

TAYLOR: Hi! This is Taylor Fleming, and you're listening to the iWrite podcast series. I interviewed a DePauw University Professor, Dr. Kathy Jesse, to talk about her writing process. Dr. Jesse is a professor of communications and English, and she is the advisor to the college newspaper, the DePauw, and its website the DePauw.com. She has a journalism background, so her writing process is very different from the academic papers that many people think of when they think of the word "writing". For example, here is her thoughts about how journalists approach starting a piece of writing:

DR. JESSE: First of all, don't wait to write your story, because you'll forget it. Even though you take copious notes, and you have an audio of your interviews, you do not. A beginner's mistake is to go through your audio recording and try to transcribe everything, even with these apps that do that for you, transcription apps, the most important information is still in your head. And you want to get that information down while it's fresh. So you sit down and you say to yourself, "What's the most important takeaway I got from this interview, or all of the interviews that you did to put together a story? What is the most important information?" That is in your head, that's what you need to write down right away. And then you go to your notes, you go to your audio recording, and you begin to sort of organize the information that you have by topic, your notes will probably end up being a mess. I used a numerical system so each topic had a different number. I did a lot of you know crossing out and circling and highlighting, but the most important thing I think is that it's time-sensitive. That you can't expect to go even 24 hours from an interview and still have it be fresh. You know, in your mind, what's most important because you just did the interview. So that's the first part of my writing process, is just keeping it fresh and beginning to craft the story immediately. You've got your major points to the story, you've got them written down, and I'm a visual person so writing them down is the way I process information. And then you begin to write. I don't look at my notes. I don't listen to my audio recording. I begin to write. It's in my head. I just had it, I just had the interviews. I gotta have faith in myself that I know what I heard. And you write it, then only then after you've written it do you go back, look at your notes, look at your transcription of your audio recordings, and begin to back up what you've written with the evidence that you have in your interviews.

TAYLOR: That's really interesting. You know, there's so many similarities and differences to what I think of when I think of the typical prewriting process. She talks about crossing out and circling and highlighting, and to me that seems very very typical of the writing process that I know and love, you know. She also talks about trusting her instincts and not constantly referring to research and interviews that she's done, which is not the way to go for a research paper for a college class, but it's exactly the way to go for journalism. It's like what writing tutors here at the W Center learn in their writing tutor training, which is that writing is so different depending on what situation you're in and journalism is just such a poster child, I think, for writing really unique because of the situation and purpose. Professor Jesse talked a lot about that and gave a really good explanation of how to write a journalism article, so I want to share that part of our interview with you now.

DR. JESSE: So in journalism, we use quotes. We use them judiciously because we want to be in control of telling the story. If you use too many quotes somebody else is telling the story, and usually in all honesty ninety percent of what we say is not quotable. We don't speak in poetry, right? So you're looking for the quotes that where someone has said something in a way that you can't say it better yourself. If you can say it better yourself in your own words, then say it:

paraphrase that quote. So you don't want a story that's weighed down with a lot of quotes. But you want to find those quotes that really sing, you know, where somebody is saying it in their own way; it reveals a personality of the person who said it. So the quotes you kind of put in at the end. There are lots of different techniques for ending a story. The ending of a story, the conclusion, I think is the hardest part to write. You can end with a quote that sort of encapsulates, sort of summarizes everything you've written, or you can, you can end your story by circling back to the beginning. So whatever point you made in the beginning, you're going to emphasize that point at the end of your story. The beginning of the story, we talk about that a lot in journalism, because you have to grab the reader. And if you're writing an essay in English class, that's a very specific kind of writing where you have a thesis, right? And then you have an introduction and you have a background and then you get to your thesis. And then you're going to have transitions and you're going to have these points that you made in your introduction that you're going to elaborate upon in your essay. We don't do that in journalism. The important thing that we do in our introduction, which is called a lead, is we grab the reader's attention, okay? So there are lots of different techniques for doing that. You can do it through description, you could do it through an anecdote. A very popular way to begin a story that's a journalism story is through an anecdote: a short story that tells the bigger story, the bigger picture that you're trying to, that you're trying to convey. So yeah, that's kind of, that's kind of the basic guide to how to write a journalism story.

TAYLOR: So switching gears to revising here, I want you to hear about how journalism does that differently, too. They have a really different approach compared to other disciplines of writing that I've studied because their writing is so deadline oriented and has such quick turnaround times. So here's Professor Jesse's thoughts on this. How much change is there from your first draft to your final draft?

DR. JESSE: That depends on how much time you have. It depends entirely upon how much time you have. Journalists have deadlines they need to meet. And when I left journalism--this is going to sound a little arrogant--but, but when I left journalism, I had spent 20 years meeting deadlines, daily deadlines. And I got out of Journalism and I entered the bigger world where people didn't seem to take deadlines seriously. you know they'd ask for extensions and they would be granted extensions...or, or they were never given a deadline, it was just kind of this amorphous "Oh well maybe sometime next month, can you get it to us sometime next month?" So in journalism, you've got to meet your deadlines or you don't have a job. So, if you have time for revisions, you can make as many revisions as your editor has given you time for. The longer the story, the more ambitious the story, the further out your deadline is probably going to be. But you know, there were stories that need to be turned around within the hour, so the only thing that's important is that you get it right. And in, in this day of digital news, when we can put things online immediately, we have a saying which is publish what you know, when you know it. So you may only have part of the story, you may send it out as a tweet on your Twitter account. Just...you know you're at a police news conference and the police chief is has an announcement about a homicide, and there's been a break in the case and he's going to make an announcement about that. And the first thing he says is, you know, we have a break in the case of, you know, whomever, had been murdered a month ago. We have a break in that case. So, your Tweet is: "Police Chief So-and-so says there's been a break in the case of So-and-So who was murdered last month" and that's all you know, so that goes out on your Twitter

account. And then, as the police chief is talking and giving more detail, you are writing your story, you are adding to that tweet and your story becomes longer and longer and longer, but your story is pretty much being written in real time .

TAYLOR: I hope all of you enjoyed getting to hear Dr. Jesse's perspective and learning about how journalism is so different from other writing styles. Thank you so much for listening! Be sure to check out our other episodes, and if you have any questions about writing you are always welcome to schedule an appointment at the W Center. This has been Taylor Fleming for the iWrite podcast series.