

## My Relationship with Writing

Samantha Stout

This article is a description of Stout's method of approaching writing in a way that is less of a formal structure and more of a romantic affair. Writing is personal, and the way we go about writing varies from person to person. Stout uses the stages of a relationship to describe how she goes about deciding on a topic, researching, preparing to write, and ultimately writing compositions.

I hate writing, plain and simple. Some people hate math, some people hate the cold, some people even hate brownies. (Crazy, I know! The chocolaty goodness!) For me, the idea of having to get the thoughts in my head to make sense, writing everything out on paper all pretty and what not, and then having it read and judged by people is less than inviting, and honestly scares the bagezezys out of me. I get a complex every time I think about it. In fact, it scares me so much that I tend to put off writing until the night before I have to have it done.

As you can imagine, and possibly sympathize with, I normally get myself into predicaments that involve having to write well and write fast. Throughout my years of trying to deal with this, I have developed a solid plan of execution to cope with this issue. I have come to think of writing as a relationship, starting with the first meeting until the point when you say, "I do." I think I've gotten it down to a science, and the best part about it is that I am able to use my tendency to procrastinate and my crazy, scattered brain to help out the process.

I wish someone I knew taught me this way of writing, or at least told me it was okay to be unconventional in the way I would go about writing, back

when I first started doing research papers. So I am going to share my process for both relationships and writing with other writers who may be stuck in front of a blank Word document.

### **Send the Flirty Eyes Over: Contemplate Your Topic**

In relationships, making eye contact is the first step of the dating process. If you don't make eye contact, nothing will be able to come of anything. You'll just be left wondering "what if?"

Similarly, in writing, you first have to think about what you might want to write about. In order to write, you have to start by thinking about the subject matter. What is the purpose? What has to get done? By musing over the general ideas surrounding your paper, you'll get glimpses of things that hit a chord with you and could potentially turn into something real. This way you can get a tangible idea of the amount of work that you have to get done, and a good foundation of potential topics you would enjoy writing about.

### **Creep on Facebook: Research**

The next step in forming a relationship is to creep the heck out of the person's Facebook page! Find your mutual friends and look at what they've been talking about with each other. Read up on the person's interests and check out the "About Me" section. If you want to get a little more in depth, look at the things that he or she has liked or comments that he or she has made. Even check out the last time the person's relationship status changed. It's intense and a little over the top, I agree, but it is better to know what you are getting yourself into on all of the general fronts before you're caught off guard and find out that the person is far from what you were looking for, because pursuing the person could end up being a waste of time and effort.

In writing, this is the research phase. Research anything and everything! The majority of us are glued to the Internet anyway, so instead of automatically hitting the Facebook bookmark, take a trip to Google and learn about your flirtatious idea(s). While you're sitting in the car or on the bus, instead of passing the time with a Twitter newsfeed, *Angry Birds* or (my favorite) *Bubble*, use your phone to Google random questions that could narrow the idea list. And look for everything; any feature of the topic could help. There is no harm in knowing too much on a topic especially when you have a rather large space to cover, and the extra knowledge could come in handy.

## The Insanely Awkward First Date: Compile All of Your Ideas

After creeping on the person’s Facebook, it’s time to build up the courage to ask him or her out. The first date doesn’t have to be anything too spectacular; it’s just a way to see how you two get along. Be warned: there will be a lot of awkward looking around and less than riveting conversation at first. Don’t worry, this how it’s supposed to be. Both parties have to get used to being around each other. It may be an uncomfortable process, but the sooner it gets done, the sooner the easy, fun, free sailing dates will come. And someday, you can look back and laugh at what you’ve been through!

When writing, this is where I use my super unorganized and random brain to my advantage while composing a piece of writing. It’s a little thing called “stream of consciousness.” Way back when, a psychiatrist named Freud came up with the idea that the mind hides thoughts from itself (a weird concept, I know, but roll with me). Today this concept is used in psychotherapy to help bring repressed thoughts up to the surface so that problems can be addressed. Anything and everything that goes on in the person’s mind is said aloud or written down in order to allow subconscious feelings to come to the surface. How does this apply to writing, you ask? Well, when I think I have done as much broad research as possible, I switch to a scary Word document and dump onto the page everything I already know, have learned through my research, and all the things I’m still wondering about. I allow my stream of consciousness to spill out on to the page so my thoughts are tangible and easily manipulated to form into a paper. No worries about punctuation, correct spelling or anything. Hit enter as often as you want. You don’t even have to hit the space bar. Just start writing and don’t let anything in the outside world distract you or you could lose the stream and end up not able to get back on. This tactic might not be helpful for everyone, and it’s very difficult to explain, so I’ll give you a taste of my “awkward first date” with the handsome young topic of the article you are currently reading (good luck understanding):

hoping not to hit a brick wall—what if they do? do i have to answer every question? do i have to present all of the flaws... id think yes...

mulling it over—getting something to eat of dancing to some music

challenge of getting back on task

necessary for the scatterbrained so we dont explode

absence makes the heart grow fonder- Possible making it into a relationship kinda writing??? some parts wouldnt be very strong my love psychotic affair with writing??? Crazy love??

sitting down and looking the problem in the face! just type...type about how you suck at writing and how you hate this topic or the ham sandwich you just ate

get the first move out of the way as horrible or corny as it might be once it's done its done and the rest of this section is easy peasy.

As you can see, not only is it really out of order, but also, a lot of it probably doesn't make sense if you're not me (most of it didn't even end up in this article). But when I stumbled upon this tactic, I hit gold for my writing. After you think you've gotten it all out, go back and look it all over just to see if anything you wrote makes you think of something new, and then repeat the process once again. Then, say good night (figuratively).

### **Absence Makes the Heart Grow Fonder: Take a Break**

Some people would tell you that the next step in a relationship is to make the person wait by the phone, not to smother them, and to let it all sink in. This is always the most delicate part of the situation. Some might argue that this is the wrong thing to do. If you're into someone, don't play games: dive in, and if they like you, they like you; if they don't, then they don't. Don't hide your interest or else they might be gone before you decide they've waited long enough. So continue with caution.

People who say that taking a break from your writing is the wrong thing to do might definitely have a point, which is why you have to treat this section with care, and if your will power to start again after you've stopped isn't strong enough, maybe this tactic isn't the right fit for you. I, however, need this or my already hectic scatterbrained mind will implode. Susana Rodriguez agrees with the idea of giving your piece of work some air. In her article, "Researching, or How I Fell in Love with Post-Its," she explains how she uses this same tactic to help her stay objective while brainstorming. After taking her "break," she is able to make connections in the writing she didn't see before (101).

When taking a break, feel free to pull up Facebook for a minute, but I suggest getting off of the computer all together. Get up and move around; get your blood circulating back to your legs. Make a sandwich, dance to some awesome music, forget all about whatever you just put onto the document, and take a break from it all. While you're not actively thinking about it, your subconscious is. Depending on your time schedule, this could include putting the paper away for the rest of the day or taking a nap. I'm normally stuck with five to ten minutes of dancing around my house to my iPod and eating a

ham sandwich while trying not to wake up the rest of my family (since by this time it's well past bed time).

### **Make the Commitment: Write Your Piece**

If you want your relationship to continue to progress, it's time to call the person. Tell him or her you've been busy but you really want to get together again. Show off your charm and you've got it in the bag. You know that you are interested and that you like the person; you have given it time, so you know it is not a rash decision. Make it a steady thing, and commit exclusively.

In terms of composing, this is where you get down to business. This is not only the most important part, but it is also the hardest. After all of the fun freedom, you have to will yourself back in front of the computer. This is where you actually write your piece. I'm not going to tell you how to do this part. I don't even know a good, easy, uniform way to do this. I start from different parts of the paper all the time; sometimes I use an outline, sometimes, when writing a research paper, I get all of the quotations I want to use and start from there, but really, this part is still a mystery to me. However, no matter how you approach this section, whether it be head on, starting with the attention-getting lead, or dancing around the paper adding to paragraphs randomly (which is how I'm writing this paper, in case you were wondering), this is the most difficult part that inevitably must be done in order to get your piece to its final stages.

While I don't have a specific process for you to follow during this stage, keep in mind that all of the previous steps I discussed are meant to make this stage of the process a bit easier for other struggling writers. Also, the exclusivity of the relationship wasn't just cute metaphor talk: staying focused is key. I often find myself on a roll, spitting out awesome sentences with a really cool points to make, and then all of a sudden my mind is somewhere else. A drifting mind is kryptonite, so eliminate distractions as much as possible.

### **Get that Credit Check: Proofread**

At this point in your relationship, things are probably pretty serious. Making this a permanent partnership is definitely in the cards. But, before you do anything too rash, get the credit check. Do whatever you have to do to put everything out on the table. This may not change your feelings for them, but it makes sure you both know what you are getting into.

In the writing process, this is what I like to call “no fun!” proofreading. After everything is out and is supposed to make sense, go back and make sure it all *actually* makes sense. Fix the spelling and grammatical errors, rearrange some sentences, omit and add information. If you’re up really late writing the paper, I suggest going to sleep after it is written and then getting up a little earlier than usual to reread it in the morning when you are a little more coherent and capable of seeing the little mistakes. Also, when I’m just looking for small proofreading errors, I find it more effective to read the paper backwards and fix it that way, because when I read it straight through, I tend to add or change things in my head as I read without realizing that that’s not the way it is on the paper. Another effective strategy is to trade papers with a friend and look for potential mistakes in each other’s work.

### **Take it to the Altar: Print it Out and Turn it In**

As the great philosopher and poet Ms. Beyonce Knowles would say of relationships, “If you liked it then you should have put a ring on it!”

Once your writing is complete, print it out and turn that masterpiece in! Everything after this is out of your control, at least for the moment. Let the relief set in.

Writing, as I have found, is not going anywhere anytime soon. It’s a pretty consistent part of life, so why not build a solid relationship with it? Even if you don’t like it (like me), figuring out a way to make it easier to deal with can help a lot. Whether you find your own way, adapt my method, or use someone else’s to fit your style, believe me, it’s worth doing.

### **Work Cited**

Rodriguez, Susana. “Researching, or How I Fell in Love with Post-it Notes.” *Grassroots Writing Research Journal* 2.2 (2011): 95-102. Print.



**Samantha Stout** was born on Krypton, but due to some major environmental issues that place was destroyed, so her pops shipped her off and she was raised in sweet ole' Smallville, Kansas. Growing up, you could say she was a bit different from the rest, so she's faster than a bullet and can save a damsel in distress like nobody's business. But it's her poster child demeanor that really set her apart from the rest. Now she resides in Metropolis, with a weekend getaway to the fortress of solitude every once in awhile, working as a reporter and moonlighting as one of the men in tights.

