Why you should write shitty first drafts

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The first draft of anything is shit. Sounds harsh? Yes, but that wasn't me, that was Ernest Hemingway:

> *Don't get discouraged. I rewrote the first part of A Farewell to Arms at least fifty times. You've got to work it over. The first draft of anything is shit.*

With that I would like to you to introduce the concept of the **shitty first draft**. Writer Anne Lamott coined this term in her famous book on writing, Bird by Bird (1995):

> *"The shitty (red.) first draft is the child's draft, where you let it all pour out and then let it romp all over the place, knowing no one is going to see it and that you can shape it later. You just let this childlike part of you channel whatever voices and visions come through and onto the page. If one of the characters wants to say, "Well, so what, Mr. Poopypants?" you let her."*

But why would you need a shitty first draft?

Shitty drafts make you more productive

In the end we are all judged on some form of output that we manage to produce. This is where shitty drafts come in: they make you more productive. They allow you to produce more of whatever you want and need to to but haven't found the courage yet to do so.

This courage can be found by letting go of your perfectionism. To quote Anne Lamott again:

> *Perfectionism is the voice of the oppressor, the enemy of the people. It will keep you cramped and insane your whole life, and it is the main obstacle between you and a shitty first draft.*

You can relax. You can give yourself permission to write shitty first drafts. You have to see these shitty first drafts part as part of the (writing) process.

By writing a first shitty draft you move the project you are working on from an intangible untouchable ideal in your head to a tangible thing in the real physical world.

Working on your shitty first draft creates momentum. Instead of superficially polishing something that doesn't need polishing yet, you move forward, you are creating momentum. This momentum is what makes you realize, "hey, I can do this, I can actually do this!"

How to write a shitty draft

So how do you write a shitty first draft? Here's a simple guide:

1. Start with a general idea.

2. Set a timer for 45 minutes.

3. Start writing/programming/drawing/whatever, no editing!

That's what I did for this blog post. You can find the shitty first draft of this blog post <u>here</u>

It will be messy. Your sentences won't be pretty. Your code will be sloppy. Your lines will be crooked. Whatever you produce will be closer in resemblance to garbage than the Mona lisa, but at least it's out there, you made your shitty first draft. You. Are. Awesome. That's what matters.

Shitty first drafts allow feedback

A good friend of mine once remarked: "Abstract ideas lead to abstract conversations."

The quote stuck with me because it's unequivocally correct. The beauty of writing a shitty first draft is that it opens you up for feedback. By writing a shitty first draft and showing it to one to three close friends you can get feedback on a tangible real world piece of work instead of an abstract idea. This will prove invaluable.

I guarantee you this. The second you press *send* on your request for feedback email you *will* regret it. Suddenly and immediately you spot twenty flaws that you, for some reason, never noticed before. Restrain yourself. Be patient.

Wait for the feedback and however painful it may be, accept it with open arms. Listen to what they have to say about your piece of work and take it seriously. Let it sink in and then decide how to incorporate their feedback into your work.

Now, with this feedback in hand, go out there and write your second or third draft. Rinse and repeat, and before you know it your shitty first draft has turned into this awesome piece of work that you are proud of.

Conclusion

This blog post introduces you to the concept of the **shitty first draft.** I argue that writing shitty first drafts makes you more productive and to top it all off I even give you a simple guide on how to write a shitty first draft. Now get cracking on that first draft and remember: **the first draft of anything is shit**.

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