

"The process of writing can be magical" (Neil Gaiman)

"There is not one writing process but many...Sometimes I write away with a river flood of fluency, other days I build a draft slowly like a bricklayer. No matter, I am a writer, I write" (Donald Murray)

Pre-writing

"I did not have a functioning pen with me, but I do think that this was probably a good thing. I simply sat and thought, for four (delayed train) hours, while all the details bubbled up in my brain, and this scrawny, black haired, bespectacled boy who didn't know he was a wizard became more and more real to me.

Perhaps, if I had slowed down the ideas to capture them on paper, I might have stifled some of them (although sometimes I do wonder, idly, how much of what I imagined on that journey I had forgotten by the time I actually got my hands on a pen)." (JK Rowling)

"I pay close attention to my daydreams" (Philip Pullman)

"Since I do not plan or outline beforehand, I normally don't know what's going to happen next." (Louis Sachar)

"Good advance plotting is usefully helpful. If you write up a fairly detailed plan before you start writing, it will help guide you along." (Darren Shan)

Drafting

"For me, it's always been a process of trying to convince myself that what I'm doing in a first draft isn't important. One way you get through the wall is by convincing yourself that it doesn't matter. No one is ever going to see your first draft. Nobody cares about your first draft. And that's the thing that you may be agonizing over, but honestly, whatever you're doing can be fixed...For now, just get the words out. Get the story down however you can get it down, then fix it."(Neil Gaiman)

"The first draft is very unorganized, often with ideas at the end that are inconsistent with those at the beginning. In the second draft, I organize it better because I now have a pretty firm grasp of who the characters are and what is going to happen to them. By the time I get to the last rewrite (which may be the fifth or sixth pass), I try to convince myself that the story is all true, and that I am simply telling it, not making it up." (Louis Sachar)

“For me, the business of the first draft is simply about completing the first draft; creating the skeleton of a story. I may not be sure what the main themes or concerns are until the end of the first draft and half of it may not end up in the finished book, but it is important to get that first draft down. Then there is more freedom to add the flavour, the lovely language, the themes and the beautiful words.” (John Boyne)

Conferring

“Writers groups can be good and they can be bad. Depends on the people in them, and what they're in them for.” (Neil Gaiman)

“Everything on each page was there to be tested or questioned.....You felt you had to workshop, as they say, whatever was put in front of you. That could be embarrassing if the work was useless. In the end I suppose what the writer gets in these situations is a sense of the poem's madeness, its strangeness to others, and maybe, yes its improvability. Some revisions were made as a result of those discussions, maybe even some improvements” (Seamus Heaney discussing The Group)

“I react sulkily at first, but then I settle down” (Michael Morpurgo on getting negative feedback)

“Midway through writing a novel, I have regularly experienced moments of bowel-curdling terror, as I contemplate the drivel on the screen before me and see beyond it, in quick succession, the derisive reviews, the friends' embarrassment, the failing career, the dwindling income, the repossessed house, the divorce . . .

Talking the problem through can help me recall what I was trying to achieve before I got stuck.” (Sarah Waters)

Publishing

“But I love finishing it, then holding the book in my hand and sharing my dream with my readers.” (Michael Morpurgo)

“What amazes me is that most days feel useless. I don't seem to accomplish anything—just a few pages, most of which don't seem very good. Yet, when I put all those wasted days together, I somehow end up with a book of which I'm very proud. Somehow I've now written eighteen books. I'm always amazed when I finish a book and realize, hey, this actually is what I set out to do.”

(Louis Sachar)

“I loved writing essays for English and spent most of my study time working on them, pacing and mumbling, testing the sounds of sentences in a contrivance of creative torment, drafting and re-drafting in a painstaking cursive. My Leaving Cert English teacher would read them out and photocopy them for the other English classes and the lads would slag me good-naturedly in the corridors.” (Donal Ryan)