

Writing is a process, not a product.

We're taught to "complete" essays and hand in "final drafts," as if the task is finished.

But writing is a process. It is a thing we *do*. An action, an energy, a set of intentions which we are carrying out.

Writing doesn't finish, we simply stop writing.

Wherever your writing was at the moment you stopped is simply where it was at the moment you stopped. Your ideas can continue to evolve, you can return to a writing again and again. Editing is your friend. You can revise, reorder, refine, and look at what you're doing.

In this way, writing is like music. When a musician gets a musical idea, they play it over and over again, sometimes in their head, sometimes on an instrument, listening, thinking, listening, and playing again. Imagining what they can do with it. Trying to understand it, to hear where it's going. That's something that every musician we have studied in class does, no matter their style, time period, social status, gender, or ability. They listened to what their idea wanted to say, and they practiced their skills so they would be able to follow where it led.

That's what we want to do as writers, too: hear our ideas clearly, thoroughly, and completely so that we can honor them and share them with others.

The purpose of writing is to communicate. Communicate to *whom*? Well, that's a different issue. But the task is to communicate, to share ideas, to clarify and show what you mean to whoever you expect will read them. The more persuasively you write, the more engaging and effective your style, the more compelling your ideas, the better the chance that you will be able to communicate to more people.

And that's where music comes in again.

All semester, we've been listening to different kinds of music, thinking about the different motivations of various musicians and the myriad ways listeners think about what they hear. We've been putting ourselves in others' shoes, trying to understand their perspectives. That's exactly what we do when we write, too. We take into consideration what a reader will already know, we anticipate the questions readers will ask, we imagine the effect our words will have on them.

It is a process. Not a box to be checked, not a hoop to jump through, although it can be if we treat it that way.

At its worst, writing is a burden. At its best, power. When we write, we command armies of words and battalions of punctuation. Sentences emerge, yes, but we, too, are changed in the process, and that is where the true power lies. How we think changes. Our confidence grows. Our flexibility and skills evolve. And when we write with honesty, with clarity, with power, and with confidence, we assert our right to exist as non-replicable individuals. Writing is a tool that not only gives voice to your experience but also commands others' attention to hear your voice. That's what every author whose work you've ever read has done: they have owned your attention. They have molded your understanding of the world and of yourself. And when you write, you enact that same power over others.

It is a process.