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This page is constantly applicable and, to me, enlightening. The term "novice writer" here means one who is encountering some challenging intellectual task for the first time. Students who are no longer novices in their majors can be "novice writers" in other fields.

## **SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF NOVICE WRITERS**

by Greg Colomb, University of Chicago

### **\* They Lose Basic Skills.**

Novice writers will often lose their grip on so-called "basic skills" so that they appear to be "basic writers" who cannot spell, punctuate, or produce correct syntax. Once they gain some mastery over the overall conceptual task, they regain command over basic skills.

### **\* They Fail to Elaborate.**

Novice writers will often fail to elaborate points and evidence in ways that make their texts seem to be mere outlines and make them appear to be unthinking or lazy. Once they acquire a larger conceptual scheme for their points, they begin to understand why the points matter and how their evidence supports the points.

### **\* They Are Tyrannized by the Assignment.**

Novice writers will often follow assignments or models slavishly, restating the assignment as the introduction to their text and taking up topics or questions in precisely the order in which they occur in the text of the assignment or in their model. Once they begin to understand why anyone would give them such an assignment, they regain the conceptual freedom to restructure their assignments and make their texts their own. Once they begin to understand the rationale behind the models, they can begin to use the models to serve their own goals.

### **\* They Are Tyrannized by the Concrete.**

Novice writers will often need to summarize (i.e., "concretize") the assigned text or procedure by reproducing the text or procedure in their own text. Only then, if at all, can they move on to the more abstract understanding that analysis requires. Once they have enough experience, they can begin to reach an abstract understanding (analysis) without going through the step of concretely reproducing (summarizing) the material.

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