

Appendix D

So Why Does a Given Piece of Writing Turn Out the Way it Does?

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Expert writers and novice writers differ not only in terms of their experiences but in terms of the range and depth of writing strategies and repertoires they have internalized. Consider some factors that influence how (and how easily) writers produce a specific text. Any of these, especially in combination, may account for the success or shortcomings of a given piece of writing.

1. Knowledge of the subject matter.
2. Ability to acquire new or additional knowledge on the subject (library research, direct observation, empirical study, experimentation, interview, etc.).
3. Familiarity with the genre, including the degree to which genre conventions are deeply internalized or known tacitly.
4. Ability to learn new genres.
5. Experience working within the physical/social constraints of the task (amount of time available, working alone or with others, setting for the writing—for example, in class or office vs. at home—and so on).
6. General reading experience; specific reading experience.
7. Past experiences and general fluency with writing.
8. General knowledge of a range of topics and subject matters (among other things, influences ability to draw connections, develop examples, devise metaphors, etc.)
9. Repertory of rhetorical strategies (invention, arrangement, style, etc.).
10. Facility with the technologies of writing, including word processing or design skills.
11. Editing and proofreading skills, ability to produce conventional standard edited American English.
12. Relationship to the target reading audience. For example, do readers know more than the writer on a particular subject (this is the difficult situation in which students generally write), or does the writer know more than the reader (which has the advantage of performing from authority but the challenge of translating that knowledge into an intelligible form)?
13. Willingness to ask for help, to work with peers and professors. Presence of a writing support group, however formal or informal.
14. Care and attention to the task, including allocating it the proper time.
15. Ability to distance oneself from one's own work, seeing possibilities or shortcomings.
16. Clarity of the task, as perceived by the writer; ability to understand “code language,” such as “synthesize” or “discuss” or “argue.”
17. The writer's confidence in his or her ability.
18. The relationship of this writing task in relation to other activities competing for time and attention.