**“Leaning into Chaos”: A Word (or two) about Rough Drafts**

*Composing by our method is not like plodding down one row and up the next with a mule, and it is certainly not like a tractor tearing along making beautiful, entirely regular patterns. Our method works like a Scottish sheep dog bringing in the sheep: she races back and forth, driving the flock in one direction signaled by the shepherd, but acting in response to the developing occasions, nudging here, circling there; rushing back to round up a stray, dashing back to cut off an advance in the wrong direction. When you compose, you are the shepherd and the sheep dog and it’s up to you to decide whether you want the sheep in the fold, flank, or field and how to get them there.*

***Ann Berthoff****,* Forming/Thinking/Writing

*Writing is like trying to ride a horse which is constantly changing beneath you, Proteus changing while you hang on to him. You have to hang on for dear life, but not hang on so hard that he can't change and finally tell you the truth.*

***Peter Elbow***, Writing Without Teachers

*Writing is like trying to smooth ripples from water with one's hand--the more I try, the more disturbed things get.*

***Kij Johnson****,*The Fox Woman

Writers are always (and always will be) trying to understand the writing process. As you can see, they—like we did earlier this semester—often generate metaphors in the hopes of coming to such an understanding. And, what these, and many others, have in common is that the writing process can be messy and chaotic. In fact, “[i]n French, the word for a rough draft is *brouillon*, derived from a verb meaning ‘to place in disorder, to scramble’” (Bean 11).

Despite the confusion and clutter inherent in the writing process, this “chaos” and “disorder” can be extremely exciting and generative. But because of standardized testing, timed writing assessments, unreasonable length expectations, and formulaic approaches to writing, students are often encouraged both implicitly and explicitly to write their complete, final draft the first time around. Rough drafts, if they are encouraged at all, are hollow documents that rarely change in intellectually complicated ways before being turned in as “final” drafts. And part of this is because rough drafts are graded.

We’re not continuing this series of misconceptions. Instead, rough drafts are:

**Required.** Failure to turn in a rough draft at (or reasonably near) the appointed due date will result in a zero for the assignment.

**Not Graded.** A rough draft is your early attempt at *coming to terms* with readings, and *taking an approach* as a writer. It’s a chance for feedback and further thinking, not graded assessment.

**Open for Revision.** Your final draft grows from your rough draft. Turning in a final draft that is nearly identical to your rough draft will negatively affect your grade.

**Discussed.** In addition to instructor comments, your group members will comment on and become familiar with your work, both in class and out.