of effort they should put into further cultivating their writing skills. Without feedback, even an experienced professional writer can have problems in his/her writing, let alone beginning and second-language student writers (Paudel, 2020a).

Elbow (1998) discusses two types of feedback: criterion-based feedback and reader-based feedback. He presents four broad foundational questions that could be used for providing criterion-based feedback (What is the quality of the content of the writing: the ideas, the perceptions, the point of view? b. How well is the writing organized? c. How effective is the language? and d. Are there mistakes or inappropriate choices in usage? (p. 240). Similarly, to providing reader-based feedback, he also offers three broad questions about how the writer's words affected the readers: a. what was happening to you, moment by moment, as you were reading the piece of writing? b. summarize the writing: give your understanding of what it says or what happened in it. c. make some images for the writing and the transaction it creates with readers (p. 255).

Wilson and Post (2019) discuss the effect and action of feedback through critical engagement on students' writing development. Here the authors try to focus "on existing narratives by representing students' dispositions toward and engagement with instructor feedback solely as the students themselves identified and described them in relation to their writing development" (p. 30). In their studies, they define critical engagement with feedback in terms of one or more of the following actions: 1. Using feedback to develop an awareness of purposes for writing beyond the assignment; 2. Using feedback to develop an awareness of broader audiences than the instructor; 3.

Using feedback as a springboard for reflecting on one's own writing; 4. Analyzing or evaluating the feedback itself, rather than accepting it without question (p. 32). The study reveals that critical engagement with feedback supports writers in their efforts to develop their writing rather than simply embracing or rejecting whatever feedback they receive on their writing from their instructors. Concerning this, Wilson & Post (2019) write, "one powerful way to promote students' development as writers is to teach them to seek out and critically engage with instructor feedback" (p. 54). The point is that critical engagement makes meaningful and productive feedback. Elbow (1998) states that feedback should support writers in seeing how readers experience their writing: "Your main task in getting feedback is to listen and see if you can experience what your reader is experiencing. If you succeed in doing so you will be able to see whether there's really something there to fix and if so how to fix it" (p. 145). This could assist writers in improving their writing based on readers' experiences, expectations, and reactions.

Reflecting on own writing

Reflective practice makes writers autonomous learners, allowing them to see their own practices closely and evaluate their own progress—what went well and what did not go well in their writing. Further, this supports writers in planning to overcome their weaknesses. The reflective strategy gives writers a chance "to notice how reading and writing strategies work for [them] and for our students [and] makes us more reflective practitioners" (Vilardi, 2009, p. 2). Indeed, it allows writers to step back and think about how their problems can be solved. Previous learning becomes food for further understanding, thought, and insight. The reflective practice seems very scientific for developing writers, as it goes through the chain of experience, reflection, and learning. Guy (2006) writes that we should [pay] attention to what happens while [we] complete a task; [it] puts [us] in a better position to perform that task more effectively (p.59). So, it seems helpful to ask students to reflect on their learning, providing some prompts, for instance, "what were you trying to accomplish in this essay? Where did you have success, and where did you run into trouble? What would you do next if you were to work more on this essay?" (Guy, 2006, p. 55). Of course, these kinds of prompts help students ponder their own practices and rectify them if needed, further enhancement.

A dialectical notebook is a tool that can be used for reflecting on reading texts in notes (Bledsoe, 2009). In the notebook, reading the assigned text, students first write (reflect through writing) their understanding, feelings, reactions, arguments, difficulties, challenges, satisfactions, ambiguities, and contradictions towards the reading text, and then peers are required to read the reflective writing and respond to the writers' reflections. The American Heritage Dictionary, third edition defines, "dialectic" as "the art or practice of arriving at the truth by disclosing the contradictions in an opponent's argument and overcoming them," and "dialectics" as "a method of argument or exposition that systematically weighs contradictory facts or ideas with a view to the resolution of their real or inherent contradiction" (as cited in Bledsoe, p. 100). Indeed, such a method is a tool that helps students to arrive at a conclusion through recursive

discussion among classmates. It is a kind of negotiation between a text and reading responses. In this regard, Bledsoe (2009) writes, "[Dialectical] notebooks help students learn to negotiate between a written work and the ranges of responses that readers might have to it" (95). This tool "[helps] students in the slow work of developing habits of mind that support a more authentic encounter with texts" (p. 107). Indeed, this allows students to observe authentic text and reflect on the text through writing. To make the students' jobs easier, teachers can provide some prompts: "something you really understand, something you have questions about, something you notice about your process" (Bledsoe, 2009, p. 98). And under these prompts, students can write their reflections in a dialectical way. As students get a chance to reflect (understandings and challenges) on the text dialectically, if this strategy is embraced in classes, it might foster students' writing.

Embracing mimesis (imitation)

Providing model writings (essays, poems, stories, letters, etc.) gives students a path to travel down, following the model writing style and form. It emboldens students to write and articulate ideas more confidently. Model writings make students' writing more systematic and save them from getting lost. Discussing sample writing, Butler (2002) writes, "As a new academic writer, I found that these sample 'themes' helped me give form to my ideas, to construct essays that were organized, clear, and coherent" (p. 25). Further, he states, "[the samples] gave me the freedom to develop ideas by offering a form for me to imitate, a model from which to structure my own essays" (p. 25). Certainly, sample writings facilitate students' writing, providing form to emulate and leading student writers to construct their writing more cohesively and coherently.

Discussing imitation strategy in teaching poetry, Brannon (2012) writes, "Part of what makes Miss Stretchberry's poetry instruction so effective is the use of imitation in her lessons. Good teachers realize the importance of finding model poems that inspire both students' thinking and writing" (p. 51). Clearly, asking students to imitate some model poems could be an effective strategy for fostering students' thinking and articulating their ideas better. The idea of mimesis is most highly fruitful for those "unskilled writers who . . . lack a sense of form at all levels—word, sentence, paragraph, and entire work" (Donna Gorrellas cited in Butler, 2002, p. 26). Imitating others' writing gives students a chance to write convincingly and confidently. As we all go through enormous practices of imitation in learning our own spoken mother language in our childhood, in the same way, for writing too, we should all go through the same process for better articulating our own ideas. Some might say imitation is not a good way to make students better writers because it is sometimes tedious and boring and seems unoriginal. For those who oppose imitation as a learning technique, I say they are ignoring a great natural method of learning language—imitation, and they may not have understood the dynamism of written composition and of language itself. Imitation is not a mere mechanical process, but rather it is proceeding to a new step. In this regard, Vygotsky (1986) writes, "To imitate, it is necessary to possess the means of stepping from something one knows to

something new. With assistance, every child can do more than he can by himself-though only within the limits set by the state of his development" (p. 187). He further argues that "In learning to speak, as in learning school subjects, imitation is indispensable. What the child can do in cooperation today he [sic] can do alone tomorrow" (p. 188). Vygotsky's point is that imitation leads children to work independently. If imitation is embraced to some extent in teaching writing, I believe that this can lead students to become better writers.

To some extent, imitation is actually a creative process of writing. In order to articulate ideas compellingly, we need to manipulate reading texts creatively. For instance, writers need to replace model writing with new words, sentence structure, new ideas, and examples. Butler (2002) writes, "Imitation can be considered a creative act. It is not merely copying or reproducing the work of another, but transforming it in some important respects" (p. 27). While imitating, writers need to contextualize their writing, consider the audience, and put in their own stories. They always need to invent something in their writing, imitative as it may be. Brannon (2012) states, "Like any writing lesson, imitation lessons require careful attention to the writing process, and students need some sort of invention activity to get started" (p. 53). I agree with Brannon's point that creative writing is not solely the result of an individual writer's ideas; instead, it is the product of a social process. Good writing has an intertextual relationship rather than being a mere mechanical imitation of somebody else's writing. Discussing the intertextual nature of writing, Butler (2002) writes, "When we write, we are not drawing exclusively upon what is within us but also upon many other factors in our lives: our environments, upbringing, past readings and writings, and conversations in many different contexts. All these factors mix and match and affect what comes out on the page" (p. 30). Writing is all about the accumulation of different ideas from different sources, intertextuality; it is the pastiche from great texts (Polette, 1996). Even writing that we assume is completely original is not actually original but rather is always and necessarily a collection, compilation, and remix of existing ideas, words, and structures from different sources. In this regard, Bakhtin states "the word in language is always half someone else's," (as cited in Butler, 2002, p. 27). Of course, our writing is the upshot of imitation and borrowed ideas from various sources. All writing is necessarily an imitation in some way. It would be utterly incomprehensible even to the author if it were not so.

In order to lead students to mimic poetry writing, Polette (1996) presents production processes for producing pastiches: The students (a) read a variety of master- texts without initially concerning themselves with what these poems "mean" …and (g) share their pastiches (p. 288). I find these processes very useful for engaging students in learning and leading them to be creative. Based on his successful workshop experience, Polette (1996) indicates that the production processes direct the students to discover multiple things: content, form, and meanings. When approaching a poem, as a reader and an instructor, I find the following questions very useful for a pastiche production: (a) What words or images struck you? (b) What did you connect with? (c) What did you

not connect with? (d) What pictures did you produce in your mind as I read the poem? (e) What does this poem seem to be doing? (Polette, 1996, p. 290).

Even though the mimesis approach may not be currently popular or stylish, it can be argued that imitating model writing is not just recommendable but required for successful writing pedagogy, for it makes teaching-learning enormously easier as well as vastly more productive.

Conclusion

Writing is often considered an intimidating task. Almost all students usually do not want to write unless they are required to do so. This is because written composition demands significant effort and investment in terms of time, practice, and thinking. Students need to follow specific procedures and conventions to articulate writing. Nobody is born a good writer, and all conscientious writers, even scholars, and professional authors, continuously struggle to produce better writing.

However, if they embrace the above-described strategies (understanding writing, doing free writing, identifying writing weaknesses, practicing enormously, visualizing purpose and audience, revising writing, articulating the writer's own voice, obtaining feedback, reflecting on own writing, and embracing mimesis approach) and understand the dynamism of writing they can gradually improve their writing and have the chance to become better writers in the future. However, producing magical writing skills overnight or in a month without learning, practicing, and understanding the complexities of written composition is extremely difficult. Sadly, nothing can magically turn people into better writers overnight or even in a couple of months. Instead, the task requires years of firm perseverance, diligent effort, productive practice, and endless patience.

During my Ph.D. journey, I have read about many writing strategies that writers can embrace to enhance their writing skills. The above-accounted strategies are a few of them, so I encourage readers to explore more writing strategies and embrace them in their writing processes and practices.

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