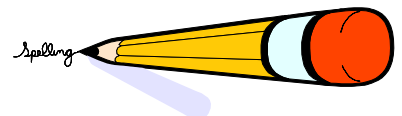


Writer's Notebook

developing writerly habits



Teresa Saum



Mr. Mahoney,

Now that I'm on Spring Break, I've had a chance to look through some of my old writer's notebooks and such, so I thought I'd take a moment to reflect on your class. In doing that, I came across an interesting phrase in my writer's notebook: "The words I am writing here are for myself - not for anyone else's pleasure or approval ... I do this to explain myself to me."

Another thing I commented on in my evaluation was the diversity of "styles and moods" in my pieces... I believed "flexibility" was important to a writer, and I'm glad we were encouraged to freely explore virtually any style or approach in our work. The ability to adjust one's voice or tone to the subject matter of a piece is essential to me as a journalist now - it's a skill I use with every article I write.

Looking through my writer's notebook, I noticed so many ways in which you gave us that freedom to explore our voices and our potential with writing. There's in fact one segment called "Breaking the Rules: Fragments and Fractures", where you allowed us to experiment with this grammatical "crime" - it yielded some rather good writing, I thought! (I ended up with: "Eyes weighted down. Body limp and immobile. Unable even to turn my head to glance at the green, glowing digits of my clock. A dark, slow Thursday morning. Here under the deep down comforter, my mind wakes. My body sleeps still. My ears wait for the blaring beeps from my alarm.") I think encouraging us to explore writing with complete liberty taught us to think of ourselves as mature writers, and to think of the language as a tool with limitless possibilities.

Seems to me the writer's notebook became an ideal place for us to experiment with language, which not only encouraged us to write by removing the "pressure" to produce only polished pieces, but helped us to identify what works and what flops in our personal technique. For example, I see that we were asked to try out several different beginnings to the same story of our choosing... opening with dialogue, or descriptive action, etc. The "quick writes" were also a great way to stretch our creative writing muscles at every class. I think having us write freely and often about thought-provoking topics, without the stress of looming grades, allowed us to think of writing not as a "chore" or assignment, but a pleasurable opportunity for artistic expression. Also, in a few of my entries, I noticed that I reflected on the process of writing itself ... about the "fear" of producing muck, and about revision being perhaps a signal to start anew. I think the writer's notebook helped us in this way by giving us the chance not only to "think on paper," but to consider the actual experience of writing itself, and develop our own literary philosophies.

Sheila Emirez

Your Writer's Notebook

- like an artist's sketchbooks
- helps develop writerly habits of living
- helps develop a wide-awake way of seeing
- helps develop a curiosity about life
- helps develop awareness of life stories worth telling

Daily Writing

- Daily writing is a way of warming up for writing; a way of getting your words to flow from your brain down your arm and onto the paper.
- Daily writing is an important part of class and you get credit for doing it.
- Daily writing sometimes provides the "seeds" for things you really want to write about. Those things are waiting, waiting, waiting ... and suddenly they have the opportunity to become words.
- Daily writing should be in one section of your binder, or in a notebook. All daily writing should be dated.
- Daily writing means you should keep your pencil moving the whole time ... even if you have to write about not knowing what to write about.
- if you can't do it, then pretend to do it.

A writer's notebook is like a sketchbook

1. You can use it as a place to do a rough draft and work on it later to fill in detail or to do a "real" thing.
2. You can use it to doodle. Sometimes you turn the page and put the doodles in a different order or develop a doodle into a real picture.
3. You can use it as a tool when you're observing. You see something and sketch it to remember it later. Almost like a photograph.

What's the difference?

Diary- Writing about the day's events. Writing what you already know. Summary of -theday's goings-on. An end in itself, a diary doesn't lead you to think or explore or discover.

Journal- Similar to a diary. Entries may be longer and about one theme. *The Diary of Anne Frank* is an example.

Writer's Notebook- A launchpad or workbench for larger projects. A good place to free-write, do daily writing, or memory writing. A writer's notebook gets you to notice things, to observe things, to think and discover.

Daily Writing Seeds

- Read over your last daily writing entries.
- Look for seeds of ideas ... little things you wrote about that didn't seem like a big deal at the time.
- Now, when you read them over, you realize you have more to say about that subject.
- Write more.
- Give your words an opportunity to be written.

Randy Bomer

Lucy Calkins

Ralph Fletcher

Barry Lane

Some possible types of Writer's Notebook entries...

- memories
- reflections
- observations
- wonderings
- ideas about the meaning of things
- reading response
- snippets of language
- clippings
- pictures
- images that stick in the mind lists ideas for stories-seeds, family stories, dreams, descriptions
- experiments with genre or style
- free-writing
- information, quotations, interviews, sensory impressions, copied text
- caught poetry and found poetry
- decision making
- conversations or dialogue
- talking to yourself
- plans
- celebrations or victories
- reflections on writing

A Time for Meaning by Randy Bomer