Constructing a Draft Silent Workshop

50 minutes
Take your draft, in whatever state it exists today, and complete the following tasks. You may find this to be a useful way to approach revisions of any new project for any class, because it breaks down many of the key issues you face in writing and revising a paper into short, manageable tasks. Try to focus only on the task at hand during the allotted time.

1) Find your thesis statement or question. If you do not have a thesis statement or question, you need to write one. If you have one, you need to revise it for MAXIMUM clarity. Go over this statement word by word, and consider alternative constructions of this thesis. Does the paper as it exists today fulfill the mission of the thesis? Are you answering the critical question(s) you’ve set for yourself? Is it too broad? Too narrow? The parameters you set for yourself in your thesis statement are very important. Without regard to the beauty of your prose, spend FIFTEEN MINUTES working out an introductory statement that announces your intentions for the entire paper. “In this paper, I am exploring…. I will accomplish this mission by examining X Y Z in detail, concluding with ???” You fill in the blanks. You may use this paragraph (gussied up in fine style) as an introductory paragraph to your paper, or you may simply use it as a touchstone: “I’ve promised to do these three things in the paper, so where am I now, on page whatever, with regard to those promises?” A good introduction will keep you focused and will keep you honest.

2) After working on your introductory statement and thesis, freewrite for FIVE MINUTES (no more, no less), on the current state of your draft. Where is it going? What do you need to do?

3) STRUCTURE: How will you order all the information in this paper? If your draft is fairly well-developed already, how might you re-order the information for clarity and “flow”? Consider alternative ways of including the information you hope to cover. Think about how the parts of the paper will comprise one entire argument about your topic, and consider how you will transition from idea to idea. Spend TEN MINUTES on this section.

4) Is this project interesting? It may be worthwhile, but is it interesting reading? If the project itself is very technical in nature, what can you do to bring human interest to the project? BRAINSTORM for FIVE MINUTES, jotting down ideas. These can include interviews with real people, case studies, illustrations. Think hard about this for five minutes.
5) EXPLODE a sentence. Remember that exercise? Find a dull sentence and make it come to life with vivid detail. One sentence. TEN MINUTES. If you finish early, you can move on to task #6.

6) ORAL PRESENTATION: Spend FIVE MINUTES brainstorming ideas for your oral presentation. Write down notes to yourself, consider the possibilities, think about your handout. You can’t read the whole paper to the class in 5-10 minutes, so what section of your project looks the most promising?

7) Consult with your group, exchange email addresses/phone numbers, and make plans for draft exchange for TWENTY MINUTES.