2021

Interchapter 2B

Channeling Dr. Frankenstein: Personalizing Strategies

Leah Robinson, *Western Washington University*
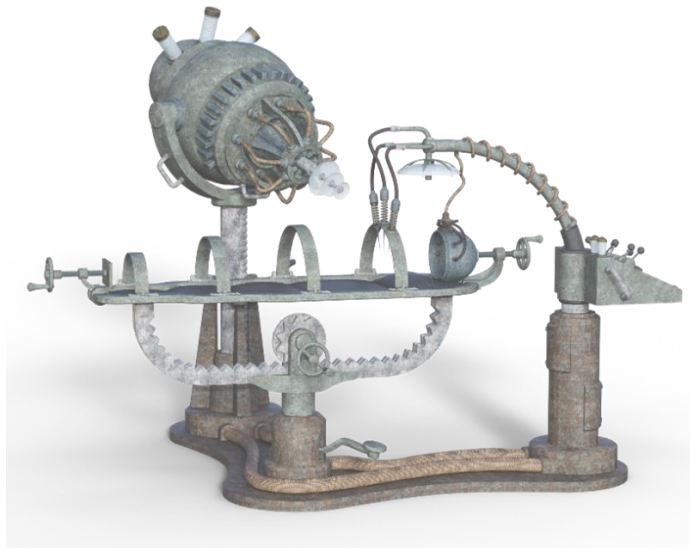

Image by S Greendragon from Pixabay

About the Author

Leah is a first-time writer with more passion for language than for what she eats for breakfast. She loves teaching and hopes to inspire others through education in the future. Leah sees writing as something all can use to express themselves without ridicule. The editors welcome communication about this piece through the Studio's email: rws@wwu.edu.

My Studio strategy reserve ran dry. The only thing going through my head was "Well now what; I've pulled out all my strategies, but nothing is working!" Allow me to explain. I was working with my Practicum[1] partner, let's call them "Rio," on editing strategies. "I have been struggling with editing assignments due to my dyslexia. I don't know how to go about it," Rio said. After walking through a few strategies, I asked, "Are any of these helpful to you?" Rio replied, "I don't know, some of these I've tried before, but they haven't fully worked." Parts of some suggested strategies were working for Rio, but other aspects threw them off course. I had to innovate. Instead of relying on the standard editing strategies I learned from my Studio training, I broke apart pieces of different strategies and remixed them into a tailored editing strategy designed to help my partner spot errors. This scenario marks the beginning of my practice in tailoring what I like to call "Franken-Strategies."

Franken-Strategies foster agency because students are central to the strategy creation process. When working on common concerns like editing, I found that visitors all had something in common—a lack of agency around the editing process. Most students lacked confidence when self-editing because they feared errors would negatively impact their grades. Others didn't even know how to start the editing process because past strategies didn't help them; still others had no strategies at all. Because Franken-Strategies are built based on individual needs and experiences, using them

---

[1] Practicum Partners are students who sign up to work weekly on their literacy development (usually for credit) while co-enrolled in courses with intensive research, writing, or speaking assignments. Studio faculty develop learning plans based on students' academic goals for the term. Studio Assistants then meet with enrolled partners to develop strategies that meet those learning goals while completing their research-writing intensive assignments.

gives students the opportunity to design personal methods tailored to their strengths. They gain agency from learning strategies that are specifically designed for them. And with more agency, they can edit (or research, or draft, or revise) comfortably on their own.

In the past, Rio learned that people with dyslexia should edit by isolating a paragraph at a time from the rest of the paper. Since that wasn't completely working, I simply modified the strategy a bit to suggest isolating each sentence in a new strategy I call "Paragraph Breaking." In this case, the Franken-Strategy took a bit of what Rio already knew and added an extra element to make the strategy a better fit. First, I asked Rio to isolate one paragraph of writing.

> *I'm meant to be writing at this moment. What I mean is, I'm meant to be writing something else at this moment. The document I'm meant to be writing is, of course, open in another program on my computer and is patiently awaiting my attention. Yet here I am plonking down senseless sentiments in this paragraph because it's easier to do than to work on anything particularly meaningful.*

Once Rio isolated a paragraph, I asked them to break it up by giving each sentence additional space in between. The extra space allows them to read each sentence in isolation.

> *I'm meant to be writing at this moment.*

> *What I mean is, I'm meant to be writing something else at this moment.*

> *The document I'm meant to be writing is, of course, open in another program on my computer and is patiently awaiting my attention.*

> *Yet here I am plonking down senseless sentiments in this paragraph because it's easier to do than to work on anything particularly meaningful.*

Because the sentences are isolated, Rio could more easily read each aloud and edit as needed without being distracted by other text. Once finished, Rio could delete the extra spaces and compress the paragraph. And that's it! The strategy is in the name: Paragraph Breaking!

Anyone can Franken a new strategy after learning the three steps for creating one. First, figure out where a failed strategy got muddy. Second, focus on upcycling[2]. And third, understand the end goal—the 'magic,' so to speak, of what the Franken-Strategy is trying to achieve. Asking questions creates an opportunity for students to reflect on previous learning. I always ask students about what works and what doesn't so we can use that information to tailor a new approach. For example, when I asked one student, let's call them "Jordan," to reflect on their process for a past assignment, Jordan realized that things got muddy when they tried typing an outline but that they enjoyed creating one with notecards. Creating space for reflection helped both us better understand the student's writing process and allowed us to move forward with creating a strategy.

Reflecting on process connects to the next step of creating a Franken-Strategy: upcycling. Upcycling is a process of re-using bits of previous strategies and then notecards for their current project. However, Jordan realized notecards wouldn't work as well for this assignment because the paper was much longer—it would take too much time to use dozens of notecards and later type them up. To create the perfect Franken-

---

[2] Upcycling (also called transfer of learning) involves accessing past learning, in this case, processual learning, and applying that knowledge to current and future learning. Our Studio prefers the term "upcycling" because it connects with our environmental consciousness while also implying that nothing is wasted – there is always a new application for previous learning.

Strategy, we realized that we needed to keep the positive aspects of notecards but with digital efficiency. That's when we discovered a website that creates online notecards. Jordan created notecards digitally, and voilà, they were instantly transformed into Word for further drafting. Jordan and I took our understanding of their learning preferences and tailored them for this new contest to create Franken-Strategy magic.

While Jordan's new strategy worked the first time, Franken-strategies may need some adjustment. Post-strategy revising is the process of evaluating the tailored strategy after the student tries it out. You might be thinking, "If the strategy is personally customized for the student, why wouldn't it work?" The simple answer: an incomplete assessment of the student's needs and preferences. While you can learn a lot about needs and preferences in a short time, it's easy for both parties to miss important details, resulting in Franken-Strategy that is better but still lacking. Being able to reflect on and revise Franken-Strategies after an initial trial is a vital skill in achieving magic. Fortunately, their puzzle-like design makes Franken-Strategy revising simple.

Since the entire strategy is made from a collection of small pieces, when one piece doesn't fit, students just exchange for one that does. Students can really take over their own revising at this point. After reflective prompting, they now know what works best for them, they can tell when things get muddy, and they can usually pick the next piece to try out. When students are involved in revising their Franken-Strategies, they can turn a near-perfect strategy into one that unlocks their own success. With enough practice, students will reach a point where they understand their own learning well enough to tailor entire strategies without a tutor. This is agency. By allowing students to

exercise agency, Franken-Strategies push the boundaries of what a strategy can be. Not

just means to an end, Franken-Strategies release students' creativity. See what happens

when you create space for students to combine imagination with their own learning.

Acknowledgements