

# MODULE #4: UNDERSTANDING YOUR DRAFTING PROCESS

## IN THIS MODULE:

This week, we'll be looking at the drafting and redrafting process ... and how to make it work for you. We'll cover different ways to go from "blank page" to "finished draft" and we'll also take a look at the key stages of the editing process.

Drafting is where it all gets real!

Some writers love to come up with ideas and create elaborate plans ... but they balk when it comes to sitting down and writing any of the "real" words of their project.

I know how momentous the first sentence of something new can feel, especially if that sentence is the beginning of your first novel, your first blog post, or anything you've been dreaming about and planning for a long time.

Something that really helps me, when I move from planning to drafting, is to think of my work as a "rough draft" or even as "exploratory writing". I can try things out, and if they don't work ... well, no-one but me needs to know!

Of course, there are a lot of different ways to tackle the drafting (and redrafting) process – and we'll take a look at some possibilities to see what might suit you best.

## Different Approaches to Drafting

### #1: Write Fast, Redraft Lots

This is my own preferred approach to drafting, particularly with fiction. I like to chuck everything down on the page, pretty fast (I'm happy if I can write at least 1,000 words per hour).

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Plenty of my rough draft fiction isn't close to something I'd want to share with anyone: there are missing bits, places where I meandered or waffled, bits where I underwrote and need to go back and add much more in, and frankly, parts that are just plain embarrassing in their clunkiness or mawkishness!

But none of that matters, because in the next draft, I start from scratch with a blank page and rewrite everything (still pretty fast) – reshaping it into something more like what I'd intended all along.

## **#2: Spend Lots of Time Mulling it Over**

One of my writer friends spends a lot of time incubating ideas. She mulls things over, and gradually they take shape for her.

This might be how you prefer to do things. Maybe, once you start drafting, you want to have a clear picture in your mind of where you're going. You might have a detailed written plan, or you might simply have thought it through carefully.

Writers who work this way often draft quite slowly – maybe you'll only write a couple of hundred words in an hour – but come out with high quality prose. The most literary writers I know tend to work in this slow, thoughtful way, carefully considering each sentence.

(I am not that patient, or that literary!)

## **#3: Create Iterative Drafts**

I first came across the concept of “iterative writing” in Mark Forster's book *Do It Tomorrow*. The idea with iterative drafting is that you start out with a bare-bones plan and continually go through adding more details.

So your very first draft of, say, a blog post might simply be a five-minute outline. The second draft might be a more detailed outline. The third draft might start to develop paragraphs. The fourth draft might add in extra details and subheadings. Each time, you go through from start to end, adding more depth, until you have a finished – and hopefully reasonably polished – piece of writing.

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I think this approach is best suited to non-fiction, but you could certainly give it a go with fiction. In my novel writing, I've occasionally used a similar drafting process at when I've written very rough material that feels like a long outline of a scene, rather than a fully developed scene – e.g. I'll add in more dialogue, more description around the dialogue, more action, and so on.

## #4: Redraft As You Go Along

You've probably come across the advice to complete a whole first draft before going back to page one and redrafting.

While that works for many writers (me included!), I'm always a bit wary of advice that implies there's only *one* right way to do something – especially something creative.

Some writers like to write a chapter, or a section of a chapter, then edit it before moving on to the next. If you have a good clear plan, this is likely to be a perfectly reasonable method (for either fiction or non-fiction) – as hopefully you won't want to make major changes to your finished, fairly polished, draft.

If you're going to be sharing material with a writing group or a friend or family member before your first draft is complete, then it also makes sense to redraft that piece before sharing it.

## How to Make Your Process Work for You

You probably already have a good sense of your own writing process, but if not, feel free to experiment – maybe using some of the ideas above, or maybe by asking other writers to share how they approach things.

Here are a few ways to make your process work as best as possible for you:

**#1: Own it!** Your process may well feel inefficient, messy, or slow. I know my “write loads of words fast then ditch half of them” novel writing process definitely feels a bit of a mess to me ... but after writing a good half-dozen novels, it's the only thing I've found that feels like *my* way of creating a story!

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**#2: Identify the different stages or milestones within your process.** It's often easier to keep going when you can mentally (or physically!) check off a completed task or section. If your process involves a lot of back and forth over the same material, maybe look for ways to break that into specific milestones (e.g. "first rough draft" and "first edit" or similar).

**#3: Don't compare yourself with other people – they likely have a different process.** So if someone you know can write 10,000 words in a weekend, and you'd be lucky to get that many in a month, it's probably because they're a fast-and-slapdash writer like me and you're a more slow-and-steady writer. (It could well also be because they have more time than you.)

**#4: Set things up so you can get your writing done as easily as possible.** We took a look at this back in Module 2, so you might want to glance back over those materials if you feel this is a particular sticking point for you. You might also want to identify the key conditions that make the most difference for you: for me, it's wearing in-ear headphones and listening to music: I've found I just don't focus in the same way if I play the music over my computer's speakers.

## The Three Stages of Editing

Again, this isn't a hard and fast *rule*, but I find it helps a lot to divide editing into three distinct stages: redrafting, editing, and proofreading.

### Redrafting

Sometimes called "rewriting" or "revising", the redrafting stage is when you take a good look at your first draft material and figure out how you want to reshape it.

This might well involve making some major changes: at this stage of the process, I've cut out whole novel characters, ditched entire sections of blog posts, or chopped out whole chunks of material from non-fiction books.

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At this point, you're *not* worrying about the fine details. You may well have some clumsy sentences or weak phrases in what you've written – that's fine. If you spend ages perfecting your sentences while you're going through the redrafting process, you may well find you end up cutting those sentences out completely because they don't end up fitting into the finished piece.

## Editing

This is sometimes called “line editing” – particularly if it's being done for you by someone else! At this stage, all the major building blocks are in the right places: you're not going to be cutting out characters or making major changes to your plot.

Instead, you're going to be tweaking things like paragraphs and sentences, maybe moving them around a little, or tightening up flabby phrases. You'll be watching for things like words that you use way too often (which often go unnoticed when you're drafting). You're probably looking out for typos and grammatical mistakes too, but you're not *primarily* editing with those in mind.

## Proofreading

This is the final stage of editing. It's a great one to outsource to someone else, if you can (either a paid proofreading or a friend), especially if you're working on something major like a book.

When you proofread, you're not really looking to *improve* your writing – you might find yourself tweaking the odd clunky line of dialogue, but mainly, you're just looking for actual mistakes.

Those mistakes might be of spelling, grammar, or punctuation. It's particularly useful at this stage to look out for inconsistencies – e.g. do you write “no one” or “no-one”? Do you prefer “Government” or “government”?

## When to Merge the Three Stages

Sometimes, it doesn't make a lot of sense to go through a three-step editing process. You might decide to do a single editing pass in the following situations in particular:

- **You've written something short and fairly ephemeral** – e.g. a 500 word newsletter article. If it was well-planned in advance, you probably won't need to make any big picture changes at all, and a single round of editing and proofreading may be enough. If a mistake or two slips through, it's no big deal.
- **Someone else will be tackling one or more of the phases** – e.g. you might mainly revise your novel, but also do a little bit of closer editing and proofreading as you're going along, before sending the manuscript to your line editor.

Of course, as always, there's no absolute "right" way to approach things. If you have a different process for redrafting and editing, that's absolutely fine! What matters is that it works for you, and that you – eventually – come out with a finished piece that you're happy with.

Do feel free to share how you tackle this part of the writing process in our Facebook group:

[facebook.com/groups/ontrack2019](https://www.facebook.com/groups/ontrack2019)

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## How the Assignments Work

During this week and the rest of the course, your only assignment is to reach the writing target that you set yourself in week two.

**Important:** If you decide your target isn't working for you, it's fine to set a different one. Please don't struggle on if it's becoming clear that you were way too ambitious / chose the wrong project / etc. We are not the writing police. ;-)

### ASSIGNMENT

Your assignment this week is simply to reach the target that you set for yourself in week two.

Even if you don't quite get there, it's fine to "check in" for your reward stamp anyway – just tell us how you got on:

[facebook.com/groups/ontrack2019/learning\\_content/?filter=2254859061461172](https://www.facebook.com/groups/ontrack2019/learning_content/?filter=2254859061461172)

If you prefer not to use Facebook, you can email me ([ali@aliventures.com](mailto:ali@aliventures.com)) with "Module #4 check in" or similar in the subject line.

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## What's Coming Up Next Week:

Well done on reaching the end of this week's module. Remember, if you have questions at any point, please do ask in our Facebook group. If it's something you'd prefer to discuss privately, you can email me at [ali@aliventures.com](mailto:ali@aliventures.com).

Here's what to expect in Module 5 next week:

### MODULE 5:

Next week, from Monday 11<sup>th</sup> February, we'll look at how to enjoy your writing more. We'll cover ways to fall back in love with your writing again, and how to inject more fun into your writing life (without feeling that you're "wasting time").