

# Write shitty first drafts

🕒 6 minute read

So to write this post I have decided to give myself exactly 45 minutes.

Hopefully this will result in a shitty first draft which we can then edit and iterate upon.

As I'm writing an article about shitty first drafts. The first thing I did was simple Google shitty first drafts as follows.

001.jpg

The

- <https://wrd.as.uky.edu/sites/default/files/1-Shitty%20First%20Drafts.pdf>
- <https://leighshulman.com/shitty-first-draft/>
- <https://lengstorf.com/shitty-first-draft/>
- <https://www.enchantingmarketing.com/writing-shitty-first-drafts/>
- <https://www.brainpickings.org/2013/11/22/bird-by-bird-anne-lamott/>

## Link 1

Born in San Francisco in 1954, Anne Lamott is a graduate of Goucher College in Baltimore and is the author of six novels, including *Rosie* (1983), *Crooked Little Heart* (1997), *All New People* (2000), and *Blue Shoes* (2002).

Lamott's popular book about writing, *Bird by Bird* (1994), she argues for the need to let go and write those "shitty first drafts" that lead to clarity and sometimes brilliance in our second and third drafts.

Now, practically even better news than that of short assignments is the idea of shitty first drafts. All good writers write them. This is how they end up with good second drafts and terrific third drafts. People tend to look at successful writers who are getting their books published and maybe even doing well financially and think that they sit down at their desks every morning feeling like a million dollars, feeling great about who they are and how much talent they have and what a great story they have to tell; that they take in a few deep breaths, push back their sleeves, roll their necks a few times to get all the cricks out, and dive in, typing fully formed passages as fast as a court reporter. But this is just the fantasy of the uninitiated. I know some very great writers, writers you love who write beautifully and have made a great deal of money, and not one of them sits down routinely feeling wildly enthusiastic and confident. Not one of them writes elegant first drafts. All right, one of them does, but we do not like her very much.

I think this hold true for programming as well. Write shitty first versions and then (hopefully) go back and rewrite

She points out that this requires some certain leap of faith

*But because by then I had been writing for so long, I would eventually let myself trust the process – sort of, more or less*

Almost all good writing begins with terrible first efforts. You need to start somewhere. Start by getting something – anything – down on paper. A friend of mine says that the first draft is the down draft – you just get it down. The second draft is the up draft – you fix it up. You try to say what you have to say more accurately. And the third draft is the dental draft, where you check every tooth, to see if it's loose or cramped or decayed, or even, God help us, healthy

## Link 2

<https://leighshulman.com/shitty-first-draft/>

Whats the key takeaway from this post? Is the importance of getting to the shitty first draft.

You have such a good idea in your head and then you try to put it on paper and you ruin it. It becomes shit. Does this mean your idea was shit? No!

It's embarrassing, painful, it sucks. You'll feel tempted to edit, but resist, don't.

Just remember that this is your shitty first draft. This is your down draft, just get it down. Just write all of it down.

It requires trust and patience in the process to NOT go back and edit.

*"The 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."*

## Link 3

Premature optimization is the root of al evil.

The goal of the shitty first draft is to remove the need for superficial polishing in favor of fundamental progress.

Any blank canvas is intimidating.

You have a vague idea of what you want to create and you know that you can create it yet there still is this hesitation.

What if people judge your work?

What if your work isn't good enough?

## What do I want to say?

- You should write shitty first drafts
- Shitty first drafts turn projects into tangible things
- This is good and ups your productivity
- Opens yourself for actual feedback
- Example. shitty first draft of a post

## Why you should write shitty first drafts

Ernest Hemingway once said:

*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**. 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."*

## Shitty drafts make you more productive

You **need** shitty first drafts. Why do you need them? Because they increase your productivity and allow you to produce more of whatever you want to but haven't found the courage yet to do so.

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.

You need these shitty drafts because they move a project from an intangible untouchable ideal in your head to a tangible thing in the real physical world, and this has a huge psychological benefit: it creates momentum. Instead of polishing we are creating progress, we are moving forward, and this momentum is what will propell us forward and make us realize "hey we can actually do this, we can finish this!"

## How to write a shitty draft

---

So how can /you/ write a shitty first draft?

Just copy me!

Set a timer for 45 minutes and start typing, no editing.

Your sentences won't be pretty, your article or program or whatever will be garbage, but at least its out there. And that's what matters.

Writing your first draft is supposed to be fast. The goal is to move the project from a vague project-shaped idea in your mind to a tangible physical thing.

I had this idea about an article on how to write articles, by all means, I'm not a very prolific writer so I can't make any claim based on authority but at least I made a shitty first draft!

## Why shitty first drafts are crucial

---

A good friend of mine once said: "Abstract ideas lead to abstract conversations." This quote stuck with me, and he's totally right.

Shitty first drafts are crucial because they open you up for feedback

# Conclusion

In conclusion, in this blog post I go over the **shitty first draft** technique coined by Anne Lamott. I urge you to at least try the shitty first draft technique once as it greatly increases your productivity. For me it works because it forces you to produce and create instead of polish.

Now get cracking on that first draft and remember: **the first draft of anything is shit.**

# Subscribe

Liked this article and want to hear more?

Subscribe

🔖 Tags:

Jekyll

update

📁 Categories:

blog

📅 Updated: July 20, 2019