




# THE 10 STEPS OF LAURA'S WRITING PROCESS

THIS CONSTANTLY EVOLVING PROCESS IS DEFINITELY NOT FOR THE FAINT OF HEART, BUT IT WORKS FOR ME.



I write something every day. I've randomized my rituals in order to eliminate creativity blocks and to keep boredom at bay, and I've made sure to give each task its own mental and physical space to help my brain understand what role I am encompassing in that moment. I spend a lot of time working toward specific goals and developing certain skills in order to be able to access that part of my skill set when necessary. I am kind to myself when I am stuck on a problem, and I trust in the universe that any roadblock that forces me to change paths must have a good reason for being in existence. I constantly search for the "why" and use those lessons to push me forward toward my publishing goals, and I explore the randomness and appreciate the connections that emerge along the journey. Welcome to my process.

## 1. Ideation

I have to be able to "see" the ending before I can begin. And that one small piece that I latch on to tends to act as my horizon, which I might never actually reach, but it will fill me with calm and appreciation through the entire journey until I arrive at the place I've been wandering toward. For example, knowing the end of a movie but watching it again anyway helps me further appreciate how the story develops or how a character's mannerisms add to the overall tone within the larger plot. The more times I watch that movie, the more I see in the details that I missed the first few times because I was so focused on anticipating what might happen next. I walk into any part of a creative project with a bit of an idea of where I'd like to go with it, what I want to accomplish, and a general impression of how to best get there. In all honesty, I almost always start with these questions to myself: What do I want to accomplish with this piece? What is my main goal and what other supplemental goals might be helpful in making that main goal more impactful? (And when I get to editing, I come back to this goal and decide if my goal changed or if I need to make adjustments to achieve that goal in a satisfactory way.) Then I let those ideas simmer while I do the many other things that constitute a daily existence: dishes, laundry, teaching, vacuuming, driving, reading, staring, eating, drinking coffee, brewing tea, drying my hair...

## 2. First Drafts

I play whatever kind of random music I want to have bouncing around in the background of my brain at that moment, and I just let the words come out for some amount of time between 5 minutes and an hour or two. Often, I don't even look at the keyboard, and I generally toggle off the wifi. I have multiple old laptops and a few cheap tablets with keyboards that give each project and work mode a specific digital/tangible workspace. That also means those work projects that I might be procrastinating on aren't staring me in the face while I try to write poetry. I write almost exclusively in either plain text mode in TextEdit on a Mac or in a sans serif font on a free bare-bones notes app on the Android tablets. (I get too enchanted with the pretty notepad apps on the iPad.) I will handwrite some zero-draft meditative writing stuff if I just want to unplug from a digital space completely, but even then I have different notebooks and different pen preferences for different moods and projects. I have to keep them all separate in my mind somehow. This is a trick I learned when I was editing 20 books a year, each averaging about 800 pages, all in different stages with different freelance writers, editors, and designers. Wheeeee!

I will use some simple prompting and some word collections to inspire some randomness to my prose. My poems are generally really abstract in the first draft form, and my fiction or nonfiction is often concrete or rambling in first draft form. I generally have a basic goal or topic in mind, and I try to find in the random words and phrases some distant connection that I can explore as a pathway that I would not have expected to venture through. Whatever emotion I am living within in that moment pours out onto the page and becomes the heart of the piece.

## 3. Developmental Editing

Once I have some goals, ideas, and words on a page, I'll deconstruct whatever I have written. I will print it all out, highlight, cut, and cluster similar things together. I have to be able to see my own patterns of theme or parallels of emotion. I will then make a copy of the document and delete the garbage and pull out sentences or phrases or ideas that I want to design a container for in the future. I use those as my prompts for my second drafts.



# FORGIVENESS HAS TO BE A PART OF THE PROCESS.

#### 4. Second Drafts

My deconstruction process helps me clear away the clutter of doubt because all I see are wonderfully unexpected phrases and delectable descriptions. I already feel like I accomplished something, so it's now much easier to go in and add more decoration and depth with some specificity related to time, space, setting, character, plot, dialogue, and theme — all the while focusing on the goal of the piece. I have been working on my ability to combine abstract and concrete over the past few months, and now I'm currently focusing my daily writing exercises on including more physical setting and physical description of humans, as well as dialogue and plot.

#### 5. Granular Editing

A lot of printing is happening. I work much better as an editor on paper. I scribble all over things. Read stuff out loud. Record pieces. Put those pieces in different fonts so they look different on the page and then read them again. All the while squishing and slicing and squinting at almost every single word, sentence, and paragraph multiple times. I might even recruit some beta readers.

#### 6. Subsequent Drafts

Working in magazines really taught me how to read something with a “fresh” eye maybe a dozen times. And I can find something to change in every draft. Too, I might even decide to change the whole piece from third person to first person or to switch to present tense. Thank goodness I work quickly and keep copies of all of my drafts. Must stay organized.

#### 7. Tedious/Design Editing

I feel passionately that writing carries more impact when it beautifully sits on a page, with a designed structure, images, color, and intentional font decisions, so I will usually go ahead and make a finished and final magazine-like layout, where I often need to cut a few words here and there to make everything fit within that editorial design. I will dig through stock photos and switch fonts until I feel that the piece has a multidimensional tone and the desired level of emotional weight.

#### 8. Letting Go

I could work and re-work and re-re-work on a piece forever and never be fully and completely finished with it. So, at some point, I just take a deep breath and rely on my varied experiences with print deadlines for magazine editions and book launches, and I decide that the piece is finished. I will then release the task of editing from my mind and make a PDF and save it in a FINALLY READY folder. I will also print it and put it in a binder. And there it will sit until I feel inspired to do something with it: maybe publish it, send it out into the social media universe, or submit it for public consumption in an open mic or workshop arena where I can test the impact and affirm that I achieved my goal with the piece.

#### 9. Recasting

Magazine publishing also taught me how to look at my work and see if I can recast it into a smaller project or bigger project or slighter altered version in order to expand the marketability or profitability. Sometimes I do this with my work, but mostly I help other people realize how they can turn one book idea into a whole series of sellable projects. I have a whole product line of ideas for my own big writing project, but I've been stuck in poetry mode for almost two years, and I've been caught up in helping other writers self-publish.

#### 10. Forgiveness

There are many projects in my head, and I simply don't have the bandwidth to tackle them all to a perfect completion, and it has taken me a long time to be OK with that. So, I forgive myself when I get distracted with some other creative project for a few weeks, or when I have to write things for work and don't have time to write a poem every day. And sometimes there are errors or mistakes in finished and published works. Forgiveness has to be a part of the process. I have stopped apologizing to myself for not yet being able to fully jump into the first round of editing on my first draft of my massive collection of short-shorts about the women in my family. Because every single day, if I keep learning something else about my writing or myself, I will eventually find my way back to that project when it's ready for me to work on it.