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WRITE FREE ▲ OR DIE

The Newsletter of the UNH Writing Programs

IN THIS ISSUE

Department Writing Goals, Outcomes, and Plans

Ed Mueller
Director, University Writing Programs

Stemming from a recent external review of the University Writing Program and the upcoming requirement to articulate goals, student learning outcomes, and assessment plans for the interim NEASC update (due in Spring of 2018), the Faculty Senate passed *UNH Faculty Senate Motion XXI-M16.* In part, this motion addresses attention to writing in academic departments (pertinent passage extracted below):

"Under the new NEASC accreditation standards, departments will be required to address 'educational effectiveness' (Standard 8, pp. 24-25). Each department will therefore be prompted to review its effectiveness in implementing the goals of the Writing Program. We charge the shepherds of the NEASC process with communicating with departments the need to reflect on their approaches to WI and Writing across the Curriculum in their program reports."

Although the motion's articulation about writing is recent, the department-level agency it describes is not. The rationale for student writing and learning at UNH has always emphasized "department planning" (although with little further elaboration). Going beyond the motion's citing of writing as an implied component of "educational effectiveness" in Standard 8, NEASC Standard 4 explicitly mentions the place of writing in the academic program as

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Future Tense: *Upcoming Writing Across the Curriculum Events*, Fall 2017

January 16 Workshop: Responding to Student Writing, Beyond the Red Pen (9:00-12:00, MUB, Room 156): In this session, we will deal with the ever-present question of how to effectively and efficiently respond to student writing. Traditional forms of feedback will be addressed, but the emphasis will be on new modes of feedback (digital, audio). A cross-disciplinary faculty panel will share their practices followed by a hands-on period in which attendees will be able to workshop their feedback methods/tools. Representatives from UNH Academic Technology (Media and Collaboration) will be on hand to consult with attendees during the hands-on segment. Offered through CEITL: please watch for their announcement for details and registration.

April 10: Guest Speakers: The Meaningful Writing Project: Learning, Teaching, and Writing in Higher Education (12:45-2:00, Location TBA): Dr. Anne Geller, Associate Professor of English and Director of the Writing Across the Curriculum Program at St. John's University, and Dr. Neal Lerner, Associate Professor and Writing Program Director at Northeastern University, will share findings (or possibly present a workshop) from their research surveying and interviewing more than 700 seniors and 160 faculty from three different post-secondary institutions investigating what writing experiences college students found most valuable and why.

Spring 2018: Student Exit Interviews (TBA): The Writing Committee will once again be conducting exit interviews with a panel of graduating seniors on their writing histories at UNH. Faculty are invited to join in this event. Watch for an announcement in the next newsletter.

June 11-13: Writing Intensive Faculty Retreat Offsite, Mount Washington Hotel: The UNH Writing Program is looking forward to reprising the well-received WI Faculty Retreat experience, consisting of a three-day offsite at the Omni Mount Washington Hotel in early June followed by three 1/2-day sessions at UNH in the following year. The salient goals of the retreat are to give faculty a fuller awareness of the principles underlying WI courses, to equip them with practices to enhance working with student writing, and to promote connections among WI faculty. Details are currently being confirmed. Watch for an announcement with application instructions early in the Spring semester. Questions may be directed to Ed Mueller, edward.mueller@unh.edu.

It's not wise to violate the rules until you know how to observe them.

—T. S. Elliot

well (from NEASC Standards, page 9):

"4.11 Students completing an undergraduate or graduate degree program demonstrate collegiate-level skills in the English language."

"4.15 Graduates successfully completing an undergraduate program demonstrate competence in written and oral communication in English."

The action to include writing among department goals and learning outcomes represents a tangible new step towards realizing this long-held intent at UNH. In this regard, meeting the NEASC requirements may define a form, but not the prime rationale for having writing in department plans.

The inclusion of writing among departmental goals, outcomes, and assessment plans will not only address compliance with NEASC and fulfill the intent of Faculty *Senate Motion XXI-M16*, but it will make the work being done in writing in the disciplines at UNH more visible and systematic.

The UNH Writing Program has been working with stakeholders at all levels to disseminate the message of *Faculty Senate Motion XXI-M16* and NEASC Standard 4. In addition to being available to advise and consult, it has also produced a *Department Writing Goals and Outcomes Guide* that has been distributed in support of this effort. Feel free to get in touch if you would like a copy.

For more information, please contact edward.mueller@unh.edu.

WAC(ky) People

UNH Writing Program
Ed Mueller, Director
Matt Switliski, Associate Director
Corey McCullough, Associate Director

Writing Committee:

College Representatives:	Term End
PCBE - Vacant	2019
COLSA - Iago Hale (Biological Sciences)	2019
CEPS - John LaCourse (Engineering)	2020
COLA-1 - Marcos Del Hierro (English)	2019
COLA-2 - Soo Hyon Kim (English)	2020
CHHS - Robert Barcelona (Recreational Management and Policy)	2019
UNHM - Gail Fensom* (English, Director of First-Year Writing Program)	2017

* Faculty Chair

Permanent Representatives:

Writing Program Director:
    Ed Mueller (Academic Affairs)
Director of Composition:
    Christina Ortmeier-Hooper (English)
Center for Excellence and Innovation in Teaching and Learning:
    Catherine Overson (Academic Affairs)
Discovery Committee:
    Kathrine Aydelott

Ex officio (non-voting):
Committee Secretary
    Elizabeth Smith (Registrar)

Persistence vs. Genius —Jill Parrott

Research in writing studies shows that improved writing *can* be taught to writers at all levels. But we must first debunk the deeply held idea in the collective psyche that only some lucky people are good writers in order to increase openness to learning how to write better. If a person thinks their writing ability is stuck in place, improvement is incredibly difficult, further solidifying as a self-fulfilling prophecy a belief that they are a hopeless cause.

...

Key to improving novice writers' experiences is improving how they think about their work, a process called metacognition. Opening up cognitive space that allows for metacognition and reflection is essential to experiential and practical improvement. One particularly powerful concept is persistence: persistence emphasizes that experience is more powerful than unchangeable ability and that challenges help move writers forward rather than delaying their progress.

...

A successful writing student. . .is not necessarily one who writes more but one who persists and reflects on the work done as a means of improvement. Instructors exist not to reward the talented genius and punish the unlucky but to provide opportunities for writing, feedback, reflection, remixing and revision of that work as socially located activities with rhetorical awareness. When a previously "bad" writer sees improvement, sees the value of persistence and feels the satisfaction of the metacognitive recognition that they have gotten better, they will know that good writers are not born but come to fruition in the social act of writing itself.

Jill Parrott, "Some People Are Just Born Good Writers." *Bad Ideas About Writing.* Edited by Cheryl E Ball and Drew M Lowe. West Virginia University Libraries, text books.lib.wvu.edu/badideas/badideasaboutwriting-book.pdf. p71-75.

Dangling Modifier: Integrating Sources

Corey McCullough, Associate Director, University Writing Programs

One challenge college student writers face is working with sources: finding, understanding, citing, and integrating the scholarly discourse of a field with their own prose. David Bartholomae has argued that when students write in an unfamiliar discourse they must, in essence, "invent the university" (4). The thrust of Bartholomae's influential argument is that academic writing in general and field-specific writing in particular are skills that must be developed over time.

Think back to how you began to learn the conventions of writing in your field of expertise. If you were lucky, perhaps you were given some explicit instruction. Otherwise, you likely built facility by reading journal articles or other prominent genres in your particular field and then by approximating that discourse yourself, either in simulated or authentic peer-reviewed or empirical contexts.

Students may not understand the way scholars and professionals in various fields utilize citations and interact with the work of others. Students, particularly early in their college careers, may dwell on issues like how many sources they are required to use and how to cite correctly to avoid plagiarism. The instructor's role in this important aspect of student development depends on the course and the expertise of individual students, but it may help to think of writing assignments as learning opportunities—a venue for students to engage with the content of a particular field, eventually situating their own research and arguments alongside what they read or discuss in class.

Because of the diversity of writing tasks and genres across all disciplines, there is no one-size-fits-all solution to teaching students to work with sources, but here are a few general suggestions that can be customized to your needs:

1) Help students determine when it is appropriate to quote, paraphrase, or summarize source material. In general, **quoting** should be reserved for when students want to emphasize the exact language of the author because of its power, aptness, or uniqueness; to underscore the author's authority; or to lay a foundation for subsequent analysis or comparison to the language of other authors. **Paraphrasing** should be reserved for when the gist of the content is more important than the exact wording and as an alternative to help students avoid quoting excessively. Whereas **paraphrase** is a slightly condensed overview of a source conveyed in the student writer's own words, **summarizing** represents one further step toward a macro view, conveying only the primary points of a significant portion of source material.

The Connors Writing Center has a useful resource on Quoting, Paraphrasing, and Summarizing, which discusses the above strategies in greater detail. It can be found at the link below or in hard copy at the Connors Writing Center in Dimond Library: **https://www.unh.edu/writing/sites/default/files/media/pdfs/outside_sources_final.pdf**

2) Provide guidance about how to introduce quoted material, including how to deploy signal verbs to introduce quotes or more precisely summarize or paraphrase quoted material. Students who are relatively new to working with outside sources may overuse general verbs such as *writes* and *said* to introduce sources, creating both redundancy and a lack of specificity.

Example (direct quote): David Bartholomae *writes* that "every time a student sits down to write for us, he has to invent the university for the occasion—invent the university, that is, or a branch of it, like History or Anthropology or Economics or English" (4).

What more specific signal verbs could be employed to introduce this quotation or to paraphrase this point? Instructors might help students choose more specific, nuanced, and appropriate signal verbs to deploy in their quotations, paraphrases, and summaries. For instance, *argues, claims, suggests, declares, asserts, observes, contends, posits, notes, reports, clarifies, insists, reiterates, theorizes,* or *emphasizes*, among other possibilities, are more specific alternatives to *says* or *writes*. Obviously not all of these strong verbs are equally suitable for all situations; the choice will depend both on the context of the source author's argument and the student's motivations for drawing attention to this part of the source. The versatile signal phrase *according to* can also be used to introduce quotations, paraphrase, or summary.

Instructors might help students brainstorm other categories of signal verbs as well to help them integrate, paraphrase, and summarize sources. Here are just a few of the many possible options:

Verbs related to expressing agreement: agrees, acknowledges, admires, endorses, extols, praises, confirms, believes, states, notes, echoes, sides with, corroborates, reaffirms, supports, verifies, celebrates, does not deny, etc.

Verbs related to questioning or disagreeing: complains,

Be obscure clearly.

—E.B. White

complicates, contradicts, contends, denies, qualifies, questions, refutes, rejects, renounces, repudiates, disagrees, argues, opposes, scrutinizes, etc.

Verbs related to making recommendations: advocates, calls for, demands, encourages, exhorts, implores, pleads, recommends, supports, urges, warns, suggests, discourages, etc.

The Connors Writing Center has a useful resource on using quotes, including a list of common signal verbs and phrases and their different functions: **https://www.unh.edu/ writing/sites/default/files/media/pdfs/ using_quotes_final.pdf**

3) The last suggestion is more general: If possible, have students read, write about, and discuss authentic texts from the field of study that exemplify the discourse conventions that you want them to learn. Further, identify and discuss the conventions in class or create low-stakes assignments to demystify discourse conventions. Monitor student progress, providing individualized and whole-group feedback as appropriate. Finally, remember that it takes time to build facility in field-specific writing genres.

Works Cited

Bartholomae, David. "Inventing the University." *Teaching Composition: Background Readings,* edited by T. R. Johnson. Bedford/St. Martin's, 2008, pp. 2-31.

For more information, please contact Corey at csf45@wildcats.unh.edu.

If you can't explain something simply, you don't understand it well. Most of the fundamental ideas of science are essentially simple, and may, as a rule, be expressed in a language comprehensible to everyone. Everything should be as simple as it can be, yet no simpler.　　　　　*—Albert Einstein*

Facilitators and Participants in the Third Annual WI Faculty Retreat at the Mount Washington Hotel, June 2017

Back, left to right: *Corey McCullough, Sergios Charntikov, Leslie Curren, Angela Braswell, Jennifer Purrenhage, Cindy Hartman, and Jennifer Frye.* ***Front, left to right:*** *Ed Mueller, Molly Campbell, Beth Caldwell, Jonathan Nash, Adam St. Jean, Pat Wilkinson, and Nicole Ruane.*

Ask Matt:

Your writing concerns addressed by our very own Matt Switliski

My students' writing doesn't flow. What can I do to help them?
—Flummoxed by Flow

In a 2012 *Writing Center Journal* article, two researchers found that textual flow was second only to grammar among student concerns in writing center conferences (Raymond and Quinn). In line with those findings, flow often comes up in appointments at the Connors Writing Center. When I've asked students what they mean by flow, most don't have an answer; they know it when they see it—or, more often, when they *don't* see it. They definitely understand that flow matters.

If we're going to talk meaningfully about "flow," then, we have to break it down. First, we've got to identify what we mean by the word. In essence, two elements contribute to flow: a sense of connection among larger units in writing such as ideas (coherence) and a sense of connection from one sentence to the next (cohesion). There are too many different disciplinary conventions to detail how to achieve flow in all kinds of writing. But writers have pinpointed a few general strategies that may help your students get a better handle on the slippery feature of flow.

The Known-New-Contract

Perhaps the most important principle undergirding flow is the known-new contract (or given-new principle). Don't worry so much about the terminology. The bit to remember is that familiar information (the known) should be put near the front of the sentence, and new information should be put near or at the end. When writers do this, it creates a chain that leads the reader smoothly from one thought to the next. Here's an example that fails to implement the known-new contract:

Some astonishing questions about the nature of the universe have been raised by scientists studying black holes in space. The collapse of a dead star into a point perhaps no larger than a marble creates a black hole. So much matter compressed into so little volume changes the fabric of space around it in puzzling ways (Williams 55).

You might notice, especially if you read it aloud, that the passage sounds "choppy." According to the known-new contract, a sentence should start more or less where the previous one left off. The writer of the above example hasn't followed that advice. Now here's that same passage rewritten with the known-new in mind. Notice how rearranging the second sentence brings related information together and makes the passage sound better:

*Some astonishing questions about the nature of the universe have been raised by scientists studying **black holes in space**. A black hole is created by the collapse of a dead star into a point perhaps no larger than a marble. So much matter compressed into so little volume changes the fabric of space around it in puzzling ways (Williams 56).*

Most readers would say that the passage flows well; this is because it follows the known-new contract. The first sentence ends by introducing the subject of **black holes**. And the next sentence starts with the same subject (**A black hole**) before introducing new information about it: that it is no larger than a marble. The third sentence begins by talking about that tiny size before introducing new information about how black holes change space. If the passage had continued, you might expect it to specify some of the *changes* black holes cause.

Here are a few more techniques to improve the connectedness of writing. Many of them overlap, but for the purposes of simplicity I'm making (artificial) distinctions.

Repetition

Repeating key words or phrases throughout a paragraph will give it a sense of unity. Such repetition keeps the paragraph and the reader focused. Of course, students may well worry about reusing the same words, so encourage them to incorporate pronouns and reference words too.

Reference Words and Pronouns

These words link concepts mentioned in the previous sentence. Examples include *this*, *that*, *these*, *those*, *such*, *he*, *she*, *it*, *they*, and *their*. A good habit to cultivate is to use these words in conjunction with a noun rather than on their own. (Ex.: "This approach leads to . . ." as opposed to "This leads to . . .")

Variation

Words related to a topic can also serve as a kind of repetition without being monotonous. (For example, if you're writing about revision, words like "change" and "rewriting" are along similar lines, so your readers will be able to follow your thought.) Be careful, however, to not just instruct students to replace words for the sake of replacing them. Sometimes the first word that comes to mind is best. Even so, it's difficult to entirely avoid repeating specific words. (For instance, as much as I tried to switch things up, I still think "flow" appears too much in this column.)

Parallelism

Sentences with similar structure emphasize the relation between sentences, as in the following:

Flying is fast, safe, and convenient. Sadly, it is not comfortable, cheap, or relaxing.

For parallelism to work, the items in a series, as above, need to be in the same form. (The three words describing

flying in each sentence are all adjectives.) Parallelism can be useful for the purposes of comparison or contrast.

We must either <u>die on our feet</u> or <u>live on our knees</u>.

Transitions

Transitional words and phrases connect ideas together, showing their relationship. They are like bridges between parts of a paper. Look at the difference between these two passages, one without clear transitions and one with them:

In "The Fly," Katherine Mansfield tries to show us the "real" personality of "the boss" beneath his exterior. The fly helps her to portray this real self. The boss goes through a range of emotions and feelings (Lunsford 127).

*In "The Fly," Katherine Mansfield tries to show us the "real" personality of "the boss" beneath his exterior. The fly **in the story's title** helps her to portray this real self. **In the course of the story**, the boss goes through a range of emotions and feelings (Lunsford 127-128).*

Writers often think of transitions as individual words (*although*, *because*, *then*, *still*, and the like) but phrases can be transitions too. In the above example, the bolded words reference material already introduced—the subject is a story called "The Fly" and so the writer refers back to this fact without directly restating so.

Metadiscourse, a particular kind of transition, signals intent or directions to the reader, but most importantly for flow, metadiscourse clues the reader in to the structure of the text (e.g., in other words, in the first place, next, finally, on the other hand, however, etc.). These sign-posts guide readers through the text and show the relationships among ideas—for example, we know that *however* signals an exception or contradiction. Using metadiscourse makes the connections between ideas clear, but using too much can obscure the real point.

Paragraph Unity

Each paragraph should focus on one main idea, often (but not always) expressed in a topic sentence, and each sentence should relate to the topic sentence. Topic sentences may be implied, and they may not necessarily begin a paragraph.

Paragraph Structure

Writers generally know why each paragraph belongs in its chosen place; readers, however, do not have that knowledge. It's up to the writer, then, to arrange the material in a logical fashion the reader can follow. Using common schemes will reduce confusion and thus help the reader comprehend. Some common ways to arrange paragraphs include general to specific or specific to general. Other patterns include:

Spatial: Often used in descriptions. Decide whether to describe something from top to bottom, left to right, near or far.

Chronological: Used to describe a sequence of events, as in a historical summary, procedure, or lab report.

Climactic: Used to hold a reader's interest. Arrange ideas in order of increasing importance, so the sequence ends with something surprising or exciting.

You don't need to integrate all of these strategies to bolster flow. One suggestion is to do a mini-lesson on a single concept and have students practice it on writing in progress. To help instructors address flow in the classroom, the Resources page of the Writing Center website has the following handouts: Organization, Topic Sentences, Transitions, and Vague Pronouns. These handouts are brief and filled with illustrative examples, all in plain language. Hopefully this information will help you and your students improve that elusive sense of flow. Good luck!

Works Cited

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Raymond, Laurel, and Zarah Quinn. "What a Writer Wants: Assessing Fulfillment of Student Goals in Writing Tutoring Sessions." *Writing Center Journal*, vol. 32, no. 1, 2012, pp. 64-77.

Williams, Joseph M. *Style: The Basics of Clarity and Grace*. Second Edition. Pearson, 2006.

For more information, please contact Matt at mjr254@wildcats.unh.edu.

Blot out, correct, insert, refine
Enlarge, diminish, interline;
Be mindful, when invention fails,
To scratch your head and bite your nails.
—Jonathan Swift

The Grammar Box: Parentheses

Matt Switliski, Associate Director, University Writing Programs

Many writers recognize parentheses as a mechanical formatting tool used in citation. Like their close kin the dash, though, parentheses can serve other purposes to add depth and richness to writing.

Part of the bracket family, parentheses (or round brackets) are often used to include additional information. While a pair of commas or em dashes can also do the job, the effect of parentheses is different. (Plus, parentheses are often acceptable in formal writing, whereas dashes are not.) Compare these three sentences:

The book, if you'll forgive the cliché, isn't worth the paper it's printed on.
The book (if you'll forgive the cliché) isn't worth the paper it's printed on.
The book—if you'll forgive the cliché—isn't worth the paper it's printed on.

In the first, the commas sneak in extra information but the phrase still scans as being integrated into the sentence. In the second, the same phrase is "set off" by parentheses and reads like the author stepping out to address the reader (breaking the fourth wall, in theatrical terms). In the last example, far from an aside, the dashes focus attention on the phrase.

Whereas a pair of commas sets off a word or clause that fits the syntax of the sentence, parentheses and dashes are under no such stricture.

It's October 13ᵗʰ (treat yourself), so I'm going out for dinner tonight.
It's October 13ᵗʰ—treat yourself—so I'm going out for dinner tonight.

Unlike dashes, which can appear singly, parentheses always come in pairs. Parentheses can surround punctuation marks (so as to interject emotion), a single word, dates, and/or clauses. One common use for parentheses is along with introductory words or abbreviations (e.g., *e.g.*, *i.e.*, and *viz*). They can also be used around a full sentence or multiple sentences; note that ending punctuation in the latter case goes inside the parenthesis:

Emoticons are one of the oldest (?) forms of ideography. [expresses doubt]
She sat at the wedding table with her (insufferable) cousin, Brantley. [adds qualifying information]
George Washington (1732-1799) played a pivotal role in the course of American history. [adds supplemental information]
The dog salivated at the ring of a bell. (To be fair, the trainer did too.) [adds new information beyond the sentence]

When a parenthesis and a comma come into close proximity, a useful guiding principle is to place the comma after the closing parenthesis so as to include the parenthetical with the syntactic unit it belongs to:

Despite his best efforts (not to mention his worst), he still failed to pass the entrance exam.

A word of caution: parentheses stand out. Too many can give the impression of hedging, careless thinking, or filler.

For more information, please contact Matt at mjr254@wildcats.unh.edu.

The Fourth Annual WI Faculty Retreat at the Mount Washington Hotel, June 11-13, 2018

Can You See Yourself Here?
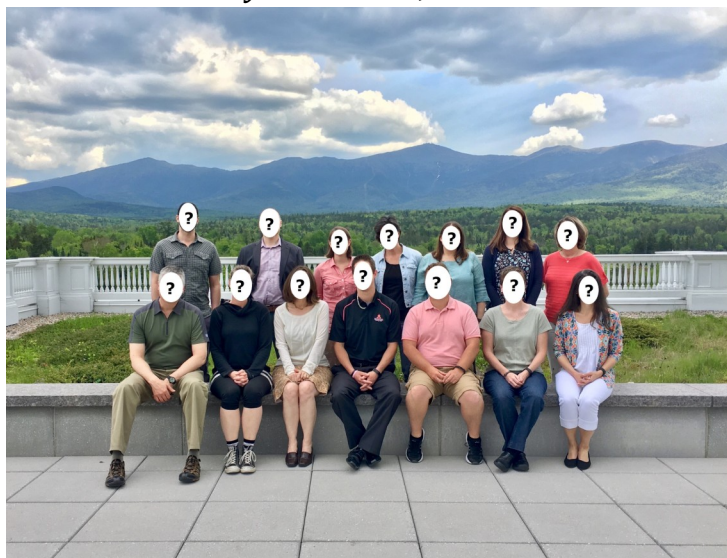
Apply Spring 2018

Please see the "Future Tense" section for details.

No passion in the world is equal to the passion to alter someone else's draft.

—H.G. Wells

Past Perfect: *Director's Notes*

Ed Mueller, Director, University Writing Programs

This semester marks the beginning of a new coordinating structure for teaching, learning, and assessment at UNH. The Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) has been "grown" and renamed the Center for Excellence and Innovation in Teaching and Learning (CEITL). Although the name change may seem cosmetic, the underlying new structure promises to be transformative. There will be a new full-time director (to be hired sometime later in 2018), and there will be a new physical presence on campus, with offices and meeting space dedicated to teaching and learning in the renovated Conant Hall starting in January 2018. Among other functions, the new CEITL will bring together multiple academic support units, the Writing Program among them, faculty stakeholders, and designated college faculty fellows "to maximize the effectiveness and efficiency of teaching and learning services at UNH" (quoted from the defining document establishing CEITL).

Although still in its early stages, the new CEITL network has already proven to be a useful conduit for the dissemination of information about writing across the curriculum. One thing this new structure also means for readers of this newsletter is that there is now is a place for "one-stop shopping" for workshops and faculty development opportunities (including those offered by the Writing Program) on the CEITL website:

https://www.unh.edu/cetl/teaching-and-learning-educational-opportunities

Teaching and Learning Educational Opportunities

January Teaching Workshops

Talk About Teaching Series

Academic Technology

UNH Library

UNH Writing Program

For more information, please contact edward.mueller@unh.edu.

Thinking is the activity I love best, and writing to me is simply thinking through my fingers. I can write up to 18 hours in a day. Typing 90 words a minute, I've done better than 50 pages in a day. Nothing interferes with my concentration. You could put an orgy in my office and I wouldn't look up—well, maybe once.

—Isaac Asimov