Week One

Reading books about writing is not something I do a lot. I think it’s kind of a boring subject to read about. When I picked up this book I didn’t initially plug my mind into a “get ready to learn about writing and like it” mindset. All I could think about was the author’s name. Elbow. What an awesome last name. Quite funny in my opinion and not intimidating in any way. A guy named Elbow has to be a cool guy. He’s probably a little weird, in a good way. I bet he was the butt of lots of jokes growing up due to such a rare last name. He’s probably funny, too, because he had to come up with creative comebacks to the jokesters (e.g. “my name may be elbow but at least I’m not an ***hole”). At least his childhood traumas will give him something to write about. I like Elbow from the start. He’s an underdog, as most writers are. So in my mind, as I set off to read the beginning chapter of this text, I do not picture an intellectual beast that has an intellectual mustache with an intellectual accent. All I picture is an elbow. I see a guy with an elbow in place of his head, and he’s talking to me about writing. And this makes me giggle. It’s like Saturday morning cartoons all over again.

Now for another E word. Emotion. Emotion is necessary within writing. It is not a bad thing. In fact, I really believe that some sort of emotion has to be present in any kind of good writing. However, I tend to become too emotionally attached to every single piece of writing I ever produce. I’m even emotionally attached to the previous paragraph I wrote for this blog. How pathetic is that? I tried to make it witty and silly. It took me about ten minutes to write. That’s a lot of minutes to write a short opener for a blog. And I’m not even that funny. I always want my writing to be great. I always want it to impress people, including myself. Basically, I have a lot of pride in my writing. This can be a good thing, but it can also be a bad thing. Sometimes I just need to get over myself and write. Let me try to start doing that.

I love that Elbow starts off his book talking about free writing. What a freeing way to write. I personally think this is an activity that I should start doing every day. Even when we did the free write in class last week, I noticed myself second guessing ways to phrase a sentence and crossing out words. These are no no’s in Elbow’s rulebook. I really need to let go of my control freak perfectionist outlook on writing. I really need to practice writing more. Outside of class, I don’t really write that often. I think this is one of the reasons I put so much pressure on myself when I do begin a paper for class. I don’t do it often enough, so when I write it feels familiarly unfamiliar. That doesn’t really make sense. But I guess I mean that because I always get anxious and initially uncertain to write a paper for a class, I always feel this recognizable terror in my stomach when I start to write. English majors are sick people. We all love to write, but it brings such pain! I definitely want to at least try to start a free writing journal. Plus, extra levels of serotonin are always welcome.

Honestly, reading some of Elbow’s theories and instructions on writing was pretty intense for me. I think because I am so stuck in my own ways of writing, I become skeptical when looking at his writing compass. I was not especially drawn to write about any of his writing techniques in this blog and feel that it will be more beneficial to listen to opinions and feedback from others in the class. However, I do agree that we NEED to start writing more and start thinking about writing less. Elbow encourages us to just keep writing and writing. It will be hard to teach an old dog new trick, but this is definitely
something that I am putting a lot of thought into. Ahh I just caught myself! I shouldn’t be putting thought into it; I should be putting writing into it! I’m lame.

And now for the dreaded E word. Editing. Evil? Yes! Easy? No. UnEasy is more like it. Here is where the emotions come back with their nostrils flaring. Elbow writes, “Editing must be cut throat. You must wade in with teeth gritted. Cut away flesh and leave only bone” (41). Whoa. Chill out Elbow. Where did my cute cartoon elbow-head friend go? But he is actually absolutely correct! As other post have mentioned before editing is the hardest part, aside from starting, for me in the writing process. I become so emotionally attached to every word and phrase within my writing. I need to step back and take some time to get over things. When I write, especially poetry, I often need to take a couple of weeks before I really delve into the editing process. It’s like going through a breakup. After you take some time to get over the lost love, you realize “Wow, he didn’t have a job” or “Huh, it probably wasn’t a good thing that he hated all of my friends.” Now I can see the truth clearly! I don’t always need to add that extra adjective. Or, that line that I thought I couldn’t live without actually did not help my thesis statement in any way. Elbow says, “Think of throwing away not as negative – not as crumpling up sheets of paper in helplessness and rage – but as a positive, creative, generative act” (41). This is such an eye opening thing for me. Editing doesn’t always take away; it can create a new and better piece of writing. Hopefully, I can start to learn how to become less emotional when editing essays and argumentative papers. Poetry will probably take a little while though.

**Week Two**

My buddy elbow is back, and this time he’s cooking! I thought about it and I tried to figure out what kind of cook Elbow would be. I don’t see him in fine dining. That’s too refined. Poor elbow would stick out like a sore…elbow. Nope, save the ceviche and foie gras for the next guy. I see Elbow as the owner of his own diner. Let’s call the place “Eggs over Elbow.” Like other diners, Elbow’s place has a feast like breakfast special including all the works. But this one isn’t called “The Lumberjack Special.” It’s called “The Funny Bone.” (Tagline: Amuse us with your attempts to finish this meal. Eat ‘til it stings!) Elbow is not only the owner, but also the head cook. I think he would find his rhythm as a short order cook. Short order cooks are scrappy and have an attitude. They don’t mess around because they constantly have to keep cooking in a demanding environment for dozens of people at a time. Their goal is to just keep cooking! I can hear Elbow now as he calls out the orders to the other cooks on the grill line...

“I need a poached with dry rye and a Short Stack with sausage.” “Patties or links?” “Links!”

“Gimme three orders of scrambled. One with well done homefries, one with light homefries, one with tomatoes instead of homefries. Two wheat and one burnt white. And I mean BURNT! Or else this guy is going to send the whole plate back!” “Not this jerk...” “Get to work!!”

Elbow is a toughie. But he gets the job done.
Alright, enough with having fun. I found Elbow’s chapter on cooking to be easier to read than his first chapter. Is it just me or is he getting edgier? I especially found his theories on cooking as an interaction between the writer and something else to be profound. Writers need confrontation and conflict. In this sense, I think Elbow is right on the dot when he expresses that for writing to taste good it needs interaction between the writer and other people/ideas/words/etc. I think that his exercise about cooking as interaction between metaphors would be something interesting to try in a middle or high school classroom. It could be a good way to introduce literary terms and techniques. For the more advanced writers, it could just be a good exercise, similar to free writing, to get the juices flowing. Having too much creativity and material within a piece of writing is always better than having too little.

I hate when the first kind of non cooking happens during a discussion in a classroom setting. It creates a boring and half-baked learning environment. Personally, within my own experience as a student, I tend to be drawn to the more confrontational and opinionated students. Usually these are the kinds of students that teach me something. Subconsciously, these are also probably the students that add some heat to my cooking. Oh man the cooking metaphors are endless! I agree with Elbow, however, and feel that people in a discussion who constantly interrupt others and who never really listen to what others are saying is just plain terrible. This leaves room for nothing productive. It is non cooking. It is just boiling water.

I think the quote that struck me the most within this week’s reading was this one: “It is crucial to learn to write words and not believe them or feel hypnotized at all. It can even be good practice to write as badly or as foolishly as you can. If you can’t write anything at all, it is probably because you are too squeamish to let yourself write badly.” BURN! Elbow called us out on the table. I will be the first to admit that I am afraid to write badly. I have so much pride in my writing that I am afraid to write badly, even in front of myself. I make excuses for trying new writing techniques, such as Elbow’s. I say I’m just too busy and don’t have time to mess around with Elbow’s stupid theories. I say that I’m perfectly happy with my way of writing. But I’m not perfectly happy with it. If you claim to be perfectly happy with your writing, than you are not a writer who is willing to grow. You are just stubborn and lazy, like me. I’m not saying that Elbow has all the answers. I am actually still pretty skeptical of what he has to say. I do not believe that there is one set way to write. I believe that some pretty incredible ideas come out of pressure writing. I think that some of Elbow’s exercises sound exhausting. I don’t think that writing should be like baking; there should not be a list of ingredients that everyone has to follow in a specific order to write an essay. Cooking is a much better term for the development of writing. Everyone cooks differently. Some people like it spicy. Some like it sweet. Everyone orders their eggs differently.

**Week Three**

Without powerful rhetoric, the world of history and literature would barely stumble by. Many wonderful pieces of literature and moving speeches would just not have that “wow” factor without the application of compelling rhetoric. For instance, what if the following excerpts of literature and rhetoric were originally written or spoken as the altered words that follow each example?
**William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet:***

“See how she leans her cheek upon her hand! O, that I were a glove upon that hand, That I might touch that cheek!

OR… “My girl is hot. I like how she moves. I wish my hand was on her cheeks, if you know what I mean.

**Jesus, *The Bible:***

“Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.”

OR… “I’m God. Hand ‘em over.”

**Martin Luther King, Jr., *I Have a Dream:***

“I have a dream that one day, down in Alabama, with its vicious racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with the words of “interposition” and “nullification” -- one day right there in Alabama little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers.”

OR…”I think I have a pretty good idea. Wouldn’t it would be nice if maybe one day white kids and black kids in Alabama would be able to hold hands and play together and stuff like that? Huh.”

**Barack Obama, *US President Elect Speech:***

“This is our time, to put our people back to work and open doors of opportunity for our kids; to restore prosperity and promote the cause of peace; to reclaim the American dream and reaffirm that fundamental truth, that, out of many, we are one; that while we breathe, we hope. And where we are met with cynicism and doubts and those who tell us that we can’t, we will respond with that timeless creed that sums up the spirit of a people: Yes, we can.”

OR… “Folks, let’s get this show on the road. Let’s start finding some jobs for people. Peace and love. Ignore the haters. I think we can.”

**President Bill Clinton, *Lewinsky Scandal:***

“I did not have sexual relations with that woman, Miss Lewinsky.”

Oh Slick Willy. It can’t really get any worse than that. But you will always be my boy.

As everyone else has mentioned, Williams is tough. Yet, it is important to know the origins of rhetoric. Even more importantly, it is also pretty important to know the definition of rhetoric. I think I’ve always just assumed that I know what the word means, when in reality I did not ever put any thought into it. After reading through the text, my thoughts on rhetoric have been simultaneously cleared up and mixed
It seems that every different generation, nation, religion, university and individual had something
different to say about rhetoric. What were you all thinking? (Rhetorically speaking)

I found the Sophists vision of truth to be interesting. It’s all relative. Protagoras’ teaching kind of makes
sense though. Things are real and true to us as long as they appear to be that way. Facts are facts until
they no longer have a reason to be a fact. However, such beliefs can produce corrupt actions. The book
lists examples such as people believing that the holocaust never happened or that Americans never landed
on the moon. I guess everyone has his or her right to believe what he or she wants. Yet, in this sense the
sophists viewpoints became a bit wishy washy to me.

I did, however, become drawn to Isocrates three necessary factors that make a good rhetorician. These
include talent, instruction and practice. I also agree that talent is the most important. However, I believe
that instructed and practiced writers/speakers can beat out neglected talent. In that sense, I believe that
purpose and motivation should also be a key factor to successful rhetoricians.

I am personally very fascinated in religious rhetoric. I was intrigued and glad that Williams discussed the
rhetorical views of St. Augustine, along with his religious views. To me, the Jewish faith is filled with a
rich rhetorical history. Ancient rabbi’s and students used to memorize the Torah in its entirety. Most
towns only had one copy of the torah that was usually located at the Temple. In this sense, oral speech
and memorization play a major role in rhetorical development. Additionally, each ancient rabbi
interpreted the Torah from a different perspective. The Bible was seen as an open ended book. When a
student followed a certain rabbi, that student took up that specific rabbi’s yoke or vision. In some ways,
this reflects Sophist ideas. But, maybe that’s a stretch.

If you look at the teachings in the New Testament of the Bible, most lessons and parables are geared
directly toward a Jewish crowd. The text uses specific examples and imagery that every Jewish person
would be immediately familiar with. This is because the Christian teachers and writers of that day were
教学 and writing to a large Jewish audience. This shows how rhetoric can be used to persuade/engage
certain groups of people. Augustine echoes this sentiment. Williams writes, “Augustine argued that
rhetoric could be put to use in preaching and, more important, in interpreting the Bible.” Some Christians
today have no idea what they are really reading when they open up the Bible. This is because they are not
always aware of the ancient meanings beneath the rhetoric. After learning more traditions and beliefs of
the ancient Jews, a person can accurately read the text through the proper rhetorical lens.

I am nowhere near an expert on religion, and I am sorry if I misrepresented anything in the past two
paragraphs! If I did I would love to stand corrected. I find the rhetoric of religious teachers and writing to
be so fascinating and influential. It was interesting to think more about it after reading William’s text.

Week four

Williams, Williams, Williams. You make it hard for a girl to focus! Because of the loads of information
squeezed into this reading, I will concentrate on the two aspects that stuck out to me. The first is
romantic rhetoric. Ahh how sweet. Personally, I love to write about myself. I know this is quite ego
centric, but I have so much to experiment with when it comes to writing about my own life. To echo
some of the sentiments from the text, good writing is “honest, true and authentic.” It should be fun. This is the kind of writing that gets students to write for themselves first, rather than for anyone else. I was kind of turned off by the idea of comparing romantic or personal writing to “confessional” writing. The word confession brings with it a slightly negative connotation. Confess your secrets! Confess your sins! I do not necessarily think that confession is always a negative thing, it can also be quite positive. Yet, I do not like the term being generically used to define all sorts of expressive and personal writing styles. Like Jamie mentioned, I too was a bit offended by Williams’ remarks about teenagers being unable to produce interesting writing from their life experiences. Does Williams actually know any teenagers? What a ridiculously ignorant comment. Additionally, Williams argues that some students might “make up” events to put into their personalized writing because they feel pressured to make it interesting. Is this really a real problem? I know that integrity and honesty are hugely important in school and life. Yet, why is it so wrong for students to embellish upon their writing? They are still producing pieces of the truth within their writing. They are learning about themselves and different styles of writing. And most importantly, they are writing. I’ve done this. I’ve embellished every personal essay I’ve written. There is a confession. Maybe some people think this is wrong, but I think I just got caught up in my writing. I’ve never changed the meaning behind my personal experiences by doing this. In this sense, I don’t think it made my pieces dishonest. Maybe this is extremely taboo of me to talk about. However, I really don’t think that sneaking bits of fiction into personalized writing is a real problem within education. I think it is ok to mix fiction with truth in personalized essays...as long as a student doesn’t go on Oprah pretending that her writing was the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

The other area that really stood out to me within this reading was writing across the curriculum. At my previous university, we had writing intensive classes across the curriculum. I liked this method. I think it made me a more well rounded student. It held teachers accountable to help students understand different methods of writing. I had a minor in Sociology, and my writing intensive sociology classes/teachers were responsible for teaching us how to adapt to the APA or ASA format and specific styles that were acceptable for social science papers. Within the reading, I thought that the linked model would probably be a beneficial and educational way to teach students different writing styles. Yet, I also think it is a lot of extra work, especially at a college level. If professors are not able to guide students to write in the regulations of their content area, then they should not be a professor. If a teacher in any content area is not willing to teach or expand a student’s knowledge in writing, than why do those teachers assign students to write papers in their classes? Why are English teachers the only teachers who are responsible for teaching students how to write? Frankly, I think this is absolutely absurd. Why is it an English teacher’s responsibility to teach students how to write scientifically? I am not trying to back down from the responsibility of teaching writing. Yes, it is primarily an English teacher’s duty to teach writing. Yes, they can teach students how to react and interact with different audiences and writing styles. However, I really believe that teachers in other content areas should be partially responsible for teaching their students to write in that specific content area. Why is it that the only secondary education students at this university to have to complete a writing portfolio are the English students? Why not the social studies students? A lot of writing is involved in social studies. I
don’t think this is fair. I can understand why the university makes future English teachers go through this process, but I do not know why they do not make everybody else go through it as well. To me, this is just an example of irresponsibility. I am very frustrated with this.

**Week six**

I’m starting to feel pressure from these Williams’ readings because I feel as though he is forcing me to choose one side over another in every single issue that he discusses. I can picture him on a first date. “So, Mary, tell me a little bit about yourself. What do you like better, ice cream or cake?” “Well I don’t know, James. Sometimes I’m in the mood for cake, but other times I want ice cream. Actually, I really like to eat them together.” “PICK ONE!” “Ok, fine I like ice cream!” “Very good. Now moving on. What is a better fruit, the apple or the banana?”

Obviously, I am exaggerating; but it is getting hard to decide what side of the spectrum I am on concerning many of these debates. I don’t think education is a black and white world. I think that maybe phonics and whole language should try to become better friends, like cake and ice cream.

I do not specifically remember an early education in phonics. I’m sure it was the method taught to me, but I must have been very young. I remember having letter people in my kindergarten classroom, so we must have been going over sounds and such. Yet, by the time I had entered Kindergarten, I had been read to constantly by my mom, so I had already developed an understanding of reading and writing through meaning and comprehension rather than through sounds and specific words. Now that I think of it, I have no recollection of specific lessons on words and sounds. All I remember are stories and writing assignments that gave me the chance to create my own stories. Maybe this means that I was a more Whole Language centered girl.

As many have expressed, I believe that there should be a balance between the two sides. Both methods bring something to the table. Even though I do not remember my own experiences, I feel as though phonics is an integral part in teaching young children how to read and sound out words. You have to start somewhere! I also feel that it gives a good foundation for a person to become better at spelling and grammar. This sounds terrible, but sometimes I judge people on their spelling and simple grammar skills. This is terribly rude, and I probably have made many errors of my own throughout this blog! But it is true. I get annoyed when people mix up their vs there. The one that gets me the most is when someone spells definitely as definately. This just really bugs me, as I’m sure it does with many of you. However, in the long run these little errors do not drastically change the meaning or understanding of what a person is trying to convey.

I also like a lot of aspects of whole language. I like that it focuses on meaning because I feel more personal connections to this method. I do not think that schools should abandon a standard of correct spelling and grammar. Yet, teachers should be more concerned that a student is learning and retaining meaning through reading before he wins first place in the state spelling bee. I like the method the teacher at the school I am observing at uses to teach her students vocabulary words. She puts a word
on the board and then has a bunch of lines running out from the word. At the end of each line, the teacher puts a different way for a student to find meaning in this word. The examples include: origin of the word, prefixes, suffixes, similar sounding words, synonyms, a sentence with the word in it and a picture of what the word means. I feel as though this method includes both phonetic and holistic qualities. Obviously, studying the prefixes/suffixes of the word brings back phonics. Looking at similar sounding words or words with the same letters in it also brings to life phonetical meaning. However, the synonyms and pictures of the word bring with it more of a meaning centered approach. I think it’s a decent approach to vocabulary. I feel as though it will give students more opportunity to remember the meaning of the word through the different examples, which is an aim for whole language. Yet, it also utilizes traditional phonics.

Overall, I think both methods should be included in school curriculums. Phonics is an important way to teach young children how to read. It is also a significant foundation for the application of correct spelling and grammar, which is very important in anyone’s journey in an educational environment. However, whole language seems to be the soul of learning how to read. It is the meaning. Whole language can help students to find meaning in and a connection to a reading within themselves. Personally, I found a little more connection to this method because it made me realize that I knew how to read and write and find meaning in stories before I actually knew how to sound out words and sounds. The funny thing is, I love ice cream. It is the best. Yet, I don’t like to eat cake unless it is served with ice cream. So maybe I just need to have my phonics served to me with a little whole meaning on the side.

Week eight

I am taking a methods for teaching secondary English class this semester. The class requires us to get into groups and teach different lesson plans for the rest of our classmates. The group that presented this past week created a lesson that revolved around figurative language. They asked us to think about a place that is special to us and to write about it in exaggerated metaphors, similes and personification. I was initially reminded of Elbow’s previous chapter where he said that writing in extended metaphors helps to avoid “writers block.” It was one of the most cathartic experiences I’ve had in a long time. At the end of the class, we all had the chance to listen to and share our work with everyone else. It was a great experience. I love listening to others share their work, and I was surprised at how inspired my own writing was. Afterwards, a friend of mine in the class who felt the same way about the lesson said that it would be fun to start a writing club. Elbow’s chapter leads me to believe that I now must become involved in a teacherless writing class. Who wants to join?!}

This has been my favorite Elbow chapter so far. I like that he specifies that the group is not purely a poetry club or a short story writing workshop. Elbow encourages us to bring a diverse variety of writing to these groups. He writes, “The poet needs the experience of the businessman reading his poem just as the business man needs the experience of the poet reading his committee report...Whenever people
work in only one genre, they gradually become blind to certain excrescences” (79). I completely agree. I feel that diversity in writing and audience only strengthens a writer’s skill and wisdom.

I really like the ideas and prompts that Elbow lists to write about if one cannot think of a topic. This could be a great way to incorporate a writing workshop or club within the classroom. These could also be simple exercises for students to do in journals and freewrites. To mix it up a bit, the teacher could change the subject or genre of the writing exercise. One day the topic could be “You walk into your house after school and David Hasselhoff is sitting at your kitchen table.” The next day the topic could be a frequent question that might appear on a standardized test.

I love that Elbow makes the distinction between showing and telling. He explains it really well in this quotation, “Telling is like looking inside yourself to see what you can report. Showing is like installing a window in the top of your head and then taking a bow so the writer can see for himself” (92.) I had a creative writing teacher who would always tell my class to “show and not tell.” He wanted us to express ourselves in more abstract ways rather than just simply state every little thing throughout the story. Part of reading is being able to interpret and create meaning on one’s own terms. Showing allows readers to be able to do so. Additionally, showing a writer one’s opinions and reactions to the writer’s work can result in a similar way.

From now on when I read someone else’s work, I want to make a noise or compare it to a vegetable. I’m serious. Elbow is a genius. His method of giving a writer feedback through metaphorical “showing” is weirdly awesome. And it actually makes a lot of sense to me. If I had the chance to give feedback to some of my favorite authors this is what I would say...

Raymond Carver: “Cathedral” made me feel like I was staring up into a rising sun through closed eyes. The yellow and pink were both transparent and opaque at the same time.

Maya Angelou: When I read your prose, I eat it. It’s a big bowl of vegetable soup, and it slowly drips down my chin as I take a big bite.

This is such an inspiring way to give and receive feedback on writing. It challenges a person’s mode of thinking. It forces people to write and create in their responses. I could go on and on about this chapter. I am eager to see what the discussion’s group activity will be for the class.