

AP Language and Composition
Summer Reading Assignment

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Congratulations on your decision to take Advanced Placement Language and Composition, a full-year college level course in rhetoric. Students will read mostly non-fiction work and study the approaches of various authors/speakers to a wide variety of subjects. You will respond to reading in multiple ways, including timed-writing practices, multiple-choice practice, at least one research paper, and multiple formal essays. This course runs on a seminar format requiring active participation every day. Students will also prepare for the AP examination on Language and Composition in May, for which a fee is charged by the College Board. This course demands considerable time, effort, and commitment. If you have lukewarm feelings about English as a subject, reconsider. **Seriously.**

Do ALL tasks

Task #1: Read the Pros, Collect their Writing Tips, and Reflect on your Own

Read *Bird by Bird* by Anne Lamott and three photocopied essays entitled "The Maker's Eye" by Donald Murray, and the paired essays "The Death of a Moth" and "How I wrote the Moth Essay – And Why" by Annie Dillard. **Synthesize** writing advice from all the authors into a list of 10 tips or insights about writing. You're looking for ideas that percolate across texts rather than ideas isolated within one individual text. Include quotes or snatches of ideas from individual authors (with page numbers) that support your conclusions about what Lamott, Murray, and Dillard suggest.

Following these tips, write a reflection about your own process of writing. Which of the tips you collected resonate with you? What are your inspirations as a writer? What is a writing task that you particularly enjoyed and why? What have been your greatest strengths or weaknesses as a writer? How do you hope to grow? Don't write what you think I want to hear; let me start getting to know your individual voice.

Task #2 Read, Annotate, and Analyze 2 movie reviews

Read and annotate two movie reviews about the same recent movie from two different reputable sources. Writing should be from a recent film and must be appropriately well-developed (700-1000 words)

Here are some suggested places to browse for model reviews.

NPR	http://www.npr.org/sections/movies/
New York Times	http://movies.nytimes.com/pages/movies/index.html
The Boston Globe	http://www.boston.com/ae/movies/
The Atlantic	http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/category/film/
Time Magazine	http://www.time.com/time/arts/
New York Magazine	http://nymag.com/movies/

Good annotators mark entire text, individual words/phrases as well as longer passages;
make explanatory notations in margins;
ask questions, summarize, analyze, identify purpose/theme of work; and
identify unfamiliar vocabulary, apply literary terms, consider structure.
In sum, annotations create a record of your active interaction with the text.

Task #3: View a movie and write a review

This can be a new movie showing in a local theater or one available on DVD or streaming; multiple students may write a review on the same movie, but each review should demonstrate the author's personal voice; it may NOT be the same movie featured in the essays analyzed for Task #2. I would NOT suggest reading a review of the movie you plan to review yourself; it will only hamper your attempts to be fresh and original.

For assistance, re-read *Bird by Bird* pages 23-27 for Lamott's experiences writing food reviews; this may similarly describe your own process. Then, view and write a review of the movie, offering a convincing argument about its merits. Is it worth it? Craft a good hook, embrace your personal style, and use specific details. Remember Murray, Dillard, and Lamott's advice and write something really polished.

ALL WORK IS DUE ON THE FIRST DAY OF CLASS.

I look forward to our year together. Email me if you have any questions about what is required; do not wait until the day it is due. Visit my Schoology for other course information, including this document as a .pdf.

The Maker's Eye: Revising Your Own Manuscripts

Donald M. Murray

Born in Boston, Massachusetts, in 1924, Donald M. Murray taught writing for many years at the University of New Hampshire, his alma mater. He has served as an editor at Time magazine, and he won the Pulitzer Prize in 1954 for editorials that appeared in the Boston Globe. Murray's published works include novels, short stories, poetry, and sourcebooks for teachers of writing, like A Writer Teaches Writing (1968), The Craft of Revision (1991), and Learning by Teaching (1982), in which he explores aspects of the writing process. Write to Learn, (6th ed., 1998), a textbook for college composition courses, is based on Murray's belief that writers learn to write by writing, by taking a piece of writing through the whole process, from invention to revision.

In the following essay, first published in the Writer in October 1973 and later revised for this text, Murray discusses the importance of revision to the work of the writer. Most professional writers live by the maxim that "writing is rewriting." And to rewrite or revise effectively, we need to become better readers of our own work, open to discovering new meanings, and sensitive to our use of language. Murray draws on the experiences of many writers to make a compelling argument for careful revising and editing.

When students complete a first draft, they consider the job of writing done – and their teachers too often agree. When professional writers complete a first draft, they usually feel that they are at the start of the writing process. When a draft is completed, the job of writing can begin.

That difference in attitude is the difference between amateur and professional, inexperience and experience, journeyman and craftsman. Peter F. Drucker, the prolific business writer, calls his first draft "the zero draft"—after that he can start counting. Most writers share the feeling that the first draft, and all of those which follow, are opportunities to discover what they have to say and how best they can say it.

To produce a progression of drafts, each of which says more and says it more clearly, the writer has to develop a special kind of reading skill. In school we are taught to decode what appears on the page as finished writing. Writers, however, face a different category of possibility and responsibility when they read their own drafts. To them the words on the page are never finished. Each can be changed and rearranged, can set off a chain reaction of confusion or clarified meaning. This is a different kind of reading which is possibly more difficult and certainly more exciting.

Writers must learn to be their own best enemy. They must accept the criticism of others and be suspicious of it; they must accept the praise of others and be even more suspicious of it. Writers cannot depend on others. They must detach

themselves from their own pages so that they can apply both their caring and their craft to their own work.

Such detachment is not easy. Science-fiction writer Ray Bradbury supposedly puts each manuscript away for a year to the day and then rereads it as a stranger. Not many writers have the discipline or the time to do this. We must read when our judgment may be at its worst, when we are close to the euphoric moment of creation.

Then the writer, counsels novelist Nancy Hale, "should be critical of everything that seems to him most delightful in his style. He should excise what he most admires, because he wouldn't thus admire it if he weren't...in a sense protecting it from criticism." John Ciardi, the poet, adds, "The last act of the writing must be to become one's own reader. It is, I suppose, a schizophrenic process, to begin passionately and to end critically, to begin hot and to end cold; and, more important, to be passion-hot and critic-cold at the same time."

Most people think that the principal problem is that writers are too proud of what they have written. Actually, a greater problem for most professional writers is one shared by the majority of students. They are overly critical, think everything is dreadful, tear up page after page, never complete a draft, see the task as hopeless.

The writer must learn to read critically but constructively, to cut what is bad, to reveal what is good. Eleanor Estes, the children's book author, explains: "The writer must survey his work critically, coolly, as though he were a stranger to it. He must be willing to prune, expertly and hard-heartedly. At the end of each revision, a manuscript may look...worked over, torn apart, pinned together, added to, deleted from, words changed and words changed back. Yet the book must maintain its original freshness and spontaneity."

Most readers underestimate the amount of rewriting it usually takes to produce spontaneous reading. This is a great disadvantage to the student writer, who sees only a finished product and never watches the craftsman who takes the necessary step back, studies the work carefully, returns to the task, steps back, returns, steps back, again and again. Anthony Burgess, one of the most prolific writers in the English-speaking world, admits, "I might revise a page twenty times." Roald Dahl, the popular children's writer, states, "By the time I'm nearing the end of a story, the first part will have been reread and altered and corrected at least 150 times... Good writing is essentially rewriting. I am positive of this."

Rewriting isn't virtuous. It isn't something that ought to be done. It is simply something that most writers find they have to do to discover what they have to say and how to say it. It is a condition of the writer's life.

There are, however, a few writers who do little formal rewriting, primarily because they have the capacity and experience to create and review a large number of invisible drafts in their minds before they approach the page. And some writers slowly produce finished pages, performing all the tasks of revision simultaneously, page by page, rather than draft by draft. But it is still possible to see the sequence followed by most writers most of the time in rereading their own work.

12 Most writers scan their drafts first, reading as quickly as possible to catch the
larger problems of subject and form, and then move in closer and closer as they
read and write, reread and rewrite.

13 The first thing writers look for in their drafts is *information*. They know that a
good piece of writing is built from specific, accurate, and interesting information.
The writer must have an abundance of information from which to construct a
readable piece of writing.

14 Next writers look for *meaning* in the information. The specifics must build to a
pattern of significance. Each piece of specific information must carry the reader
toward meaning.

15 Writers reading their own drafts are aware of *audience*. They put themselves in
the reader's situation and make sure that they deliver information which a reader
wants to know or needs to know in a manner which is easily digested. Writers try
to be sure that they anticipate and answer the questions a critical reader will ask
when reading the piece of writing.

16 Writers make sure that the *form* is appropriate to the subject and the audience.
Form, or genre, is the vehicle which carries meaning to the reader, but form cannot
be selected until the writer has adequate information to discover its significance
and an audience which needs or wants that meaning.

17 Once writers are sure the form is appropriate, they must then look at the
structure, the order of what they have written. Good writing is built on a solid
framework of logic, argument, narrative, or motivation which runs through the
entire piece of writing and holds it together. This is the time when many writers
find it most effective to outline as a way of visualizing the hidden spine by which
the piece of writing is supported.

18 The element on which writers spend a majority of their time is *development*.
Each section of a piece of writing must be adequately developed. It must give
readers enough information so that they are satisfied. How much information is
enough? That's as difficult as asking how much garlic belongs in a salad. It must
be done to taste, but most beginning writers underdevelop, underestimating the
reader's hunger for more information.

19 As writers solve development problems, they often have to consider questions of
dimension. There must be a pleasing and effective proportion among all the parts
of the piece of writing. There is a continual process of subtracting and adding to
keep the piece of writing in balance.

20 Finally, writers have to listen to their own voices. *Voice* is the force which
drives a piece of writing forward. It is an expression of the writer's authority and
concern. It is what is between the words on the page, what glues the piece of
writing together. A good piece of writing is always marked by a consistent,
individual voice.

21 As writers read and reread, write and rewrite, they move closer and closer to the
page until they are doing line-by-line editing. Writers read their own pages with

infinite care. Each sentence, each line, each clause, each phrase, each word, each
mark of punctuation, each section of white space between the type has to
contribute to the clarification of meaning.

22 Slowly the writer moves from word to word, looking through language to see
the subject. As a word is changed, cut or added, as a construction is rearranged, all
the words used before that moment and all those that follow that moment must be
considered and reconsidered.

23 Writers often read aloud at this stage of the editing process, muttering or
whispering to themselves, calling on the ear's experience with language. Does this
sound right – or that? Writers edit, shifting back and forth from eye to page to ear
to page. I find I must do this careful editing in short runs, no more than fifteen or
twenty minutes at a stretch, or I become too kind with myself. I begin to see what I
hope is on the page, not what actually is on the page.

24 This sounds tedious if you haven't done it, but actually it is fun. Making
something right is immensely satisfying, for writers begin to learn what they are
writing about by writing. Language leads them to meaning, and there is the joy of
discovery, of understanding, of making meaning clear as the writer employs the
technical skills of language.

25 Words have double meanings, even triple and quadruple meanings. Each word
has its own potential of connotation and denotation. And when writers rub one
word against the other, they are often rewarded with a sudden insight, an
unexpected clarification.

26 The maker's eye moves back and forth from word to phrase to sentence to
paragraph to sentence to phrase to word. The maker's eye sees the need for variety
and balance, for a firmer structure, for a more appropriate form. It peers into the
interior of the paragraph, looking for coherence, unity, and emphasis, which make
meaning clear.

27 I learned something about this process when my first bifocals were prescribed. I
had ordered a larger section of the reading portion of the glass because of my work,
but even so, I could not contain my eyes within this new limit of vision. And I still
find myself taking off my glasses and bending my nose toward the page, for my
eyes unconsciously flick back and forth across the page, back to another page,
forward to still another, as I try to see each evolving line in relation to every other
line.

28 When does this process end? Most writers agree with the great Russian writer
Tolstoy, who said, "I scarcely ever reread my published writings, if by chance I
come across a page, it always strikes me: all this must be rewritten; this is how I
should have written it."

29 The maker's eye is never satisfied, for each word has the potential to ignite new
meaning. This article has been twice written all the way through the writing
process [...]. Now it is to be republished in a book. The editors made a few small
suggestions, and then I read it with my maker's eye. Now it has been re-edited, re-

revised, re-read, and re-re-edited, for each piece of writing to the writer is full of potential and alternatives.

30

A piece of writing is never finished. It is delivered to a deadline, torn out of the typewriter on demand, sent off with a sense of accomplishment and shame and pride and frustration. If only there were a couple more days, time for just another run at it, perhaps then...

1. How does Murray define *information* and *meaning* (13-14)? Why is the distinction between the two terms important?
2. According to Murray, at what point(s) in the writing process do writers become concerned about the individual words they are using? What do you think Murray means when he says in paragraph 24 that "language leads [writers] to meaning"?
3. The phrase "the maker's eye" appears in Murray's title and in several places throughout the essay. What do you suppose he means by this? Consider how the maker's eye could be different from the reader's eye.
4. According to Murray, when is a piece of writing finished? What, for him, is the function of deadlines?

“The Death of a Moth” by Annie Dillard

I live on northern Puget Sound, in Washington State, alone. I have a gold cat, who sleeps on my legs, named Small. In the morning, I joke to her blank face, Do you remember last night? Do you remember? I throw her out before breakfast, so I can eat.

There is a spider, too, in the bathroom, with whom I keep a certain company. Her little outfit always reminds of a certain moth I helped to kill. The spider herself is of uncertain lineage, bulbous at the abdomen and drab. Her six-inch mess of web works, works somehow, works miraculously, to keep her alive and me amazed. The web itself is in a corner behind the toilet, connecting tile wall to tile wall and floor, in a place where there is, I would have thought, scant traffic. Yet under the web are sixteen or so corpses she has tossed to the floor.

The corpses appear to be mostly sow bugs, those little armadillo creatures who live to travel flat out in houses, and die round. There is also a new shred of earwig, three old spider skins crinkled and clenched, and two moth bodies, wingless and huge and empty, moth bodies I dropped to my knees to see.

Today the earwig shines darkly and gleams, what there is of him: a dorsal curve of thorax and abdomen, and a smooth pair of cerci by which I knew his name. Next week, if the other bodies are any indication, he will be shrunken and gray, webbed to the floor with dust. The sow bugs beside him are hollow and empty of color, fragile, a breath away from brittle fluff. The spider skins lie on their sides, translucent and ragged, their legs drying in knots. And the moths, the empty moths, stagger against each other, headless, in a confusion of arcing strips of chitin like peeling varnish, like a jumble of buttresses for cathedral vaults, like nothing resembling moths, so that I would hesitate to call them moths, except that I have had some experience with the figure Moth reduced to a nub.

Two summers ago, I was camping alone in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia. I had hauled myself and gear up there to read, among other things, James Ullman's *The Day on Fire*, a novel about Rimbaud that had made me want to be a writer when I was sixteen; I was hoping it would do it again. So I read, lost, every day sitting by my tent, while warblers swung in the leaves overhead and bristle worms trailed their inches over the twiggy dirt at my feet; and I read every night by candlelight, while barred owls called in the forest and pale moths massed round massed round my head in the clearing, where my light made a ring.

Moths kept flying into the candle. They would hiss and recoil, lost upside down in the shadows among my cook pans. Or they would singe their wings and fall, and their hot wings, as if melted, would stick to the first thing they touched — a pan, a lid, a spoon — so that the snagged moths could flutter only in tiny arcs, unable to struggle free. These I could realize by a quick flip with a stick; in the morning I would find my cooking stuff gilded with torn flecks of moth wings, triangles of shiny dust here and there on the aluminum. So I read, and boiled water, and replenished candles, and read on.

One night a moth flew into the candle, was caught, burnt dry, and held. I must have been staring at the candle, or maybe I looked up when the shadow crossed my page; at any rate, I saw it all. A golden female moth, a biggish one with a two-inch wingspread, flapped into the fire, dropped abdomen into the wet wax, stuck, flamed, frazzled, and fried in a second. Her moving wings ignited like tissue paper, enlarging the circle of light in the clearing and creating out of darkness the sudden blue sleeves of my sweater, the green leaves of jewelweed by my side, the ragged red trunk of pine. At once the light contracted again and the moth's wings vanished in a fine, foul smoke. At the same time, her six legs clawed, curled, blackened, and ceased, disappearing utterly. And her head jerked in spasms, making a spattering noise; her antennae crisped and burnt away and her heaving mouthparts cracked like pistol fire. When it was all over, her head was, so far as I could determine, gone, gone the long way of her wings and legs. Had she been new, or old? Had she mated and laid her eggs, had she done her work? All that was left was the glowing horn shell of her abdomen and thorax — a fraying, partially collapsed gold tube jammed upright in the candle's round pool.

And then this moth-essence, this spectacular skeleton, began to act as a wick. She kept burning. The wax rose in the moth's body from her soaking abdomen to her thorax to the jagged hole where her head should be, and widened into a flame, a saffron-yellow flame that robed her to the ground like an immolating monk. That candle had two wicks, two flames of identical light, side by side. The moth's head was fire. She burned for two hours, until I blew her out.

She burned for two hours without changing, without bending or leaning — only glowing within, like a building fire glimpsed through silhouetted walls, like a hollow saint, like a flame-faced virgin gone to God, while I read by her light, kindled, while Rimbaud in Paris burnt out his brain in a thousand poems, while night pooled wetly at my feet.

And that is why I believe those hollow crisps on the bathroom floor are moths. I think I know moths, and fragments of moths, and chips and tatters of utterly empty moths, in any state. How many of you, I asked the people in my class, which of you want to give your lives and be writers? I was trembling from coffee, or cigarettes, or the closeness of the faces all around me. (Is this what we live for? I thought; is this the only final beauty: the color of any skin in any light, and living, human eyes?) All hands rose to the question. (You, Nick? Will you? Margaret? Randy? Why do I want them to mean it?) And then I tried to tell them what the choice must mean: you can't be anything else. You must go at your life with a broadax. ... They had no idea what I was saying. (I have two hands, don't I? And all this energy, for as long as I can remember. I'll do it in the evenings, after skiing, or on the way home from the bank, or after the children are asleep. ...) They thought I was raving again. It's just as well.

I have three candles here on the table which I disentangle from the plants and light when visitors come. Small usually avoids them, though once she came too close and her tail caught fire once; I rubbed it out before she noticed. The flames move light over everyone's skin, draw light to the surface of the faces of my friends. When people leave I never blow the candles out, and after I'm asleep they flame and burn.

ANNIE DILLARD

HOW I WROTE THE MOTH ESSAY— AND WHY

XX

1
It was November 1975. I was living alone, as described, on an island in Puget Sound, near the Canadian border. I was thirty years old. I thought about myself a lot (for someone thirty years old), because I couldn't figure out what I was doing there. What was my life about? Why was I living alone, when I am gregarious? Would I ever meet someone, or should I reconcile myself to all this solitude? I disliked celibacy; I dreaded childlessness. I couldn't even think of anything to write. I was examining every event for possible meaning.

2
I was then in full flight from success, from the recent fuss over a book of prose I'd published the previous year called *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*. There were offers from editors, publishers, and Hollywood and network producers. They tempted me with world travel, film and TV work, big bucks. I was there to turn from literary and commercial success and to rededicate myself to art and to God. That's how I justified my loneliness to myself. It was a feeble justification and I knew it, because you certainly don't need to live alone either to write or to pray. Actually I was there because I had picked the place from an atlas, and I was alone because I hadn't yet met my husband.

3
My reading and teaching fed my thoughts. I was reading Simone Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*. Simone Weil was a twentieth-century French intellectual, born Jewish, who wrote some of the most interesting Christian theology I've ever read. She was brilliant, but a little nuts; her doctrines were harsh. "Literally," she wrote, "it is total purity or death." This sort of fanaticism attracted and appalled me. Weil had deliberately starved herself to death to call attention to the plight of French workers. I was taking extensive notes on Weil.

4
In the classroom I was teaching poetry writing, exhorting myself (in the guise of exhorting my students), and convincing myself by my own rhetoric: commit yourself to a useless art! In art alone is meaning! In sacrifice alone is meaning! These, then, were issues for me at that time: dedication, purity, sacrifice.

5
Early that November morning I noticed the hollow insects on the bathroom floor. I got down on my hands and knees to examine them and recognized some as empty moth bodies. I recognized them, of course, only because I'd seen an empty moth body already—two years before, when I'd camped alone and had watched a flying moth get stuck in a candle and burn.

6
Walking back to my desk, where I had been answering letters, I realized that the burning moth was a dandy visual focus for all my recent thoughts about an empty, dedicated life. Perhaps I'd try to write a short narrative about it.

7
I went to my pile of journals, hoping I'd taken some nice, specific notes about the moth in the candle. What I found disappointed me at first: that night I'd written a long description of owl sounds, and only an annoyed aside about bugs flying into the candle. But the next night, after pages of self-indulgent drivel, I'd written a fuller description, a description of the moth which got stuck in candle wax.

8
The journal entry had some details I could use (bristleworms on the ground, burnt moths' wings sticking to pans), some phrases (her body acted as a wick, the candle had 2 flames, the moth burned until I blew it out), and, especially, some verbs (hiss, recoil, stick, spatter, jerked, crackled).

9
Even in the journals, the moth was female. (From childhood reading I'd learned to distinguish moths by sex.) And, there in the journal, was a crucial detail: on that camping trip, I'd been reading about Rimbaud. Arthur Rimbaud—the French symbolist poet, a romantic, hotheaded figure who attracted me enormously when I was sixteen—had been young and self-destructive. When he was sixteen, he ran away from home to Paris, led a dissolute life, shot his male lover (the poet Verlaine), drank absinthe which damaged his brain, deranged his senses with drunkenness

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With my old journal beside me, I took up my current journal and scribbled and doodled my way through an account of my present life and the remembered moth. It went extraordinarily well; it was not typical. It seemed very much “given”—given, I think, because I’d asked, because I’d been looking so hard and so long for connections, meanings. The connections were all there, and seemed solid enough: I saw a moth burnt and on fire; I was reading Rimbaud hoping to rededicate myself to writing (this one bald statement of motive was unavoidable); I live alone. So the writer is like the moth, and like a religious contemplative: emptying himself so he can be a channel for his work. Of course you can reinforce connections with language: the bathroom moths are like a jumble of buttresses for cathedral domes; the female moth is like an immolating monk, like a hollow saint, a flame-faced virgin gone to God; Rimbaud burnt out his brains with poetry while night pooled welchly at my feet.

11

12

OPPOSITE: Page from the first draft of "The Death of a Moth."

suspense: the reader constantly asks himself, where on earth is this going?) Usually I end up throwing away the beginning: the first part of a poem, the first few pages of an essay, the first scene of a story, even the first few chapters of a book. It's not holy writ. The paragraphs and sentences are tesserae—tiles for a mosaic. Just because you have a bunch of tiles in your lap doesn't mean your mosaic will be better if you use them all. In this atypical case, however, there were very few extraneous passages. The focus was tight, probably because I'd been so single-minded before I wrote it.

I added stuff, too, to strengthen and clarify the point. I added some speculation about the burning moth: had she mated and laid her eggs, had she done her work? Near the end I added a passage about writing class: which of you want to give your lives and become writers?

Ultimately I sent it to *Harper's* magazine, which published it. The early drafts, and the *Harper's* version, had a different ending, a kind of punch line that was a series of interlocking statements:

I don't mind living alone. I like eating alone and reading. I don't mind sleeping alone. The only time I mind being alone is when something is funny; then, when I am laughing at something funny, I wish someone were around. Sometimes I think it is pretty funny that I sleep alone.

I took this ending out of the book version, which is the version you have. I took it out because the tone was too snappy, too clever; it reduced everything to celibacy, which was really a side issue; it made the reader forget the moth; and it called too much attention to the narrator. The new ending was milder. It referred back to the main body of the text.

Revising is a breeze if you know what you're doing—if you can look at your text coldly, analytically, manipulatively. Since I've studied texts, I know what I'm doing when I revise. The hard part is devising the wretched thing in the first place. How do you go from nothing to something? How do you face the blank page without fainting dead away?

To start a narrative, you need a batch of things. Not feelings, not opinions, not sentiments, not judgments, not arguments, but specific

objects and events: a cat, a spider web, a mess of insect skeletons, a candle, a book about Rimbaud, a burning moth. I try to give the reader a story, or at least a scene (the flimsiest narrative occasion will serve), and something to look at. I try not to hang on the reader's arm and bore him with my life story, my fancy self-indulgent writing, or my opinions. He is my guest; I try to entertain him. Or he'll throw my pages across the room and turn on the television.

I try to say what I mean and not "hide the hidden meaning." "Clarity is the sovereign courtesy of the writer," said J. Henri Fabre, the great French entomologist, "I do my best to achieve it." Actually, it took me about ten years to learn to write clearly. When I was in my twenties, I was more interested in showing off.

What do you do with these things? You juggle them. You toss them around. To begin, you don't need a well defined point. You don't need "something to say"—that will just lead you to reiterating clichés. You need bits of the world to toss around. You start anywhere, and join the bits into a pattern by your writing about them. Later you can throw out the ones that don't fit.

I like to start by describing something, by ticking off the five senses. Later I go back to the beginning and locate the reader in time and space. I've found that if I take pains to be precise about *things*, feelings will take care of themselves. If you try to force a reader's feelings through dramatic writing ("writhe," "ecstasy," "scream"), you make a fool of yourself, like someone at a party trying too hard to be liked.

I have piles of materials in my journals—mostly information in the form of notes on my reading, and to a lesser extent, notes on things I'd seen and heard during the day. I began the journals five or six years after college, finding myself highly trained for taking notes and for little else. Now I have thirty-some journal volumes, all indexed. If I want to write about arctic exploration, say, or star chemistry, or monasticism, I can find masses of pertinent data under that topic. And if I browse I can often find images from other fields that may fit into what I'm writing, if only as metaphor or simile. It's terrific having all these materials handy. It saves and makes available all those years of reading. Otherwise, I'd forget everything, and life wouldn't accumulate, but merely pass.

The moth essay I wrote that November day was an "odd" piece—"freighted with heavy-handed symbolism," as I described it to myself just after I wrote it. The reader must be startled to watch this apparently calm, matter-of-fact account of the writer's life and times turn before his eyes into a mess of symbols whose real subject matter is their own relationship. I hoped the reader wouldn't feel he'd been had. I tried to ensure that the actual, historical moth wouldn't vanish into idea, but would stay physically present.

A week after I wrote the first draft I considered making it part of the book (*Holy the Firm*) I had been starting. It seemed to fit the book's themes. (Actually, I spent the next fifteen months fitting the book to its themes.) In order to clarify my thinking I jotted down some notes:

moth in candle:

the poet— materials of world, of bare earth at feet, sucked
up, transformed, subsumed to spirit, to air, to
light

the mystic—not through reason
but through emptiness

the martyr—virgin, sacrifice, death with meaning.

I prefaced these notes with the comical word "Hothead."

It had been sheer good luck that the different aspects of the historical truth fit together so nicely. It had actually been on that particular solo camping trip that I'd read the Rimbaud novel. If it hadn't been, I wouldn't have hesitated to fiddle with the facts. I fiddled with one fact, for sure: I foully slandered my black cat, Small, by saying she was "gold"—to match the book's moth and little blonde burnt girl. I actually had a gold cat at that time, named Kindling. I figured no one would believe it. It was too much. In the book, as in real life, the cat was spayed.

This is the most personal piece I've ever written—the essay itself, and these notes on it. I don't recommend, or even approve, writing personally. It can lead to dreadful writing. The danger is that you'll get lost in the contemplation of your wonderful self. You'll include things for the lousy

reason that they actually happened, or that you feel strongly about them; you'll forget to ensure that the reader feels anything whatever. You may hold the popular view that art is self-expression, or a way of understanding the self—in which case the artist need do nothing more than babble uncontrolledly about the self and then congratulate himself that, in addition to all his other wonderfully interesting attributes, he is also an artist. I don't (evidently) hold this view. So I think that this moth piece is a risky one to read: it seems to enforce these romantic and giddy notions of art and the artist. But I trust you can keep your heads.

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX FOR DISCUSSION XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

1. Why is Annie Dillard opposed, as a rule, to "writing personally" (23)? What dangers does she advise you to avoid when you write a personal essay? How well do you think she herself avoids these pitfalls? Please point to specific passages in her two essays that support your opinion.
2. According to Dillard, what's the value to a writer of keeping a journal? Again, please point to specific statements in her essays.
3. In which paragraphs does Dillard explicitly DESCRIBE the process of revising the moth essay? What did she omit in the second draft? How and when did she change the ending? What's the nature of the changes? Why did she make them?
4. Think about the ways you generally go about starting to write. Where do you start? What kind of research do you do? How much time do you spend revising? How does your writing process COMPARE with Dillard's?