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HUMW-011

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**Writer’s Reflection**

At the outset of this course, I was none too thrilled with the idea of peer review. For a moment, I even considered switching to different class. But my desire to achieve this course’s stated goal of “Nice Work” outweighed my apprehension of having strangers, in a new, unfamiliar environment, read my work. In the end, I’m glad that I stayed in this class. The variety of workshops and comprehensive editing processes, have strengthened my writing abilities. And, I have learned to appreciate the value of peer review, developed an aptitude for detailed editing, and increased my overall confidence in expressing myself.

In the beginning of the semester, we read George Orwell’s “Politics and the English Language.” This essay had a profound effect on me. It is both hilarious and helpful, and every time I write I make a concerted effort to remember his writing tips and guidelines. Don’t be lazy and rely on overused descriptions or metaphors! Replace neutral verbs with stronger, more expressive verbs! Be concise, original and clear in one’s writing! In the past, I employed the same organizational and writing style for every assignment, but now I consider both audience and writing genre.

Peer review sessions have not only improved my editing skills, they have helped me to fulfill Orwell’s stipulations by forcing me to strengthen my arguments and tailor my writing style to specific assignments. Receiving constructive criticism from my peers has enabled me to evolve as a writer. And, reading their work with an objective eye has also helped me to recognize new writing techniques. For example, as a creative writing novice, my short stories ‘told’ rather than ‘showed’ the narrative. My classmates asked direct questions about each section of my stories, prompting me to add descriptions or delete analysis where necessary. In high school, the difference between my first and final draft was often negligible. Thanks to our peer review sessions, I edit my work more thoroughly, and I do not hesitate to ask for assistance. Now, my writing is more concise and dynamic.

My most successful piece of writing this semester is my proposal paper on the climate change. While I was writing it, however, I felt completely overwhelmed. The breadth and depth of information, such as the scientific complexities, the history and the politics of climate change, made me fear I would never finish. There was so much I wanted to convey, I could have written 20 pages. Here is where the necessity of editing came into play. I wrote multiple paragraphs, moved them around, pieced them together like a puzzle, until I could arrange a coherent narrative to be “published.” I then channeled Orwell to pare down and clarify the piece, and to help emulate The Economist’s quippy writing style. Lastly, but most significantly, my peer review conferences helped me to figure out how to organize and to proceed at a time when I really needed it.

I chose to revise my literary analysis paper, “Something Mean,” on ZZ Packer’s “Brownies” because, quite simply, I love this story! Following Professor Debelius’ and Jen’s advice, I added more analysis of Packers descriptive prose, for example, analysis of ‘crescendo’ and the food the narrator Laurel mentions. I also combed through the essay to improve the flow, organization, sentence structure and verb choice. With “Interactive Education,” I followed Jen’s advice and let my narrative “do the talking first.” I relocated the first paragraph, weaving some of it into the story for clarification, and moving other parts to the conclusion. By doing this, I “showed” rather than “told” my story. In addition, I addressed several of Jen’s questions regarding how I felt, and how I succeeded in getting an “unfriendly-looking” man to register to vote.

I am also including a response to one of Father Steck’s nightly readings for his “Problem of God” class. One of our first texts to address was Sharon Daloz Parks’ “Meaning and Faith” which contends that all humans assign meaning and value to their lives. We may associate ‘meaning’ and ‘faith’ with religion, but Daloz expands those definitions to include secular or humanistic values. The message of her piece resonates with my beliefs and experiences; that in life, it is important to have convictions, whether tangible or abstract. These principles could include, for example, the resolve to treat yourselves and others with dignity and respect, or to have faith in God. Whether our focus is narrow or broad, however, our faith will change and evolve through hardship and suffering. Because when we are in crisis, we tap an internal force that helps us to endure and transports us to a higher consciousness. My reflection is a personal response, not a polished piece of writing, but I chose to include it in my portfolio because I esteem its message and I believe my summary adheres to Orwell’s provision of concise clarity. In my writing, I condense a lengthy and labyrinthine chapter to a coherent and understandable synopsis. I conclude my reflection with personal antidote as an example of this phenomenon.

As a writer, my greatest strength is my ability to organize my arguments. In high school, I made extensive outlines for all of my essays. And in this class, I continued to build on this skill, often outlining and rearranging entire paragraphs. This semester I became aware of my continued use of polysyllabic and superfluous words in order to give my papers a more authoritative and erudite tone. I learned, however, that precise and succinct words are always preferable. One weakness of mine as a writer is my tendency to mix up tenses, and use too many words when fewer would suffice. This course made me more cognizant of these bad habits and the same writing style I often fall back on. In the future, I hope to correct my grammatical errors, and to improve the speed with which I articulate my thoughts. I do, however, understand writing is a long process and shouldn’t be rushed. I also intend to try different writing styles, and to learn to write sentences using more efficient words. I believe these goals are accomplished only through practice. And yet, despite these weaknesses, I believe my writing skills have improved because of this class, have enjoyed being a part of it.