

### Chapter 2

#### The Craft of Writing: A Panacea for Low Intelligibility

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#### **Writing is an exploration you start from nothing and learn as you go (E.L Doctorow)**

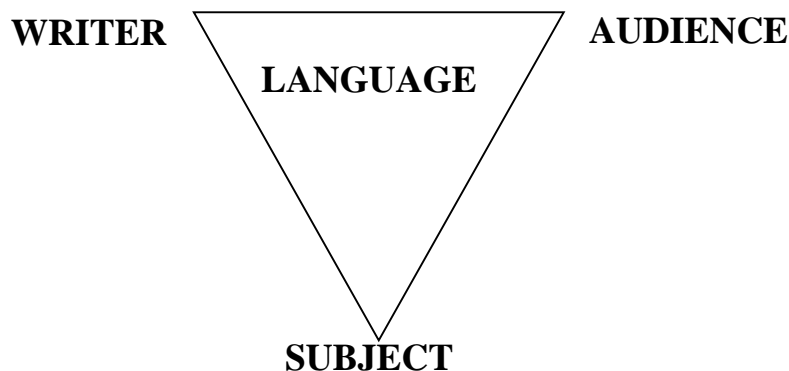
Writing is a natural activity. All physically and mentally normal people learn to speak a language. A written message can be received, stored and refer back to at anytime. Bell and Buraby (1983) see writing as an extremely complex cognitive activity in which the writer is required to demonstrate control of a number of variables simultaneously. At the sentence level, these variables include control of content, format, sentence structure, vocabulary, punctuation, spelling and letter formation. Beyond the sentence the writer must be able to structure and integrate information into cohesive and coherent paragraphs and texts.

#### **Concept of writing**

Writing is a process by which one expresses his ideas, and feelings through the use of calligraphic symbols or marks. The central idea in writing is the need for communication. Communication is therefore central to all the language skills. In other words writing is the process of using symbols, letters and punctuation to create a visual representation of language, allowing us to communicate thoughts, ideas and information in a lasting form, distinct from ephemeral speech. It is a fundamental human technology that serves as a powerful tool for recording, sharing, persuading and reflecting on our experiences. It is the process of using symbols (letters of the alphabets, punctuation and spaces) to communicate thoughts and ideas in a readable form.

#### **The writing process**

For effective communication through writing, there has to be a **Writer**, the writer has to have something to communicate about, that is the **Subject**; there has to be someone to say it to that is **Audience** and finally, there has to be a way of saying it that is the **Language**. Therefore, writer, subject, audience and language are known as the elements of writing. They constitute the key to the mystery of effective communication through writing. As a learner, you can think about these elements as a triangle in which language both written and spoken is at the center. This can be represented in a diagram as thus:



Communication through writing does not just happen. A great deal of thinking and planning goes into it. For example deciding on the ideas to convey and how to do it properly to meet the demands of your audience entails a lot of thinking. However, for a learner to overcome this, he/she can follow a

**Writing process:** This writing process includes the following basic steps

**Pre writing:** This is the first basic step in learning to communicate through writing. It involves thinking and planning. Planning involves choosing a topic/subject, a purpose, and an audience. While thinking involves thinking up ideas, planning how to present the ideas and so on.

**Writing:** This entails the first draft. This involves putting ideas into sentences and paragraph; following the plan for presenting ideas as outline in the first step.

**Evaluating and Revising:** This is yet another step in the writing process. It involves looking over the draft you have made. By looking over the write-up you have decisions as to what is good and what needs to be changed in your write-up in order to improve your writing.

**Proofreading and Publishing:** This is the last writing process. It involves finding and fixing errors after which a final copy will be made and their sharing the writing with an audience (Kinneavy and Warriner, 1993)

The writing process represents the **HOW** of writing. It should therefore be seen as a continuous process in which at any given time or stage, a writer can return to an earlier stage or even to the beginning if the need arises. The topic, purpose and the audience are also important in the writing process.

### **Aims of Writing**

- To inform: we write to communicate facts and other kind of information or to explain something, to share some special knowledge
- To persuade - writers may write to convince people of something e.g to buy a product or to vote for someone or to take some action
- To express - writers may simply want to express their thoughts and feelings, to find meaning in their lives
- To create - writers sometimes create stories, poems songs and plays writers like to say something in a unique way ( Kinneavy and Warriner 1993)

### **The Steps in Writing Process**

Seow (2002) identify the writing process as comprising four basic stages: planning, drafting, revising and editing. Kinneavy and Warriners (1993) have equally four stages: pre writing, writing, evaluating and revising, proofreading and publishing. There are basically no much differences between the stages as provided by the scholars.

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Warriner (1993) involves thinking and planning as identified by Seow (2002) Also, the drafting stage as identified by Seow (2002) involves writing the first draft as identified by Kinneavy and Warriners (1993) . The stages as are neither sequential or orderly, infact as research has suggested many good writers employ a recursive,non- linear approach. Writing of a draft may be interrupted by more planning and revising may lead to reformation, with a great deal of recycling to earlier stages (Krashen 1984).

### Step One

#### Prewriting techniques

Prewriting is any activity in the classroom that encourages students to write. It stimulates thoughts for getting started. In fact, it moves students away from having to face a blank page towards generating tentative ideas and gathering information for writing. These activities include:

**Writer's journal or jotter:** A writer's journal is a notebook or file folder which contains a record of experiences, feelings, ideas, questions and thoughts of a writer.

Do you have such records? If yes, it will assist you in getting some ideas for writing. However, if your answer is no then, this is your chance to keep one. You can start by trying to keep one. You can start by trying to

\* Write daily and keep your journal handy so you can write down your thoughts as they occur to you.

\*Let your imagination run free. You can write down anything from your dreams, songs, poems, story ideas and drawings (Kinneavy and Warriner 1993).

**Free writing** - is also another technique that can be used in prewriting stage. As the name implies, it is writing freely about anything or whatever pops into your head. Do not judge ideas or worry about wording, complete sentences or mistakes in punctuation to be able to do this effectively you can.

- Set a time limit of three to five minutes and keep writing until the time is up
- Start with a subject that is important to you. It could be anything -sports, science fiction, movies, agriculture, music and others.
- If you get stuck along the line, just write anything. The important thing is to keep your pen moving.

**Focused free writing or looping:** is another form of free writing which involves choosing a word or phrase from your free writing to use as starting point for your write-up. After choosing a starting point then you do a free writing using the word or phrase as a subject. The idea is that by so doing, you will be able to focus on what you are writing on (Kinneavy and Warriner,1993)

**Brainstorming** involves saying whatever comes to mind in response to a word without stopping to judge what is said. It could be done alone, in a group or in pairs. However, group or pair brainstorming is more fun because hearing other people's ideas helps you to think of even more ideas.

According to Seow (2002)"group members spew out ideas about the topic". Spontaneity is important here .

There are no right or wrong answers. Students may cover familiar grounds first and then move off to more abstract or wild territories. For effective brainstorming.

- Write down a subject at a top of a piece of paper (in group, use the chalkboard)
- List every idea about the subject that comes to mind (in group, have one person to list the ideas)
- Keep going until you run out of ideas (Soew,2001; Kinneavy and Warriner,1993)

**Clustering:** This is sometimes called webbing (Seow 2002) involves the brainstorming and then connecting the ideas with circles and lines. In the classroom, students are encouraged to form words related to a stimulus supplied by the teacher. The words are circled and then linked by lines. The

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lines and the circles help you to see and understand how the ideas you came about as a result of brainstorming are related.

**Clustering** is a simple yet powerful strategy. Its visual character seems to stimulate the flow of association and is particularly good for students who know what they want to say but just cannot say it. (Proett and Gill 1986 p6). To make a cluster diagram.

- Write your subject on your paper and circle it
- Around the subject, write whatever ideas about the topic that occur to you. Circle these ideas
- Draw lines connecting them with the subject
- When your ideas make you think of related ideas, connect them with circles and lines (Kinneavy and Warriner 1993)

**Asking questions:** A writer generates who, why, what, where and how questions about a topic. More such questions can be asked of answers to the first string of WH-questions and so on help a writer to realize what to write

### Reading and listening

Reading is helpful particularly when someone is writing about things outside one's own experience. It is through reading that most of the time we get ideas for our own writing. Several ideas could be obtained from books, magazine, newspapers and brochures. The advantage of reading is that it saves time. One could easily checkout books by checking their tables of contents and index to find areas of interest and the exact pages. The skill of skimming will be useful in this regards because one will need to skim through the pages of the book until one finds something of interests. Also, one's skill in note taking will be used in taking down notes of the main ideas and important details (Kinneavy and Warriner 1993)

**Listening:** A writer can also obtain ideas for writing through listening. By listening for information from speeches, radio and television programs, interviews, audio tapes or video tapes, stories, anecdotes and lectures. As a pre listening activity, one needs to make a list of pre listening questions about the topic. As the writer listens, he/she should take notes of the main ideas and important details Kinneavy and Warriner (1993), Underwood (1989)

**Imagining:** This is a very interesting source of ideas for writing. Many works of art are a product of imagination. For instance novels, poems and short stories that you might have read are examples of such. The use of imagination gives the writer creative ideas for writing. Often, we imagine that we are someone else or somewhere else. A writer can trigger off his/her imagination with question like what if? Such question can be

- What if I become a grown up overnight?
- What if I become the president of Nigeria?
- What if I was locked up in the school library?

### Practice Exercise: using your imagination

Imagine that you were locked up in the school library. Write an outline of the ideas you will use in delivering this topic. **A night in the library**

As you engage yourself in the prewriting activities, you should keep in mind your purpose of writing and your target audience. It is within the scope of the prewriting step to think about the purpose and the audience for which one is writing. The purpose of writing varies from individual to individual. But generally, the purpose of writing as we have already identified include among others to

- To express oneself for this purpose, the examples of the forms of writing for this are journal entry, letters and personal essay.
- To be creative: the forms of writing for this include short story, poem and play.
- To explain or inform: the forms of writing for this include short story, poem and play.
- To explain or inform: the forms of writing for this are science or history writing, news story, biography and travel essay

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- To persuade: the forms of writing for this are persuasive essay, letter to the editor, advertisement and political speech **Make a plan on how to arrange your ideas**

As you engage in the prewriting activities, you should also make plans on how to arrange whatever ideas you have gathered using the various techniques discussed above, you will have to arrange these ideas in such a way that gives your readers the “value for their money” and to get them to follow your line of thought

### Tree diagram

A tree diagram is another way by which a writer organizes his main ideas and important details. The tree diagram helps writer to see the structure of ideas.

**Charts** The writer can create a chart for the different information he/she has collected. For example if he/she gathers ideas for a report on the truancy in some schools in Anambra state, he/she might organize such by making a chart like the following

Schools	LGA	STATE	NO OF CLASS	%
FCET Umunze Staff School	Orumba	Anambra	100	100
FSTC Awka	Awka	Anambra	50	50

The above is an example of chart which can be used by a writer

### Step two

#### Writing a first draft

In the pre writing step, you have been able to identify a topic through the various techniques, determine your purpose and the audience and also organize your information using the different arrangement order. The next thing in the writing process for you to write your first draft.

There is no one right way to write a paper. Some people write to their drafts quickly, just trying to get their ideas on paper. Others go slowly, carefully shaping each sentence and paragraphs. At this drafting stage, writers are focused on the fluency of writing and are not pre occupied with grammatical accuracy or the neatness of the draft. One dimension of a good writing is the writer's ability to visualize an audience. In the drafting stage, the writer should be encouraged to visualize the audience and write for different audiences among whom are peers, other classmates, pen friends and family members. A conscious sense of audience can dictate a certain style to be used. Whatever the case, below are some tips that will be useful to the writer

- Use your prewriting plans to guide you
- Write freely focus on expressing your ideas clearly
- As you write, you may discover new ideas, include the ideas in your drafts
- Don't worry about spelling and grammar errors you can correct them later
- It is worth remembering that the first draft of an essay usually contains a lot of mistakes. These will need to be corrected later in the stage of writing ( Winneany and Warriners 1993)

### Step Three

#### Evaluating and revising

This is yet another step in the writing process. They are an essential step in improving your writing and they are usually done at the same time. Evaluating involves making a decision as to the strengths and weakness of your paper. When you evaluate writing, you judge it against a set of standards. You decide whether or not the writing meets each standards.

Some of the standards you might use to evaluate your writing include

- The writing has a clear main ideas
- The main ideas are supported with details

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- The order of the ideas makes sense.
- The ideas flow smoothly.
- The writing is interesting  
(Seow, 2002; Kinneavy and Warriner, 1993).

Evaluation here is of two types namely **self evaluation** and **peer evaluation**

The self evaluation involves evaluating your own work by yourself. For effective self evaluation consider the following types:

### Tips for self Evaluation

Read your paper carefully more than once. First, read for content (what you say) Next, read for organisation (how you order your ideas). Finally, read for style (how you use words and sentences).

- Listen carefully - Read your paper aloud to yourself, listen to what you have said. You may notice that the ideas don't flow smoothly or that some sentences sound awkward
- Take time - Set your draft aside. come back to it later and read through it. It will find that it is easier to be objective about it after a little time away ( Kinneavy and Warriner, 1993)

### Peer Evaluation

**Peer Evaluation** involves having someone else to read and evaluate your work. This sort of evaluation helps you to improve on your writing. In peer evaluation the writer can

- Make a list of questions for the peer evaluator of the parts of the write-up which the writer is more worried about.
- Keep an open mind. Don't take your evaluator's suggestion as a personal criticism
- As for the peer evaluator, he/ she should tell the writer what is good about the paper to give the writer some encouragement.
- Focus on content and organisation. The writer will catch spelling and grammar errors when proof reading.

Be sensitive to the writer's feelings. State your suggestions as questions such as what does this mean? And can you give an example? Seow, 2002; Kinneavy and Warrier, (1993).

**Revising:** involves making the necessary changes to improve your paper. It is often considered as the ,most important stage in writing. It involves adding finishing touches to ;piece of writing. Revising can be done many times until one is satisfied with one's work. The following techniques can be used in revising.

**Add** involves adding new words and phrases, sentences and whole paragraphs.

**Cut** this involves taking out repeated or unnecessary information and unrelated ideas.

### Step Four

#### Proof reading and publishing

Proof reading involves re-reading your paper carefully in order to correct mistakes in grammar, spelling, capitalization and punctuation. This should be done slowly and carefully. It should be line by line and paragraph by paragraph. If in the course of proof reading, you are not sure of what is correct look it up. Afterwards, exchange papers with classmate and proofread each other's paper to try to find errors that need to be corrected.

### Guidelines for proofreading

- Is every sentence a complete sentence, not a fragment?
- Does every sentence begin with a capital letter and end with the correct punctuation mark?
- Do plural verbs have plural subject? Do singular verbs have singular subject?
- Are verbs in the right form? Are verbs in the right tense?
- Are verbs in the right forms used correctly in making comparison?
- Are the forms of personal pronoun use correctly?
- Does every pronoun agree with its antecedent (the words it refers to in number and in gender)?
- Are pronoun references clear?

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- Are all words spelled correctly? Are the plural forms of nouns correct? (Kinneavy and Warriner, 1993).

### **Publishing**

Publishing involves sharing of your writing. This is done after proof reading. Below are some ways of publishing your work

- Read what you have written to the class or to a group of friends.
- Illustrate or decorate a copy of your creative writing and give it to a friend or relative.
- Post book and novel reviews on school bulletin board or in the library
- Keep a folder of your writing. Share it with your family and friends.
- Enter a writing contest, some contests award prizes. Your teacher may have information about writing contests.
- Send your writing to a newspaper or magazine. Try the school newspaper, your book or magazine. Your local newspaper might publish a letter to the editor. Find out which magazine publishes student stories, poems and essays (Kinneavy and Warriners, 1993).

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