Quotes

“Not one of them writes elegant first drafts. All right, one of them does, but we do not like her very much. We do not think that she has a rich inner life or that God likes her or can even stand her. (Although when I mentioned this to my priest friend Tom, he said you can safely assume you've created God in your own image when it turns out that God hates all the same people you do.)” Context: The author was describing how good authors write really bad first drafts, and people who do not are not very likeable or real people.

“There may be something in the very last line of the very last paragraph on page six that you just love, that is so beautiful or wild that you now know what you're supposed to be writing about, more or less, or in what direction you might go -- but there was no way to get to this without first getting through the first five and a half pages.” Context: The author is describing how something useful can be pulled from really bad first drafts, but you have to work through simpler instincts in order to get to the better stuff.

Questions

Does this help reduce anxiety about writing, or does it increase it because it is an extra step?

Why isn’t this taught to students more in the writing process?

Summary

In this article author Anne Lamott describes the process of writing a bad first draft in order to reduce pressure on writing a perfect first draft. She describes it as a common step among professional writers, and then describes her own experience writing a food critic column for a newspaper. She describes how she would sit to begin writing her first draft and could never write a first sentence to her satisfaction. So she changed her outlook and focused on writing down all of her thoughts, almost in a childlike manner. The draft would be an unfocused monstrosity that exceeded the page limit. Then Lamott would go back through and mark through what she wanted to take out and what was worth keeping, and rewrite the second draft, looking over it one more time to fine-tune the process.