Hurray! Spring is here, and with it we bring you the newest edition of The re-Visioner. This issue of the University Writing Center’s newsletter is chiefly concerned with the idea of vision, particularly as it relates to writing. Throughout the semester, we began to see discussions of vision develop in consultations with clients and conversations among the staff. As we pondered the following questions, we began to recognize the importance of vision to all writing. We hope you too will ask yourselves these questions in terms of your own writing and keep them in mind when perusing this semester’s issue. We ask, what is the relation between vision and the writing process? To what extent are the two congruent, and where, if at all, must they part? How can vision make us better writers?

Within, you will find student and faculty pieces that address these questions of vision. A conversation between writing center consultants will situate the topic of vision in the context of lively discussion and debate; a meditation on the relationship between the experience of trauma and poetic vision casts our focus in a more somber light; finally, an exercise will help you hone your own sense of vision and writing.

And, of course, this issue is filled with information to help you not only see the various events that have occurred this semester in the University Writing Center world, but also to become better acquainted with who we are, what we do, and who has been coming by. Finally, we’d like to thank all who have participated in the publication of The re-Visioner.

Dennis Bohr, Robert English, Paige Hinson, Becky Woodard, & Erin Zimmerman

Statistics for the UWC during the Fall 2006 semester

<table>
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<th>Category</th>
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<td>Percentage of sessions conducted with non-native English/bilingual speakers</td>
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<td>Number of clients based on academic level:</td>
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<td>200 Juniors</td>
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<td>58 Graduate Students</td>
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<td>13 Other (staff, faculty, alumni, community)</td>
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Top Ten Departments/Subjects represented by number of client visits:

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<td>University Studies/Freshman Seminar</td>
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Thanks to:
Allison Cate, art
Kevin Young and Tom Curran, photography
Wretched Writing Contest Winners

The University Writing Center hosted its first ever Wretched Writing Contest this semester and received many entries. Listed below (in no particular order) are the winning submissions. We would like to thank all the participants and congratulate the winners.

There was once a shrew who thought to woo a female that is hard to pursue. Few knew this ugly shrew, but if I were to guess, this shrew would receive a big fat boo from the female it wants to woo.

-Ian Timmons

Our kissing we gave up for lent. I battled nature till the month was spent. But when Easter came and went, I found I had no more love for thee.

-Ryan Furstenberg

Ray wrote wretchedly and retched, reached for his ratchet, wrenched his wrist, and risked Ramona’s wrath. Ramona rose rapidly, wrangled with the wrong wraith, writhed and wriggled in the wreckage, and realized Ray was right in reprimanding Ramona. Ray and Ramona wrestled, religiously reciting Romanian rubrics while rigorously rotating.

-Dennis Bohr

Dude, like, we went to eat and, like, all the marshmallows were almost gone. There was one left; Ashlee stabbed it with her long fork-like thing and knocked over the freakin’ pot of, like, really hot melted chocolate and it, like, totally got all over her. Dude, it was funny.

-Angie Naessens

Verbosity is, really ineffably over-rated within the exuberantly, brilliant writer’s sphere of word choosiness and contextual virtuosity of the well-constructed beatific idea when approaching a prompt which invites charismatic appraisal of the said prompt offered to the contestants during which upon evaluation of their respectful entrees, they assay the essay and oft wonder into an oblivion of words they no nothing about the meaning of by use of a thesaurus to add puffery to a markedly very badly written essay in a disparate attempting to win a contest much akin to the one the author of this writing has thus entered upon. Ergo, considering that the author (to elude too he whom is verbose, and whom purist writing techniques holds no adhesion too) who doesn’t simply state what he’s clearing lucidly saying and muddied by ill-choiced wordage concludes in such a way, as is in its entirely different from what the author, he or she wanted to utter in originality to the reader, loses, and thereby the readers which judge the contestation will calculatingly evaluate each and every single writing piece submitted must ruefully, edged out the worse of them all and narrowing the field down to the best most eloquent sample of the american written language. Such as this very may well be the case with many of this writer’s maladroit constituents, she is in remains confidently composed in equanimity because of the oppositeness with which she replied simply to the task-at-hand and voila her admittedly most exceedingly great written “simple illuminating ideology” of a thoughtfulness well delivered upon.

-Samantha Levy

Visions of Poetry, Visions of Pain

By Jennifer Kirby and Robert English

Bin ich es noch, der da unkenntlich brennt? (Is it still I, burning here beyond recognition?)

-Rainer Maria Rilke

My poems are my enemy; they rob my precious days left at the gate of life.

-Herman Taube

In “Ode to the West Wind,” Percy Shelley asks the West Wind to make him its poetic voice, its lyre; his inspiration and poetic vision arise from a kind of Dionysian revelry, an ecstatic worship of nature’s wealth. In this poem, one sees an artist who willingly offers himself to his inspiration, prepared to divest himself of all that would hinder his further creative aspirations. This is, to be sure, a fine ideal; a balmy and mild world indeed had such a goal within Shelley’s reach. However, our lives are more often than not rife with the frustration, rather than satisfaction, of ideals. Shelley’s vision in “Ode to the West Wind” sets the stage for our discussion by contrast: Herman Taube, poet, teacher, and Holocaust survivor, offers a different perspective regarding creativity and what it means to have creative vision.

Vision is a word with many different senses. Ranging the supernatural to the scientific, it can be bent, perhaps, in as many directions as one wants. Our concern here is the difference between poetic vision and vision in its most literal sense: seeing things in the world. Again, an optimistic theory of creativity might suppose that the poet draws from the wealth of her experience, in whatever form it may take, and somehow makes of this experience a literary object. Now certainly imagination comes into play here; it is not as if the poet filters his experience through a sieve, allowing a finished poem to drip through the other side. Quite probably it is the enigmatic character of this process that has led so many to have recourse to the divine when theorizing the creative act. But suppose a poem, arguably the paragon of over-determination, can itself be traced to a specific event or series of events. Suppose further that not only one poem, but a series, a volume —indeed, a life’s work— are deter-

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rmined by a single series of events. Thus resituated, the notion of poetic vision takes on a very different sense than Shelley’s “West Wind.”

In 1975, Herman Taube visited Auschwitz, producing the poem “A Single Hair,” which depicts a grim vision of “ash gray” Zyklon-B-discolored hair (1). Written on the back of the kosher chicken box (given to visitors to eat while at the camp), the poem is a prosopopeial monologue, where the “single hair” addresses a tourist wielding a camera. The poem is at once poignant and bitter; the hair pleads for remembrance of those lost to the fires of the crematoria, as well as its own foreshortened life upon a young woman’s head, while simultaneously judging the visitors of Auschwitz for their inability to empathize with her death. Taube described this not as a creative poem inspired by the presence of the hair, but rather as something that he was implored to write by the hair itself. The poem, therefore, was not of himself: from Taube’s perspective, writing the poem was not an option, it was forced upon him without creative ingenuity. This is how he understands most of his poetry and why he is driven in “Letter to a Poet” to call the poems his “enemy; they rob my precious days left at the gate of life.”

It is arguable, then, to what extent Taube’s “poetic vision” can be called that at all. Perhaps we do better to understand vision in this context as vision of the former sense: the physical act of seeing itself. Divested of poetic implications, this raw vision is inexorably present in his works. It is manifest in his often undorned descriptions of events, in his deliberate use of “fractured English”(2), instead of his native Yiddish, as language of poetry. He explains the use of English as a tool whereby he can communicate more directly with his English speaking students; that his poetic language is foreign and admittedly uncomfortable suggests internal alienation and alterity are the costs of this bond. The poet locates his creative impulse in a language which is not his own. So there is an otherness which is the linguistic material of his creations, and there are the experiences and images that he cannot control which issue the imperative to write. Taube’s “poetic vision” is the unbidden rush of images that accost him; what he has seen, in its cruel particularity, structures what he is able, poetically, to see.

Although we suggested above that Shelley sets the stage of our discussion by contrast, both poets seem to sacrifice their own creative agency at the precise moment where one thinks it would be most triumphantly affirmed. Taube has no choice but to write his poems, as Shelley offers himself up to the West Wind as its lyre. A crucial difference between the two, however, emerges in Taube’s ambivalence towards his creative vision. It is at this point that the Rilke epigraph, taken from Edward Snow’s translation of Rilke’s final poetic fragment in his last notebook, should resonate. Rilke presumably wrote this fragment while enduring the debilitating pain of acute leukemia (he died shortly after its entry); is there a similar self-obfuscating pain which issues from corrosive memories? And of these still extant visions, what would it mean to exercise them? What form would such a project take, and what would be its goals?

In Poetry After Auschwitz, Susan Gubar writes that “when psychologists of trauma explain the significance of the flashback in the later lives of the injured, they view it as a form of recall that recovers a past so horrific at the time that it cannot be fully taken into consciousness” (Gubar 8). She goes on to explain that poetry can present “images that testify to the truth of an event as well as its incomprehensibility;” thus, the author is able to engage and grapple with traumatic experience through the process of writing. What, though, of a poet such as Taube? He intimates that his poetry is less a craft than a sudden arrival of sights and sounds; indeed, he often does not even choose to write them. It seems much less therapeutic than one should like to think. Taube’s first recollection of writing poetry was at the age of nine after his mother died; he would write to her asking “Why did you leave me?” That poetry has its root in grief and pain provides insight into Taube’s poetic vision.

It is telling that he calls his poems his enemy not in a theoretical text or an essay, but within a poem itself. This suggests a dependence upon the very entity which threatens; his critique must be located at the site, in the very words, of that which must be critiqued. This paradox is very well the condition of his poetry, the root of his ambivalence.

A systematic study of the poetry that arises from trauma is certainly a project worth exploring; a definition of trauma, however, would be the axis upon which such a study would spin. And the remarkable variety of suffering challenges the very notion of a unified definition; hence, any such project would most likely be piecemeal. Such a project, though, would do well to explore the troubled relation between poetic imagination and the often visualized remnants of trauma which, in their intransigence, continue not only to wound, but also to give creative life.

Notes:
1) One exhibit at Auschwitz is a roomful of hair shorn from the heads of victims to be gassed; it is here that the “single hair” speaks to the spectator.
2) He writes in “Inner Struggle”: “What’s left for me is to continue dreaming/in Yiddish and writing in fractured English.”

Bibliography:


The Vision Thing
(a conversation about vision)

Dennis Bohr: Wednesday, January 24, 2007
Our newsletter is The re-Visioner, so let’s talk about vision. Where do we get this stuff? Are we just conduits plugged into the great cosmic Nobodaddy? Do we pull it magically out of a hat? Does it emerge from thin (or thick) air? Where does it come from, this creative urge, this itch that must be scratched? How do we see what we see?

For me, it depends on what I am writing. When I wrote Macbeth: The Play That Dare Not Speak Its Name, the first image I saw was the three witches. I thought of the bad press they’d gotten and wondered what their real lives were like, so I gave them real personalities and lives. That was my vision for the play.

Ideas tap me on the shoulder and nudge me; they usually emerge as I’m writing, too. I immerse myself in an idea and let it simmer until the broth thickens into soup.

Paige Hinson: Wednesday, January 31, 2007
When I start to write, I don’t usually have a vision. I start with a general idea of what I want to write and let the writing develop itself. As I write (usually between 1am-8am), I ramble and let the ideas go where they will, and suddenly, BAM! I have a vision of what my meaningless mutterings want to be. Does anyone else experience this?

Robert English: Thursday, February 1, 2007
It depends on what kind of writing I’m doing. I’ll often draft an outline or spatial representation of the course an ‘academic’ essay will take. If I am writing ‘creatively,’ however, I tend to be more spontaneous.

Wyatt Reynolds: Thursday, February 1, 2007
I tend towards the opposite: more spontaneous with structured assignments (I suppose I depend on the assignment to structure me & my thoughts) and more structured with "creative" assignments (I need that sense of order imposed, I guess). Interesting.

Dennis Bohr: Thursday, February 1, 2007
Paige, I’d like to hear more about your "BLAM!" What is it? How does it happen? Where does it come from?

Paige Hinson: Monday, February 5, 2007
I’m not really sure what my BLAM! is. I guess it’s that moment when all my rambling, stressed-out ideas come together and I know what I want to say.

Last semester, I was having a hard time figuring out what to write for my final paper in the Writing Center Theory and Practice class. I wanted to discuss how my views about grammar’s place in writing had changed from very prescriptive to descriptive over the semester. I had two great articles to use, the whole paper was going to be personal, and I knew what I felt about the subject, but when I sat down to write, nothing happened. I struggled for weeks and had all kinds of drafts and notes, but my creative spark wasn’t sparking. My BLAM! moment finally came two days before my portfolio was due when Emily me asked why I felt grammar was important. I realized exactly what I wanted to say. I finished the paper that night, and it is one of the best I’ve ever written.

That’s the gist of how my vision comes. It doesn’t always happen the same way (sometimes I have a vision from the start, but that’s rare), but that BLAM! moment almost always happens when I’m at my most stressed-out point.

Wyatt Reynolds: Thursday, February 1, 2007
When I think of vision, I think of artistic vision. I think of Isabel Allende & The House of the Spirits: Clara & her notebooks that bear witness to life. I think of truly high stakes writing—as in writing like the aforementioned novel or Rushdie’s The Satanic Verses that just may get you thrown into jail or killed.

I think of F. Scott Fitzgerald & his double vision: “[T]he test of a first rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function. One should . . . be able to see that things are hopeless and be determined to make them otherwise” (from “The Crack-Up,” 1936). The poignancy and yearning in this “simple observation.”

I think of him coming to Asheville (okay, Hendersonville) certain he would die, yet living on . . . of him, after his first heart
attack, struggling to finish The Last Tycoon... of the beauty of that unrealized vision, that human endeavor—failed. I imagine him, dying, certain he was doomed to obscurity & irrelevance, yet his vision lives in Tender Is the Night, Gatsby, “The Rich Boy” and “Winter Dreams,” and I think of him and Zelda, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.

I think of Gertrude Stein and her vision of a new language forged in repetition, repetition replete with a rhythm throbbing with an urgency unlike anyone else then writing in the English language (well, except Joyce).

I think of Virginia Woolf and her dream of a room of one’s own, of her vision of a new consciousness, forged in a mode all her own.

I think of Ernest Hemingway and the vision of In Our Time... the aching poignancy of The Sun Also Rises, Jake Barnes staring at his ridiculous wound, looking into the mirror for some semblance of an explanation, and that final bitter parting shot: “Isn’t it pretty to think so?” I think of his beautiful, terrible vision of a world gone wrong, a generation lost, and an earth that abides... of the aging Papa, after everyone wrote him off (see Islands in the Stream & Across the Rivers and into the Trees for evidence why) and then years later celebrated him, deeming a second rate novel worth a Nobel Prize (err, The Old Man and The Sea). He stayed true to his vision, rising every morning to write (and drink and then drink some more). I think of him, alone, in those final moments before sunrise as he gathered himself, steeling himself, to write... one... more... day, always willing to pay the price, no matter what it cost him.

I think of Kurt Vonnegut—who dared laugh into the darkness of Dresden’s abyss, who saw the Bush administration’s vision of the world and wrote, brilliantly, wittily, savagely, A Man Without a Country. I think of his vision of this world and his statement that No. This. Cannot. Stand. This. Will. Not. Stand. Not. In. My. Name.

I think of these writers, their visions, and ask, “What sense can I make of this world? What is my vision? And how do I put that vision into words?”

What sense can I make of this world? What is my vision? And how do I put that vision into words?

Every Wednesday morning, Friday morning, Saturday, and most Sundays, I write the fleeting glimpses of my vision. It may be futile. I may never finish this f*#^ng novel. If I do, it may never be read, much less published. But that is the vision of the artist.

This is the most human of endeavors—to endure. Each day that I sit down at this godforsaken desk and write, that vision endures. For. One. More. Day.

This is the human struggle, played out in its most compressed form... writing... trying to make sense of not just what I’ve seen, but what I felt at what I saw.

And so I ask myself: What would Faulkner do? With not barns but bodies burning, their charred corpses dragged by celebrants through the streets of Fallujah.

What would Fitzgerald do? With Paris Hilton and all the sad, young women, their furtive glances, those mumbled whispers: “Do you think I’m pretty?”

And what would Hemingway do? With presidents in pants too small who stand atop aircraft carriers, flags waving, speaking of a mission accomplished that had not yet begun. That was 1300+ days ago, that 1st of May, 2003. All the while, levees fail, buildings crumble, and people die—well or badly, it matters not. They are dead.

So one more day I force myself to write. One day, I will set forth in words a vision true enough to begin to tell the tale of this world.

Dennis Bohr: Thursday, February 1, 2007

Sometimes the only release is to spit words out on paper or go to D.C. and march up the street and see three identical women (they must have been triplets) poised motionless on boxes: one in a middle-class suit with a red ribbon running from her hand to her knees; next to her a soldier with a similar ribbon that flowed to her feet; and next to her a woman in a burkha, and her ribbon reached out to me, twenty, maybe thirty feet away. This tableau was their hell-no-not-in-my-name-not-in-my-name-dammit!

There’s no one I can save except maybe me, maybe you—maybe if other people read this stuff, Wyatt’s stuff, your stuff (whoever you are), they will tell people who will tell people, and one more person will hear it and another and maybe after 2000 years-plus of counting, we will stop trying to convert people to our viewpoint by killing-torturing-raping-starving-burning them because they’re brown-black-red-yellow-white-muslim-christian-jew-atheist-whatever*#*kinever!

Words are my only weapon. There’s no shortage of them, and yes, people get killed for using them, and they are dangerous, but words don’t kill people. Neither do guns (but bullets and bombs do).

Allison Cate: Thursday, February 8, 2007

Wyatt, while sitting at your godforsaken desk, do you peer between the lines of paper and attempt to make sense of the infinite, white abyss? Subconscious thoughts linger among blankness, continuously trucking along the crevasses of our minds, only uncovered when we least expect it. Maybe you need to change your writing environment—although it seems to work well because your post is beautiful. Dennis, yours is as well.

All of these authors have struggled with the same thoughts, feelings, and maybe, and all have succeeded. What do authors have
that allows them to get their feelings and opinions on paper so that mere mortals can understand? Super powers? Or is it the patience to persist long enough at their own "god-forsaken desks"? The true test of writers is patience, how long they can stay shackled up in their minds. If I check into mine for too long, I get crazier than I already am. When I get into my zone and uncover EXACTLY what I am wondering about, an answer is zapped to my consciousness and quickly transported to paper by hand. If you continue to religiously sit at that desk, soon enough, you will have a published work.

Dennis Bohr: Thursday, February 8, 2007

Paige talks of BLAM! Allison talks of zapping. But where do we get the BLAM! ZAP?! Where does the magic come from? When did you know you could string words together, confident that what you said made sense? I don't remember NOT being able to do it.

The frustration of the writer is that he/she spouts words chasing words, yet wonders, "What in the hell am I talking about? Does anybody else out there get it too?" And when somebody does—wham, bam, thank you, ma'am/mister/miss muse. (Do women have male muses? Do gay writers have same-sex muses? Is there a muses' union?)

And I don't do anything religiously. It's against my religion.

Jennifer Flaherty: Friday, February 9, 2007

I wish I could be BLAM-med or zapped. Maybe we are all BLAM-med and zapped and don't know it—writing furiously in some transcendent coma until our pencil snaps and we wake up: "What just happened?" Sometimes that's how it is for me. The bits of writing I hold on to most occurred as I was unaware of inspiration, the words just sort of had to happen. When I think, "I need inspiration, may Zeus strike me down!" nothing comes except paraphrased ideas of something I read somewhere. Nothing original comes from my forced zaps. Maybe that's the point: you can't predict a thunderstorm, and you're not conscious while being held in the grip of a lightning bolt.

Dennis Bohr: Friday, February 9, 2007

Jennifer may be right about the inspiration—that it just happens. Of course, it won't if you just stare at the paper. I have to goose the muse with words, and then more words dance down my arm and form word puddles. Sometimes they emerge into "something wonderful" (as David in 2010 says).

Theresa Kennedy: Sunday, February 11, 2007

Interesting... BLAM, zap, magic? It's just writing. Some writing is crap, some is good, some is brilliant, and some is tolerable crap. Writers have moments when everything pulls together, and suddenly they have a paper, a book, a play, a screenplay.

We start with a topic, assigned or pulled from the world around us on our own whim. Maybe we start with something that seemed more like a dream because we were never fully aware we needed to write about it. A student will begin with the topic the teacher picked out and pretend he/she knows what the subject is. One who writes for fun will start anywhere, with any subject, any reason. Some authors have voices and characters who must be heard.

Maybe inspiration comes from thinking about what we need to write, and what we need to say comes as we write. For the sake of peace of mind, just write whatever comes to mind. Don't think about it: just write. See what happens.

ASU’s Writing Center sends employees to SWCA Conference

Five consultants from Appalachian’s Writing Center went to the Southeastern Writing Center Association Conference in February. held two presentations that created conversations with other professors and students involved with writing centers across the Southeastern United States. We want to congratulate and thank them for taking the time to advertise and promote to other universities the steps that Appalachian’s Writing Center takes to review, revise, and enhance our services.

One presentation, led by Lori Beth De Hertogh, Jon Burr, and Kyle Warner, explored how the writing center prepares first-year graduate students to teach Expository Writing and conversely, how teaching freshman writing enhances the expertise and skills of writing center consultants. They found that working in the writing center allows them to come into contact with issues which are applicable to the composition classroom; that the writing center helped them learn how to quickly identify strengths and weaknesses in students’ writing and communicate these issues to students; and that the support system within the writing center and peer teacher groups help them learn strategies that transfer from the writing center to the classroom and vice-versa.

The second presentation, led by Shauna Gobble and Sarah Vanover, examined the event when a student is faced with reading his or her work aloud and becomes aware, possibly for the first time, how he or she uses words to make meaning and how those words may not contain the impact originally intended. They discussed that by reading their papers aloud, students can often hear how their language becomes too much of a generalization, how students must confront their own prejudices in their word choices, and how working in a semi-public space affects the idea of audience, which could alter the way the student chooses his or her words.
Since I have been doing the following exercise in my English 1000 classes, my students’ narratives have been full of rich imagery and striking detail. I have been in hospitals as a ghost visiting a dying patient; in the goal at a hockey game as the puck hurtles toward the goal; in cars speeding away from the police; climbing the fence in center field to make a game-winning catch; throwing the game-winning touchdown pass as I lie sprawled face down in the mud; and in a dorm room as an insomniac is confronted by a red Gibson guitar-playing rock star and blue penguins. Even when I am not interested in the topic, my students have painted word pictures that I can see.

(I adapted this from Peter Elbow and Pat Belanoff’s *A Community of Writers*, Chapter 4, page 99.)

First of all, here is the assignment I give them:

**Write a story in which you illustrate to readers why you are interested in the topic you have chosen.** You do not need to say, “I chose alligator wrestling as my topic because....” Instead, show your readers why you enjoy alligator wrestling by putting readers in the mud with you and the alligator, telling a story that will show them why you have chosen to devote the semester to alligator wrestling. If you have chosen music, tell us a story about a musical experience which convinced you that music was important. If you’ve chosen football, put us on the field with you as you score the winning touchdown. If you have chosen beauty pageants or family, therapy or law enforcement or drugs, tell a story that will make readers as interested in this topic as you are. Tell fish stories about the one that got away; put yourself in the biggest wave you’ve ever seen. [This can be a true story; it can be totally fictional; or you can blend fact with fiction.]

Two things to keep in mind:

1. **Write an introduction that grabs the audience’s attention.** Perhaps you can put us in the middle of some action: a concert, a storm, a crucial moment in a game. Later you can return to this scene as the ‘climax’ of the story.

2. **Look for a moment in the story**—one crucial scene which you want to fully describe so that we can see, hear, taste, touch, smell and sense the whole scene. Put us there with you (or your fictional narrator).

   Length: long enough

**Step one:**
Write a journal in which you do an invention technique about your narrative.

[Brainstorm, cube, free write, just write, outline, or map/cluster/web—get a start to the paper.]

**Step two:**
Tell your group about your story and what might be the crucial ‘moment’ within the story. Ask readers to help you pick a moment in your story—a high point, a place where you will describe everything to put the reader in the shoes of the characters.

[Group members can be helpful by asking who, what, where, when, why, and how. I want listeners to help the writer see what else needs to be said. What other information will readers want? For the “moment,” the best example comes from *Schindler’s List*. The image that has stuck in my mind from that film is the girl in the red coat. What writers have to do is show that red coat in words. I want students to try to capture their moment for readers, to show readers what the characters in the story are seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and sensing. I want them to put the readers in the scene with the narrator or characters.]

**Step three:**
In your journal, write down a brief description of the crucial moment in your story. Decide what scene you will fully describe.

**Step four:**
Put your pen down but leave your journal open. Close your eyes and visualize the scene you are intending to write about. Look around: Who is there? Where are you (or where is the narrator)? What is happening? When is it? How is it happening? Why is it happening?

[Do this for 2-3 minutes. Talk to the students to get them comfortable with this, as some will see it as silly. Reassure them that no one will steal their books, their water, their legs, etc.]

**Step five:**
Open your eyes and as quickly as you can before you forget it, write down in your journal what you saw in your head.

[Another 2-3, even 5 minutes. Watch them and see if they are writing things down. You might tell them to jot down phrases, images, etc. rather than full sentences—but leave it up to them. If someone is madly scribbling away, let him/her continue before you go to the next step.]
Step six:
Close your eyes again, but this time, look around within your scene and think of the sensory details: What can you see? Smell? Taste? Feel? Hear? What can you sense from the scene?

[Another 2-3 minutes to look around inside their heads, and again you should talk to them as they wander.]

Step seven:
Open your eyes again and write down what you saw.

[Another 3-4 minutes to write down what they saw in their heads.]

Step eight:
[Teacher talk. I interrupt here to talk about the importance of detail—why it is more effective to show readers what you want them to see, rather than merely telling them, using Elie Wiesel’s Night as an example. I also explain that every sensory detail won’t be important to every story. For example, the sense of smell may not be important to a story about a video game war, but it could be vital to painting a hospital scene. I always try to use their topics as examples.]

Step nine:
Close your eyes again and focus in on the crucial moment within the moment. What colors do you see? How many people are around? What “gear” is being used that is important? Is it sunny, snowing, or raining? What sizes are the people, the trees, the players, etc.?

Step ten:
Open your eyes and write down what you saw.

Step eleven:
Read through your list of “stuff” and put stars beside items you definitely want to use in your story. Put question marks beside the ones you might use and x’s beside the ones you know you won’t use.

Step twelve:
Get back in groups and tell your group what you saw.

Step thirteen:
Report to the whole class. What is one small detail you saw that you know you will include in the story?
[I have each person tell us something, sometimes with some goading.]

Step fourteen:
Write a draft of the paper and bring it to the next class.