



# A comparison of diversity in the writing processes of writers: Implications for teaching of writing in Pakistan

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## Abstract

Writing researchers have shown increasing interest in the writing process of individuals. This interest has largely been stimulated by interest in writing instruction as well as such pressing issues as the writing processes of ESL writers and the effects of L1 on L2. This article outlines the diversity in writing processes of Pakistani writers, highlighting the writer's individual style of writing. Cognitive process model of writing has been reviewed and discussed in Pakistani context. In process model of writing, which is proposed as an alternative to product oriented model of writing, writing is said to be an individual process of writer for the reader. In the process of writing, writers may be said to explore various writing tools which gradually enable them to set an identical writing style. Writers vary in the use of their writing processes that make writing a non-linear process. Differences in each individual's writing style are evident. This study offers interpretive evidence of how these individuals may differ in their writing processes.

**Keywords:** Writing process, writing instruction, Cognitive process model, individuals, differences

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## 1. Introduction

A few years back, during the collection of data for my PhD thesis, I asked one of my colleagues to describe to me how he writes. His answer was although lengthy yet fascinating. He assured me that he had never practiced a formal outline. He was so committed on his style of writing that it urged me to explore one identical strategy for successful writing and the commitment of writers with their own styles. Since then I started thinking on various styles of writing and commitments of writers with their styles, this inquiry took the place of my hobby. I started asking everyone I knew who wrote regularly to describe their writing process to me: academics, authors, graduate students, business professionals, lawyers etc. I expected either to find one identical strategy for successful writing (which could then be a part of my Doctoral Research and I

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could also pass on to my students) or to discover that there were as many writing tools and variations as there were writers. In fact, I was successful to find a lot of minor variations for example people wrote using different tools with different conditions, at different times, in different places, and for different reasons. I also found that writers tended to use various cognitive strategies in the process of writing. Two of these strategies are the contention of this paper.

### **Think and Write:**

The first strategy used by the writers was pre-writing process of thinking. One of my colleagues who is a writer applies this strategy. He is an Assistant Professor, a celebrity poet and a professional writer. He is currently working on a unique idea of exploring an ancient Arab poet. He describes his way of writing essays or any other creative work as under:

- i. He begins his work by spending weeks of thinking before actually writing.
- ii. He thinks about what he is going to say.
- iii. He reviews the available literature on the same topic.
- iv. He takes notes from the available literature.
- v. He discusses a few of his ideas with colleagues.
- vi. When he feels that he has retrieved all necessary information he talks it through.
- vii. Often he gives himself lectures when he is alone in office, home etc.

He rehearses the whole retrieved material for weeks and sits down and writes the essay, usually completing it in a day or two.

### **Spontaneous Drafting**

One of my colleagues, writes for a news paper and academic books, he reveals his writing processes as under:

- i. He usually sits and smokes for a long time before he starts to write.
- ii. When he returns to his task he sits down and types out the article.
- iii. He writes almost as quickly as he can write.
- iv. He writes at least three drafts.
- v. Selects useful content from the mess of written drafts

- vi. Writes two more drafts and selects a final draft.
- vii. After he finishes writing, he reads over the article once and makes stylistic changes.
- viii. And then sends it out to be typed.

### **Out lining before writing**

A third person I interviewed, a student advisor in a private college, he reported that

- i. Often he drinks two to three glass of water before he begins to write because this activity keeps him from pacing, while leaving his mind free to meditate on his task
- ii. When he finishes drinking water he sits down at his desk and writes an outline.
- iii. He says, "Writing the outline is the most difficult part for me. It takes a long time, but once I've worked out the outline, the writing itself is easy, almost anti-climactic."

All of these three writers have reported a strategy of thinking before writing. This style comprises of the following features:

### **Prewriting stage**

These writers typically exhibit a process of prewriting. At first hand they have to effort to gather their material (content), after this they have to spend days, weeks, even months to consolidate their thinking on their subject before they begin to write.

### **Pen and Paper Activity(Drafting)**

During the pre-writing stage, they often start writing in real situations which demand the use of pen and paper; they talk to themselves (rehearsing) while sitting in balcony, driving, smoking or go for long walks, or drinking water. Some of the writers begin to write by writing an outline, while others don't. Those who don't, however, say that they have their organizational framework worked out before they begin to write.

- i. These writers frequently reported to me that, once they began to write, they felt as if the hardest work of writing was over.

- ii. The writers in this group reported that their writing time was relatively rapid and continuous.
- iii. Most of them reported writing few drafts, usually only one or two.
- iv. Usually these writers reported that revisions after the first draft were revisions for grammar and style, rather than for content and organization.

### **Write, Write and re-write**

A different style of writing that is very common among students. I name it the “write, write and re-write style. During all this process I interviewed 10 writers of various competence, level and qualifications. A student writer reported to use this style. He reported that when he is asked to write an assignment,

- i. He recollects all of his materials for example; notes, books, paper, and then begins writing in a separate or isolated room.
- ii. Then he begins to write, recalling and repeating the same old items this all reminds him that it is just a rough draft and nothing more, so he writes each and every thing.
- iii. Some time he takes the initiative by writing summaries of his notes and readings.
- iv. Later he starts working on headings which may result in his final essay.
- v. He states that he picks one heading that he uses for final essay it consequently produces five or six pages and out of these pages, he only gets one or two sentences that will actually be used.
- vi. After writing a number of headings, he would bring them in some order and type them.
- vii. Then he begins to revise the typed copy, writing the next draft in longhand.
- viii. He continues in this manner, alternating handwritten drafts with typed drafts until he has a final product that satisfies him—which may be anywhere from 5 to 15 drafts after his original attempt.
- ix. A second writer, a lawyer, my wife, says that
- x. She begins writing soon after she has sorted out some of her legal references.

- xi. She reports, that she writes smoothly and accumulates a big mass of notes or headings. If ever the stream of an idea breaks she instantly picks the next idea and tries to expand and associate it.
- xii. Then she rewrites the notes, and rewrites, usually a new list of notes every day for two to three days. By the end of this exercise, she can see where her arguments are leading to.
- xiii. Then she starts to refine the mechanics and later, her legal draft is ready for presentation."

Both of the above described illustrations show "instant-writing-re-writing " style. This style has the following characteristics in contrast to the think-write style (See Table 1):

Table 1. Characteristics of instant-writing-re-writing style

Think and write	Write, write and re-write
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It takes a long time between actual writing activity and collection of cues.</li> <li>• It keeps a writer away from material (pen and paper) until he/she has not completed his/her thinking process.</li> <li>• It provides the writers enough time for building an outline, organizational pattern or a schema in mind</li> <li>• Thinking before writing saves from a physical drudgery of producing masses of drafts.</li> <li>• It accelerates writing speed.</li> <li>• It keeps writers on producing drafts more frequently.</li> <li>• It encompasses revision as whole for example both the content and mechanics.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It takes no longer time between thinking and actual writing activity.</li> <li>• It creates such an environment that works as a stimulus for writing instantly and the writers starts writing even while the journey of his/her thinking is yet not accomplished.</li> <li>• It helps writers with in process plans and organizational patterns.</li> <li>• It makes it a drudgery and source of torture to produce even first draft without thinking before hand.</li> <li>• It slower down the writing speed because the writers have to sort out usable and appropriate sentences from a big mass of drafts.</li> <li>• It reduces the pace of draft production due to unnecessary not taking and draft writing because these writers know that what are</li> </ul>

	<p>they writing is no more than a mess.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It separates revision in two phases (i) content and structure at the end of first draft and (ii) in process revisions for mechanics.</li> </ul>
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Writing is a recursive, non-linear process (Flower & Hayes, 1981) in which a writer cycles back and forth. It shows that the writer gets help from the produced text which becomes a source of expanding ideas. According to Donald Murray (1978) writing is a process of discovering what we want to say by writing about it. Murray (1978) says by writing the first draft, writers, and “stake out a territory to explore.” They then use successive drafts to explore this territory, confirming, altering or developing their original vision as they go. (Stephens D. Rory 1996). Here the writers of Instant-Writing style clearly support the findings of previous researches (Flower & Hayes, 1981; Donald Murray, 1978; Sondra Perl, 1982 and Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987).

Interestingly the proficient writers used both styles. Both groups of writers, go through the same processes Donald Murray (1978) says, delineating a territory, then exploring and developing and changing their ideas and the structure of their text until they have a whole that satisfies them, and then turning their attention to matters of style and correctness. What differentiates the two styles is that writers who exhibit the think-write style search for and find the meaning and shape of their ideas before they begin to write, while writers who exhibit the Instant-Writing style do the same cognitive work, but do it while they are writing.

Lev Vygotsky (1962) differentiates between “inner speech,” speech for oneself, and “external speech,” speech for others. In one of his essays, “Thought and Word, he says” Inner speech is the language of inner thought, while external speech is the language of thoughts encoded for others in speech and writing. Inner speech, since it is egocentric, is highly abbreviated and saturated with meaning. Writing is one of the decoded forms of external speech and demands explicitness, clarity of purpose and reader and writer harmony for the discovery of meaning. In the words of Briton and James Moffett (1978; 1981), writing travels from egocentricism toward maturity i.e. reader based

writing. Since inner speech and written language are at opposite poles, drafts are necessary in order to make the transition from one to the other—drafts. Lucy McCormic (unpublished work, cited in Lee et al.,) advises, students must make it messy to make it clear. Writing begins as a mess of drafts (Lee et al.,). Vygotsky (1962), says which can either be mental drafts or written drafts. The process of drafting, then, can be seen as the process of making the transition, step by step, from inner to external speech from egocentricism toward maturity i.e. reader based writing. The two styles of composing that have been discussed can be viewed as two alternative but equally effective cognitive strategies for writing, one using the medium of inner speech, and the other using the medium of external speech.

The thing to remember is that writing is not a unitary process (Paul, 2001) means a writer deals with a variety of constraints, often many different constraints for example; how to write in school, in office etc and he/she has to cope with them. But the writing experience continues. Gradually, as the writing experiences broaden he/she uses different tools in writing, writing itself becomes a tool. According to Tompkins (2005) the writing process is a tool. Denny (2011) says that a tool has the purpose of making a task easier to approach. If the students consider it a task it becomes burdensome one and the purpose of writing becomes skewed, even unrecognizable. Writers begin to use this tool to sift out the methods that work for them, from those that don't, and to use, more and more, the methods that work for them, until an identical individual style emerges.

Most of the respondents who expressed their writing style with me were committed to the style they described as their dominant tool of writing, that is, committed in an odd sort of way. They all believed that, even though they might occasionally vary in their work habits, the tool they had hit on for writing was the only one that worked for them. In fact, one informant gave me some interesting evidence that suggests that it may, in fact, be difficult to write in the style of somebody else. He typically used the think-write style. After talking to me, he decided to see if he could write in the other style. He tried to write down a first draft of an article that he had just begun to work on in his head. Later he told me, *"I was shocked at seeing so much mess in black and white. I crumpled up the*

*paper and threw it away.*" Perhaps one of the determinants in which composing style we prefer is where we prefer our messiness—on paper or in our minds (Stephen D., 20006).

Most of my colleagues wish their students to write in the style of celebrity writers this is the outcome of approach that written product should be error free, the evaluation system in Pakistan where students writing is evaluated by the examiners under a pet formulae, students are not being provided with sufficient class room practice in various genres of writing. (Humaira,2011). Although most of my colleagues are adamant to their individual commitment with their own style, they ignore for their students. Likewise, Donald Murray ( 1978) recounts a story about a professor who, until he talked to Murray, was always ashamed of the way he wrote because he never knew what he wanted to say when he sat down to write. He had to write and write to find out, and he thought that because he wrote like this, he must have been stupid—after all, doesn't everyone know what they want to say before they say it? This is writing itself that opens the secret of exploring ideas by itself.

Most of those students who think and write also consider the methods they use are wrong. They worry about how long they have to labour before they begin to write. They characterize themselves as lazy or as often experiencing writer's block, and they look with envy on their peers who are busily working on their second-or fourth, or eighth draft. One student writer reported to me that he didn't try to refine his work enough, because he had read that professional writers always did at least seven drafts, and he never wrote more than two.

I do think that this knowledge of diversity in the writing styles has strong implications for our writing instructors. For one thing, I think that knowing how we ourselves compose will make us better teachers. If we are aware of the complexity of the styles we use in our own writing, and that others will employ in their writing, we will be less likely to offer pat formulae to our students. Further we must consider the demands we require from our students. I think we require too much from our students' writing sometimes we do not even demand of our own writing.

On the other hand, there is a natural tendency to generalize from our own experiences. If we ourselves use one style identically, we are in danger of making that



style the rigid formula we present to our students as the way to write. Instead, I believe that we should expose our students to a variety of writing styles. They are in the same position that I was in when I began teaching: they are just beginning to investigate writing tools. They need to try out many tools so that through such experimentation they can discover what will work for them.

Here are some implications for teaching writing:

- i. Teachers can help students to discover their own writing tools in many ways.
- ii. Teacher can provide the students with situations for writing that allows for experimentations.
- iii. Teacher can structure an extended pre-writing period, allowing the students to read about their subjects, and discuss in pairs.
- iv. Teacher can guide the students through multiple drafts, beginning with free writing and gradually moving to a more structured form.
- v. Teacher can also provide the learners with the important information that not everyone writes in the same way, so that perhaps when they develop their own style, of writing, they won't consider it to be an idiosyncratic style that works for them, but that only works for them because they're stupid or lazy.
- vi. Teacher can help them to reflect on their writing experiences, perhaps helping them to decide what method works best for them.
- vii. Teacher can, ask them to keep journals in which they record and evaluate their reactions to different writing experiences, Sharon Crowley (1977).
- viii. The examiners must weigh to the individual writing tools despite of a unitary system of evaluation.
- ix. Evaluation must now be refined to take into account the individual and their identical writing styles.
- x. Evaluation should no longer be merely the last step of the writing process; it should be on going and integrated into the entire writing experience.

With increasing knowledge of the composing process the instructors will change their view about themselves as teachers of writing. Commitments are narrow in vision instead; our task must be to lead our students through writing experiences, helping them discover the best way to write for themselves.

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