

The cognitive and affective
importance of academic writing:
putting writing at the heart of the
development of graduate attributes
at UL

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A brief exercise

- Focus on what you are good at:
- A) spend 1 minute thinking about the things you consider yourself to be good at
- B) spend 2 minutes 'freewriting' on this topic
brief rules of freewriting: write in full sentences without stopping or editing; private, no-one has to know what you have written, don't worry about spelling or grammar, just keep writing as ideas come into your head;

Final piece of the exercise

- Now spend 2 minutes generating a piece of writing that you would be prepared to show to others on the same topic

Learning functions of writing

- transactional, for communicating information;
- poetic, for creating beautiful objects;
- expressive, for exploring and reflecting upon ideas
- Generative and attentive – writing *is* attention, and attention in education is the new information

Writing as a positive, developmental process



- ‘unless the losses to learners of not writing are compellingly described and substantiated... writing itself as a central academic process may not long endure’
 - Janet Emig – writing as learning

The process of writing

- Prewriting and planning
- Composing
- Redrafting at structural and conceptual level
- Redrafting at sentence and grammatical level
- Editing
- Finalising and release

The Cognitive Skills Developed by Writing

- Planning ideas - PROBLEM SOLVING, MANAGING COGNITIVE LOADS
 - Generating concepts, organising them and setting goals to be achieved
- Translating ideas into text – LANGUAGE USE, VERBAL ABILITY, CONCRETE LANGUAGE, RAPID ACCESS
 - Turning semi-formed, misty ideas into something concrete that can eventually be understood by others.
 - Establishing coherence – creating meaning, imposing structure, sequencing
- Reviewing ideas and text – CRITICAL THINKING, AWARENESS OF READERSHIP
 - Detecting faults at structural and sentence levels, fundamental principles, shades and nuances of meaning, faulty logic, errors of fact, inconsistencies, tone, degree of complexity

The Emotional and Attitudinal Skills Developed by writing

- Creating 'flow' states for optimal performance – concentration, motivation
- Setting up schedules, rituals and managing time – protecting time and space (Trollope, King, Dickens)
- Overcoming block – overcoming the intense negative and ambiguous feelings that often accompany the early stages of writing a text
- Reflection and sitting still
- Using imagination and intuition
- Showing, not telling
- Boundaries –deciding what writing is about and not about, decision making
- Challenging, not settling into comfort zone of repetition
- Finding and speaking in one's own voice, confidence, self-esteem, courage
- Persistence and commitment to excellence

The role of journaling and personal writing

- Feeling about thinking
- Thinking about feeling

- Eg thinking about a traumatic event = brooding
- Writing about a traumatic event = processing
- Thinking about a delightful event = relishing
- Writing about a delightful event = deconstructing

Proactive
Articulate
Responsible
Creative
Collaborative
Knowledgeable

IMAGINATION

REFLECTION

**CONFIDENT
ENGAGEMENT**

**WRITTEN, VERBAL
& TECHNOLOGICAL
COMMUNICATION
SKILLS**

**CRITICAL
ANALYSIS**

CROSS-DISCIPLINARY PROFICIENCY AND FLUENCY

DISCIPLINE-SPECIFIC EXCELLENCE

Writing has the potential to unlock engagement and attention

- **Our primary and strongest relationship with language is through speaking**
 - Exploiting the natural fluent ability to speak in developing writing and thinking, is a useful thing to do
- **The same words cause different things to happen in different minds**
 - It's almost impossible to give writing a single grade. Utilise as much for formative voice finding as for summative grade giving
- **It pays to get students to take writing seriously**
- **People feel personally very strongly about writing**
 - It can be an access point to strong engagement, attention and motivation
- **A learner's sense of audience has a big effect on their writing**
 - Ignore audience to get ideas straight and nurtures
 - Pay attention to audience to construct, articulate and make robust

Emig

- writing is neurophysiologically integrative, connective, active, and available for immediate visual review, it represents a unique form of learning that deserves increased experimental and theoretical attention.

Writing is self rhythmed and creative

- One writes best as one learns best – at your own pace
- Esprit d'escalier
- Written speech is a powerful instrument of thought
- Writing is a much slower process than talking, encouraging the shuttling among past, present and future – connecting the three tenses of our experience to make meaning through analysis and synthesis
- Epigenetic – with the complex evolutionary development of thought, steadily and graphically available throughout as a record of the journey. – an archeology of learning providing reflective tools, demonstration of progress, an evolutionary testimony to one's own development.