

The Amplifier

December 2018

The Beginning, Middleton and End of My Writing Process

When the Amplifier staff asked me to write a piece on the writing process, I admittedly felt a little panicky at first. Even though I teach and tutor writing at the University of Illinois on the Urbana campus, I don't often dive deep into my own writing practices or processes. While I have to contend with them often in my writing as a graduate student, rarely do I ever sit down and reflect on what I do and why I do it, how it works and where it comes from. What I do to write and (re)write and (re)(re)write is so personal, private, and to be perfectly honest, not always in line with what's considered "best practices" when it comes to writing, academic or otherwise. In what follows, though, I'll touch on a handful of select insights about (my) writing process—and maybe what you can take to use for your own.

I'll start by mentioning that I find the phrase "writing process" a bit of a misnomer. I don't believe anyone has a single way that they go about putting something to paper or screen. What we do to think, write, and act varies depending on the task at hand. Whether we're composing a letter to a loved one, a presentation to be delivered to our peers, a collage, a poem, or some sort of academic assignment for class, we approach these genres differently. Or even if we're carrying out the same sort of writing task, we might complete those projects differently depending on where we're writing; how distracted, hungry, or tired we are; or any other number of social-environmental-personal factors. In this regard, there are only writing processes. Who ever enacts the same steps toward writing the same way time and time again?

In some regards, this is why I find it so difficult to talk about process work—and why I think classroom guidance on these topics is more than not flattened, inaccurate, and less than helpful. Is it ever really prewrite->write->revise->edit, in such a linear, homogenized procedure? Rarely. Unless I'm

narrating my experiences in working on a specific project or maybe a particular genre, it's hard to point to anything remotely singular or generalizable. But from a teaching or instructional standpoint, if all we ever did was talk about our own, unique, happening-one-time-ever-over-time-and-space processes, then we'd not very effectively be able to communicate any writing "best practices" to each other.

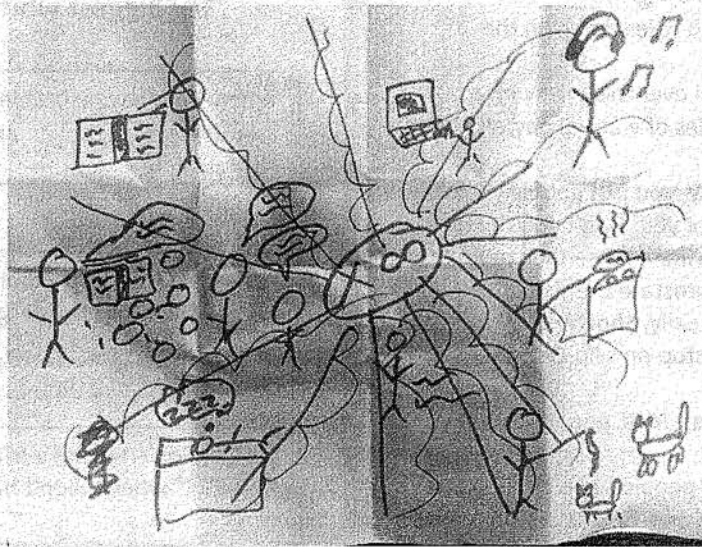
In lieu of that, though, what I'll offer is a drawing of some things that are representative of one of my many composing processes. I've decided to share this illustration because I think it gets at a lot of the non-writing activities that I believe are important to approaching any sort of writing task.

I recognize that my drawing is messy at best, incomprehensible at worst, so I'll explain a bit of what's going on for me here. At its core, what's present here are really quotidian things that comprise my day-to-day. There are some scenes that are typically associated with literacy: reading a book (upper left), writing at a computer (upper middle), and teaching in a classroom (middle left). But I also listen to music (upper right), cook (middle right), play with my cats (lower right), run/exercise (lower middle), sleep (lower left), and talk with people

Logan Middleton's messy life

(colleagues; friends; strangers; close to center). The " $x \infty$ " indicates that all of these activities are recursive; they're repeating over and over and over again, spiraling, accelerating, and exploding into daily, lived contexts for all of eternity (or until I'm dead).

When I'm doing most of the things in my drawing, I'm not writing. But I might think of something that's useful for writing. Someone might say something that sparks an idea, a turn of phrase, or something related to composing that I've not thought of. In cooking a new recipe, for instance, I'm reminded of the ways that recipes are prescriptive and how, in my teaching, I encourage students not to follow "writing formulas" to a tee, instead encouraging a sense of play, experimentation, and trial and error. Or I think of how I



actually started composing this very piece when commuting back from DCC on August 24th, spending the hour drive back thinking of how I'd organize my thoughts, include the drawing above, and zoom in on explaining snapshots of this particular process in a piece about process (meta!).

The ultimate point I want to make here is that, to quote writing researchers Paul Prior and Julie Hengst, "people are never just talking, just reading, just writing." We're always engaged in a wide range of meaning-making activities, whether they're explicitly literacy based, rooted in alphabetic text, or involve some sort of generation of words for an audience. That's not to say that I'm claiming that "running is writing" or "playing with cats is writing." But these are practices and processes that can, through means either fortuitous or intentional, lead to some sort of idea or some sort of insight that we'd not otherwise anticipate. And if that thing ends up being useful—great! If not, that's OK too.

And so, whatever you're writing, however you're writing, whenever you're writing, think in terms of what works, feels good, or what can be habitual for you. Think in terms of multiples. Think in terms of writing-that-is-not-writing; that may very well end up getting you closer to where you want to go.

—Logan Middleton

Nick & Shorty

Nick- What the hell are all these water bottles doing on the floor of my ship? (Buuurp!)

Shorty- Well geez, Nick, you drag me all over the galaxy on a five day adventure, eight bottles of water a day, that's forty bottles, Nick!

Nick- You're such a little gobbler, Shorty, you just gobble up whatever tripe is put in front of you. Don't you think it's strange that you have to urinate more than a seventy-year-old man with a prostate the size of a cantelope? (Buuurp!) I mean really, Shorty, the maintenance staff at the rest stop on Glip-Glorp thinks we're stalking them.

Shorty- You don't need to call me names, Nick, geez. I'm just trying to do what's healthy.

Nick- How is it ever healthy to do what people say without knowing why? (Buuurp!) Look, Shorty, in 1945 there was a study done, by a bunch of scientists with nothing important to do apparently, who said the body needs 2.5 liters of water a day, which roughly translates to 8-10 glasses of water. But what no one talks about is the same study said most of that water exists in the foods we eat, so there's no need to work your kidneys harder than I (Buuurp!) work my liver.

Shorty- Awe, come on Nick, no way that much water is in my food. Plus I drink soda and I know that dehydrates me.

Nick- Oh you knooooow that, do you? Why don't you quit assuming you know so much and think logically about this. What is the main ingredient in soda? It's water, you know it all, soggy little @\$#! Same as

coffee, tea, fruit juice and probably any other liquid you consume daily. So unless you're going to help me start a bottled water company, why don't you get all these bottles out of my ship (Buuurp!) and stop helping the multi-national conglomerates multiply their profits by making something as common as fresh water into some kind of must-have, in-demand, cure-all magical substance! (Buuurp!) Here's an idea, drink water when you're thirsty. Pretty simple, right Shorty?

Shorty- Sure, whatever Nick. But can I go to the bathroom first?

—Chad Lane

Inmate Twitter



it

"My biggest white lie was. . ."

Whenever I have a problem with someone who asks if I have a problem and I say "No."

#conflictavoidance

I told her I loved her when I didn't really know her, but it made her feel good about herself.

#3kidslater

When people tell me a frivolous story and I say "Exactly!" when I didn't hear anything they said.

#headphoneson

"I read every word of *The Amplifier*."

#extratoiletpaper



Next issue's question: "What three works of fiction should everyone read?"

Im-be-ciles (i

The Supreme Court, American Eugenics, and the Sterilization of Carrie Buck
Adam Cohen

"Cohen's book is a masterpiece of history and science writing." —Montreal Star Tribune



Very recently America lay to rest Senator John McCain, a national hero and self-proclaimed maverick known for challenging the status quo. During his eulogy, former president George W. Bush made reference to McCain's brutal honesty that pardoned no one, not even sitting presidents. A champion of truth is direly needed within today's political climate of alternative facts and loyalty pledges. It's unfortunate that individuals like Adam Cohen aren't recognized for their bravery to tell ugly truths.

Adam Cohen's book, *Imbeciles*, traffics in truths that indict America for tragedies birthed in the 1920's, the reverberations of which were felt throughout history and still have an effect on today's politics and society. For those of you not familiar with the term *eugenics* Mr. Cohen does a skillful job explaining the "science" behind the term through intriguing

storytelling. Cohen also gives historical background to the numerous societal ills that plague this country, such as the immigration debate, race relations, Supreme Court nomination hearings and their importance, the opioid epidemic, accounts of violence at the hands of the "insane" and "criminals," and many others. You will encounter tidbits of historical facts that will blow your mind and call your sanity into question.

Imbeciles tells the tale of the poor and disenfranchised via Carrie Buck, the unsuspecting lead character of this tragic tale. Carrie's fate was to suffer a devastating and silencing end through coerced sterilization. The most infuriating part of her story is that all this was done by those she, and most of society, would trust to protect their freedoms. The role lawmakers and the Supreme Court play in these atrocious crimes will make your stomach churn. Eugenicians accomplished their mission of sterilizing the socially undesirable by labeling them "feeble minded". This recounting of historical events informs the reader of how easy it is to marginalize a segment of society and perform unspeakable acts upon them. The background of the story is set in a time (1920s America) where racism is known to be embedded in the fabric of the country. The historical period of the book's focus makes it easier for the modern reader to recognize the racist rhetoric for what it was and, helps us recognize the dog whistles blaring out of our television speakers in attacks on certain demographics of today's society.

Imbeciles is a nonfiction account of American history that reads more like a fictional drama. Author Adam

Cohen does a masterful job of delineating the complex nature of the eugenics movement, a movement that laid the foundation for the numerous atrocities. Cohen compartmentalizes the book into sections that seem repetitive, but builds a case to lay blame at the feet of those responsible for so much inhumane behavior in the name of ignorance and bigotry. His approach makes those involved accountable for their actions and comes as a breath of fresh air in a day and age where accountability is as rare as a winged unicorn.


In addition to exposing the racist undertones of American politics, *Imbeciles* drops a bomb on the notion that America was the triumphant vindicator of freedom during World War II. I was surprised to learn that American academics laid the foundation to Adolf Hitler's manifesto *Mein Kampf*. Even more surprising was the fact that during the Nuremburg trials the Nazis founded their defense for war crimes upon American legal precedent, citing and quoting the United States Supreme Court. The roller coaster hit an all new low when I learned that American immigration politics wrote the tragic end to Anne Frank's diary. This country's xenophobic attitudes led to political action that discriminated against those deemed a threat from without, namely those of non-Nordic decent. The Franks' story and numerous other "jewels" of veracious historical accounts are scattered throughout this book.

Imbeciles failed to receive the "must read" review by the prominent book reviewers, but for those who suffer, or have suffered, some sort of social injustice this is a definite "must read".

—Pablo Mendoza

Mario's Mysteries

- 1) It is the beginning of eternity, the end of time and space, the beginning of the end, and the end of every space. What is it?
- 2) The younger I am the whiter my hair is. The older I am the blacker my hair is. My hair is black when it is wet. My hair is white when it is dry. What am I?



CALL
the
WAAAHMBULANCE

Does your life feel like it's becoming a multi-car pileup? Do your affairs of the heart seem more like cardiac arrest? Are you choking on whatever's stuck in your craw? Then dial up the Waaahmbulance. Our ace paramedics will be on scene to mend that broken heart, help vent your spleen, and dislodge the foot that keeps finding its way into your mouth—not to mention the stick that wound up elsewhere.

I am writing you in the hope that you can help me with a problem that I have. I have a twenty-nine-year-old daughter who refuses to grow up. She still lives at home. She's never had a job; she has no driver's license and has no desire to rectify either of these situations. She is not a lazy malcontent; she is willing to do anything for anyone especially when it comes to helping her grandmother and other family members. The fact is though she lacks direction and the family coddles her and enables her to the point that she feels no need to advance in life. How do I bring up this subject without alienating her and causing a rift to grow between us?

Sincerely,
At wits end

At Wits End prompted three different suggestions from our Waaahmbulance responders:

At Wits End,

It seems like you have her life all figured out. If you came up with this theory by listening to your daughter then you wouldn't be seeking my help. I suggest you try listening to your daughter for the answer to your question. Maybe then you'll realize you're vicariously trying to relive your life through her. Best of luck.

Dear At Wits End,

I'm sorry I can't seem to come up with any advice to help you out. The best thing I can tell you is let her know how much you love her and tell her that you're worried about her future. Try to relate to her by telling her that knowing one's course in life is hard to determine and a scary proposition at that. Maybe you can have some material at hand for you and her to go over together.

Dear At Wits End,

Give her 90 days to get her act together and if she doesn't have a drivers license or a job by then, KICK HER SPOILED ASS OUT INTO THE REAL WORLD.

Thanks for Your Embrace

I first heard of the University of Illinois's satellite program at Danville Correctional Center after my arrival at Western Illinois Correctional Center in 2009. This was music to my soul! You see, in 2007 when I originally arrived at Western and promptly submitted for enrollment into college programming, I found myself unable to attend any of the college programs offered by Lakeland College. This was due to my past academic achievements in the Illinois Department of Corrections—I had exceeded the allotted number of degrees and occupational/vocational certificates. I was not permitted to take advantage of the one place that I had found to be my comfort zone—the classroom. In short, I was dazed and devastated. What would I do for the next eleven-plus years that remained of my stay in IDOC?

However, when I heard of EJP, all was not lost. I was light years away from EJP by being in another institution, but that did not prevent the rays of hope from reaching me. The possibility that I might be able to continue my education through EJP became my dam against despair. I spent the next eight years repeatedly submitting transfer requests to Danville CC. I continued to plead for class enrollment while at Western; I managed to eke out a class here and there, whenever there were changes in the college programs' personnel. However, the continued transfer denials soon stifled any short-term joy I received. In total, my transfer request to Danville CC was denied fourteen times.

Then came what would prove to be one of the best years of my life—2017! My transfer request was approved in January, and I arrived to Danville in February. It was with great enthusiasm that I asked for an EJP application, almost before my feet hit the pavement getting off the bus. I'm still amazed that after all the years of trying to get to Danville to enroll in EJP, I had just enough time left on my sentence to be accepted.

What I discovered from the first day of the New Student Reading Group and throughout each for-credit class, workshop, WAMP session, committee meeting, and all other EJP events still astounds me to this day. It was not the traditional aspects of academia, which I knew so well from my many years in the classroom, that stood out most to me. It was the people and OUR community.

At this time I wish to thank all of EJP; thank you for your hospitable embrace that has been so welcoming. The manner in which this community received me will stay with me for the remaining years of my life. Going forward there will never be an interview, committee meeting, think tank, or any other gathering, where I will not have the backing of my EJP sisters and brothers. All of your insights, pushbacks, and unique points of views will be with me—forever. I will be guided by your passions, by your humanity, by your "roll your sleeves up and get it done attitudes," and by your concerns for one another.

I have purposely not mentioned any names because I have personally written this letter to each of you from the depth of my heart. Still there are those who reach me down to the marrow of my bones. Those of you who have gotten

involved, sometimes without my knowing how to ask, you have invested in my tomorrows and me. I can never say thank you enough nor convey how much I mean it. All of my successes shall be *our* successes. That which I give back to this world shall be our shared contributions.

For many of you, this is indeed not a good-bye; this is just until we meet again. I am off to join the alumni that have made this transition before me, and I will dedicate myself to the continued service of EJP and the formerly incarcerated. I go forward to expand our community, and I take each of you with me, because I am EJP.

—Karl Eric Ezekiel Simmons

PBS Programming in December

Saturday, December 1, 11pm: Chet Atkins: Certified Guitar Player
1987 event celebrating the music legend.

Sunday, December 2, 10pm: 70s Soul Superstar
Patti LaBelle hosts the Chi-Lites, Heatwave, and others.

Tuesday, December 4, 10:30pm: Rhythm of the Dance
Irish entertainment.

Sunday, December 9, 9:30pm: Secrets of Scotland Yard
The famous police station exposed.

Tuesday, December 11, 8pm: Letters from Baghdad
Gertrude Bell—spy, explorer, and political powerhouse.

Tuesday, December 11, 9:30pm: Frontline: "Trafficked in America"
Guatemalan slave labor in Ohio.

Monday, December 17, 9pm: Independent Lens: "Man on Fire"
He did what?!

Tuesday 18, December 19, 9pm: Frontline: "The Gang Crackdown"
MS-13 and immigration sweeps.

Wednesday, December 26, 8pm: Nova: "Apollo's Daring Mission"
First manned moon mission.

Wednesday, December 26, 9pm: American Experience: "Tesla"
The man, not the car.

The Amplifier is a publication by the students of the Education Justice Project, a unit of the University of Illinois, at Danville Correctional Center in Illinois.

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Dr. Didactic

Do you know the names for the days of the week? How about the names for each of the months? Of course you do, but do you know what the names mean or where they come from? If you didn't you will after reading this.

English	Latin	Anglo-Saxon/Old Norse
Sunday	Dies Solis (Sol's day)	Sunnandaeg (Sun's day)
Monday	Dies Lunae (Luna's day)	Monandaeg (Moon's day)
Tuesday	Dies Martis (Mars's day)	Tiwesdaeg (Tiw's day)
Wednesday	Dies Mercurii (Mercury's day)	Wodnesdaeg (Woden's day)
Thursday	Dies Jovis (Jupiter's day)	Thursdaeg (Thor's day)
Friday	Dies Veneris (Venus's day)	Frigedaeg (Frigga's day)
Saturday	Dies Saturni (Saturn's day)	Saeterndaeg (Saturn's day)

January	Janus (Roman god of gates and doorways)
February	februa ("to cleanse")
March	Mars (Roman god of war)
April	aperio ("to open", as in a bud)
May	Maia (Roman goddess of plants)
June	Juno (Roman goddess of marriage)
July	Julius Caesar
August	Augustus Caesar
September	seven (seventh month of the Roman calendar)
October	eight (eighth month of the Roman calendar)
November	nine (ninth month of the Roman calendar)
December	ten (tenth month of the Roman calendar)

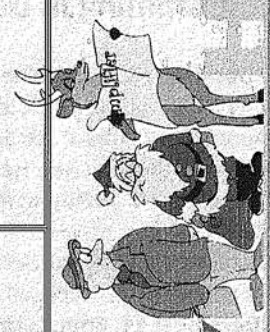

—Thomas Stromblad

If there are any other trivia you would like Dr. Didactic to reveal in these pages, send your suggestions to the Amplifier through the resource room suggestion box or to the EJP office.

Answers to Mario's Mysteries:

September: The two elderly people are on separate sides of the river.

November: Jill was a cat and Jack was a fish. Jill knocked over the fish bowl.

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	
<h1>December</h1>							
2	8:30am Workshop: Writing 12pm CAVE 5pm WAMP	12pm Evaluation 5pm Credit Courses 5pm LP	8:30am Workshop: Office Hours, IVP, Writing 12pm Python 6pm Student Meeting	8:30am Workshop: Culture Inclusion 5pm LP, Mindfulness	8:30am CAVE 12pm WAMP 5pm Credit Courses	8:57am On the Yard "I can't feel my fingers or toes anymore; do you think I should do my next set?"	
9	8:30am Workshop: IVP 12pm CAVE 5pm WAMP	12pm Evaluation 5pm Credit Courses 5pm LP	8:30am Workshop: IVP 12pm Python 5pm Workshop: Engineering 6pm Student Meeting	8:30am Workshop: Culture Inclusion 5pm LP, Mindfulness	8:30am CAVE 12pm WAMP 5pm Credit Courses	15	
11:17pm In the Cell "No, Cellie, I would not like to be on your naughty list!"	12pm CAVE 5pm WAMP	12pm Evaluation 5pm LP	6pm Winter Solstice Literary Event	5pm LP, Mindfulness	8:30am CAVE	22	
23	24	25	26	27	28	29	
30	31						

HAPPY HOLIDAYS