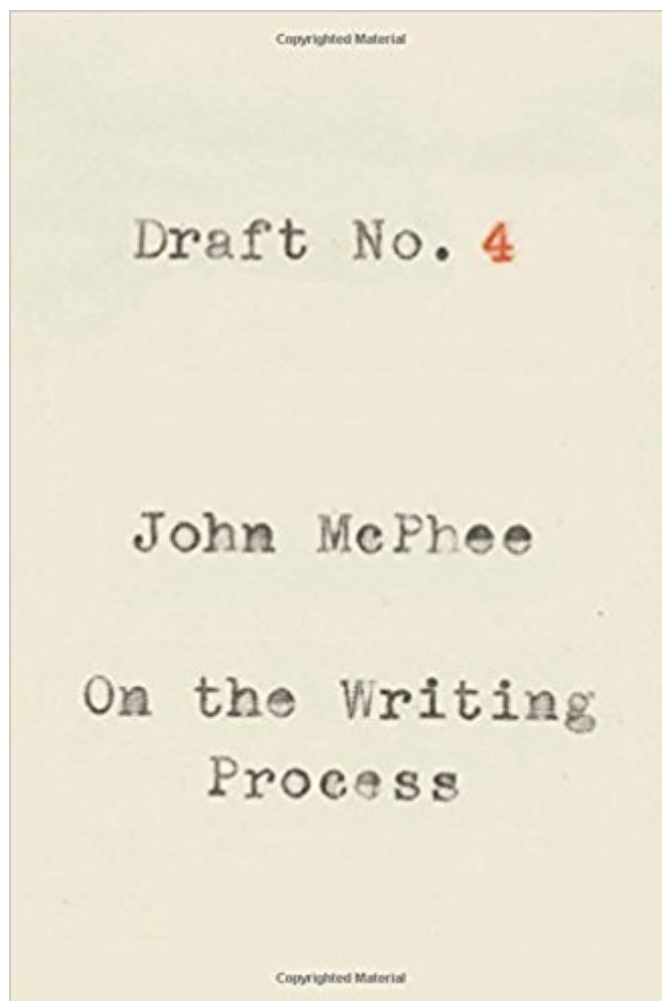


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# Draft No. 4: On The Writing Process



## Synopsis

The long-awaited guide to writing long-form nonfiction by the legendary author and teacher *Draft No. 4* is a master class on the writer's craft. In a series of playful, expertly wrought essays, John McPhee shares insights he has gathered over his career and has refined while teaching at Princeton University, where he has nurtured some of the most esteemed writers of recent decades. McPhee offers definitive guidance in the decisions regarding arrangement, diction, and tone that shape nonfiction pieces, and he presents extracts from his work, subjecting them to wry scrutiny. In one essay, he considers the delicate art of getting sources to tell you what they might not otherwise reveal. In another, he discusses how to use flashback to place a bear encounter in a travel narrative, while observing that "readers are not supposed to notice the structure. It is meant to be about as visible as someone's bones." The result is a vivid depiction of the writing process, from reporting to drafting to revising and revising, and revising. *Draft No. 4* is enriched by multiple diagrams and by personal anecdotes and charming reflections on the life of a writer. McPhee describes his enduring relationships with *The New Yorker* and Farrar, Straus and Giroux, and recalls his early years at *Time* magazine. Throughout, *Draft No. 4* is enlivened by his keen sense of writing as a way of being in the world.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

An [Best Book of September 2017](#): One of the great joys of being a book nerd is the rare offer from an accomplished writer to peer inside their head, to probe the process that makes their work, well,

work. The best examples (Stephen King's *On Writing*, Anne Lamott's *Bird by Bird*, etc.) go beyond the nuts and bolts of prose to how to tell a story in three acts, e.g. to talk about how they view their craft, however idiosyncratic or replicable. *Draft No. 4* falls squarely into this category. With this collection of eight essays, McPhee the author of *Coming into the Country*, *Encounters with the Archdruid*, and countless other celebrated works of longform nonfiction shares his experiences as a working writer, recalling the methods, tools (mental and otherwise), and relationships that helped him produce some of his most memorable books and articles. It's less of a how-to than a this-is-how-I-did-it approach, offering plenty of astonishment and inspiration for aspiring writers (and just plain readers), if not easy solutions. A deft blend of art and memoir, *Draft No. 4* might seem like the entertaining, amiable reminiscences of a favorite uncle, if it wasn't also so informative and insightful.

--Jon Foro, Book Review

"Reading [these essays] consecutively in one volume constitutes a master class in writing, as the author clearly demonstrates why he has taught so successfully part-time for decades at Princeton University. In one of the essays, McPhee focuses on the personalities and skills of editors and publishers for whom he has worked, and his descriptions of those men and women are insightful and delightful . . . Almost every sentence sparkles, with wordplay evident throughout. Another bonus is the detailed explanation of how McPhee decided to tackle certain topics and then how he chose to structure the resulting pieces. Readers already familiar with the author's masterpieces . . . will feel especially fulfilled by McPhee's discussions of the specifics from his many books . . . A superb book about doing his job by a master of his craft." *Kirkus Reviews* (starred review) "[*Draft No. 4* is] not a general how-to-do-it manual but a personal how-I-did-it of richer depth not bouillon cubes, but rich stock . . . McPhee lays it all out with the wit of one who believes that 'writing has to be fun at least once in a pale blue moon.'" *Publishers Weekly* "McPhee has set the standard for the genre of creative nonfiction . . . With humor and aplomb, he recalls anecdotes about how he approached a story: from interviewing and reporting to drafting and revising, to working with editors and publishers . . . [*Draft No. 4* is] a well-wrought road map to navigating the twists and turns, thrills and pitfalls, and joys and sorrows of the writer's journey." *Donna Marie Smith, Library Journal* "Eight crisply instructive and drolly self-deprecating essays [are] gathered here in this exceptionally entertaining and illuminating book . . . [*Draft No. 4*] is expert, charming, and invigorating." *Donna Seaman, Booklist* "McPhee taught us to revere language, to care about every word, and to abjure the loose synonym . . . Perhaps there are writers

out there who make it look easy, but that is not the example set by McPhee. He is of the school of thought that says a writer is someone for whom writing is more difficult than for other people. Some people joke about lashing themselves to the chair to get a piece of writing done, but McPhee actually has done it, with the belt of his bathrobe . . . I doubt many of us ever took a class that resonated so profoundly over the years." ["McPhee: A Master of the Craft"](#) by Joel Achenbach, Princeton Alumni Weekly "In college, I took a twelve-week writing course with McPhee at Princeton. I received a ["Passing the Test"](#) for ["Passing the Test"](#). This was a mercy. McPhee has been teaching the course, so far as I know, since the Silurian Period. More than half of his former students have gone on to work at various magazines and newspapers, to write books. Actually, only a small percentage of McPhee's students studied with him at Princeton; he has been for dozens and dozens of nonfiction writers what Robert Lowell used to be for poets and poet wannabes of a certain age: the model." ["McPhee's Sentences are Born of Patience and Attention: He Seems to Possess a Pair of Eyes with the Swivel, Zoom and Reach of a Peregrine Falcon, and a Pair of Ears with the Recording Ability of a Dictaphone. He Notices Almost Everything."](#) ["McPhee's Sentences are Born of Patience and Attention: He Seems to Possess a Pair of Eyes with the Swivel, Zoom and Reach of a Peregrine Falcon, and a Pair of Ears with the Recording Ability of a Dictaphone. He Notices Almost Everything."](#) by Robert Macfarlane, The Guardian

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