writing. While I often read what other people say about writing, most of what I know about writing is rooted in my own experiences. This is why this book focuses on writing experiences.

Subject knowledge is acquired over time as you are exposed to more and more information. Unlike cramming for a test, where much of what you "learned" disappears not long after the exam, writing requires you to retain and utilize knowledge, making it significantly "stickier."

As much as possible, the experiences in this book are designed to encourage you to access (and then build upon) your existing subject expertise. But there are some experiences that will require you to enhance your knowledge of what you're writing about.

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This first section is designed to work on some of the foundational aspects of the writer's practice, things like the writer's process, considering the audience, and reading like a writer. These foundations will be carried through the rest of the book, but in this section the experiences focus specifically on highlighting these aspects of the writer's practice.

How Do I . . . ?

(Instructions)

Try to think of a procedure or activity you're expert in. Maybe you make the perfect cup of coffee. Maybe you can sew a dress or dress a deer. Can you defeat that impossible level on some video game or tell someone how to play "When the Saints Go Marching In" on the harmonica?

Everyone has some kind of expertise they're capable of sharing with the world.

Someone else may have occasion to need that expertise.

AUDIENCE

Someone who has never done what you're telling them how to do.

However, they probably cannot and should not be a blank slate. One of the first steps will be to more deeply consider who your audience will be.

PURPOSE

The audience has a need—for a good cup of coffee, to play "When the Saints Go Marching In" on the harmonica, or whatever—and they have turned to you as an expert in helping fulfill this need.

Don't be shy about it. Be the expert you are.

PROCESS

1. Spend some time inventorying your own expertise.
What are you good at? What do you enjoy doing? What do you take pride in? Make a list.

2. Select your subject.
What one skill do you think best lends itself to this particular writing-related problem? Why have you chosen that one?

3. Plan.
A good way of preparing to write the solution to this writing-related problem is to do the action itself while taking careful notes along the way.

4. Audience analysis.
Who is your audience? We know their need (to do what you already know how to do), but what might their attitudes be toward the task? Excitement? Trepidation? Something else?

Additionally, what about their knowledge? To successfully execute the mission, what will they need to know or be able to do prior to engaging with your solution to this writing-related problem?

5. Find and analyze models.
Look for models that serve similar purposes. Stay away from ones too closely related to your own task. You don't want to risk copying, and also remember that you're the expert here. You don't want to be unduly influenced by someone else's approach, which may actually be kind of crappy.

Look at how these models are formatted and structured. How do they begin? How is the information conveyed? What techniques will you use and choices will you make in your own instructions?

6. Draft.
Doing your best to meet your audience's needs, draft your document. Use your models to help guide your approach. For our purposes, you're restricted to "text only" instructions. No diagrams or illustrations are allowed or required.

7. Test draft.
Give your draft to someone else. Ideally, you can exchange drafts with someone else engaged in the same experience so you can get a perspective on this experience from the standpoint of the audience.

If possible, have them attempt the task by following your directions while you do the same with their task. If that isn't possible, try to visualize the process while reading.

Would they be successful? Where might they be confused or even lost? Identify those sections.

Areas of confusion in need of additional clarity, as well as those elements that work well, should be specifically identified and discussed.

8. Revise draft.
Based on the feedback, as well as any additional insights gained along the way, revise the draft to improve its effectiveness. Think of your audience.

9. Edit and polish.
Even small errors can throw off an audience that's trying to follow the instructions closely. Fixable mistakes can also shake their confidence in the quality of your instructions.

REFLECT

Writing instructions using only text was probably pretty hard. What could be done differently if you had the benefit of illustrations?

Is the cliché of a picture being worth a thousand words true in this case?

Is there an even better way? Would your task be better learned by a different method? What about a video or other visual simulation? What would be the trade-off between text instructions and video instructions? When would one be more useful than the other?

Or is your task something that would best be done in a live setting, either one-on-one with you as the expert or in a class setting? How would the different atmospheres change the learning? How would your role as the expert change?

What's best? Given total freedom to craft a solution to this problem, what method would you use and why? How and why is this best for the audience? (It may even be a combination of methods.)

THE WRITING PROCESS

Sometimes when I ask people if they have a writing process, they hem and haw, and say, "Maybe?" "Sorta?" "Sometimes?"

In truth, provided you're capable of eventually producing *something*, everyone has a writing process. It may not be a particularly great process and may contain counterproductive elements, but it's still a process.

In college, under the delusion that I was most creative under maximum deadline pressure, I would wait to get started the night before an assignment was due. To fuel this last-minute process, I would secure a two-liter bottle of Coca-Cola and a two-pound bag of Peanut M&M's, and chug the soda and gobble the candy as I worked. No one would confuse my college academic record with the work of a highly dedicated and accomplished student, but it got the job done.

Except . . . there was one time when I'd finished an essay at around 4:00 a.m., early by my standards, and when I tried to go to bed, I realized my heart was threatening to pound its way out of my chest. I'd managed to nearly overdose on caffeine.

And there was that other time when I procrastinated writing a short story for a creative writing class and, as the time grew shorter and shorter and nothing came, found myself writing a story about a college student with writer's block who had a story due for class in a few hours, and I knew I was doomed, doomed, doomed.

My process tended to be to put things off as long as possible, fire out something when I had no other choice, print it out, and turn it in. I would sometimes get my papers returned and see errors that were downright embarrassing but not surprising, because I hadn't actually read the whole thing again after I typed the final word.

In the "How Do I . . . ?" experience, I semiforced you to follow a writing process. But even within that process, you likely marched to the beat of your own drummer.

Everyone has a writing process because writing *is* a process. A significant part of the writer's practice is being mindful about, and seeking to refine, one's process. The writing process consists of the following stages: