

November 19, 2015

Dear Dr. Rodrigo and English 102 peers,

I have a rather peculiar perspective of first-year English. My first semester in English was taken in 2006 at a community college while majoring in architecture and the second semester now as a junior majoring in optical sciences and engineering. Before my first semester of college English, I was taught to view all writing projects as essays and that all essays should have a singular simple structure: introduction, body, and conclusion. It was assumed this one method would fit all my writing needs. This belief was not at all challenged during my first course in 2006. In fact, the first course reinforced the structure by using it for many purposes. My writing process at this time was dominated as a procrastinator that would begin the research, outline, draft and final draft overnight. This course did help me grow-by teaching me how to acknowledge an audience and have a strong message.

Between first-semester English and this course, life happened and I dropped out of school to work in retail. I quickly moved into a leadership position that required me to send professional emails to vendors, other stores, and corporate offices. This new challenge significantly changed my writing style. Suddenly, I had to be extremely concise and to the point without leaving out pertinent information. The learning curve was steep when I first began writing these emails because sending one that is too long, missing information, or unprofessional could lead to disciplinary action. I heavily revised each email until another manager felt that it was worthy to sent to higher personnel. These types of interactions became the basis for my writing, which has not been challenged until Dr. Rodrigo's course.

Until this semester, I had not imagined approaching writing as an essential tool that requires critical thinking and careful execution. Dr. Rodrigo's course has profoundly changed every aspect of my writing ability and knowledge because of this new-found perspective. As a reader, I have gained more motivation to understand an author's intent, to work through a confusing sentence, and to learn new words. As a writer, I have taken much more time to [brainstorm](#), plan, [organize](#), draft and revise. I see the power in peer reviews and [annotated bibliographies](#), and in taking the time to [clarify](#) my writing projects. I understand that every audience and message has an appropriate method of delivery. In shifting from being a heavy revisor/procrastinator to a sequential composer, I have become more creative and allowed myself to [ask deeper questions](#), allowing me to then select a motivating direction. Through careful discipline, I have researched while generating an annotated bibliography. I have gained a better understanding of the subject and can [formulate a general thesis](#). I have researched writing styles to find what is most important in public arguments. Through all these new skills, I have created much more detailed, finely tuned first drafts.

Rome wasn't built in a day and my writing skills weren't either. I had the rough points among the initial topic selection, formulation of thesis, integrating quotes, punctuation, wordiness, and transition sentences. I found picking a topic was not simple and even less so when choosing a side for a public argument and having a strong voice in the matter. The draft writing is still the hardest part of writing for me because I am still learning correct execution of punctuation and grammar which in turn hinders my clarity and increases wordiness. Even though copy-editing was the unsung hero before posting my drafts, I still missed many errors that seem so obvious when another peer would bring it up. Above all writing a thesis is still the thorn in my side. I feel so lost in how long it should be, how many sentences it should be and whether I am saying too much or too little. Lucky we had an assignment that helped in writing a better one, but I still feel that I need to develop the skill more.

The peer review process - an unintentionally gratifying part of the course - comes next. It turned out to be one of the most helpful parts of the class. I was able to see my writing through others' eyes to understand mistakes and confusing sentences I missed. One example of a major correction in a [project](#) by a peer was that they couldn't even find my thesis statement. They helped me correct these errors to achieve my writing goals. As a peer reviewer lacking experience in the position, I relied heavily on course guidelines and followed the "Rules for Writers" to make sure my editing was well thought out and helpful. The review process, both by peers and by self, led to stronger writing and editing.

One of my projects perfectly sums up just how much this course has done for me. [This project](#) was on an upper division level physics topic that is well beyond my level of knowledge. After doing my best to learn about the theory of special relativity and how the Lorentz law of force was incompatible with it, I approached a few professors in the College of Optical Sciences and asked for their opinion on my drafts. I was very happy my rhetorical analysis was well received and found to be accurate. I even received a follow up email from Masud Mansuripur, Professor and Chair of Optical Data Storage, whose paper I conducted the rhetorical analysis on. In the email he said, "thank you for sharing your blog with me; it's well-researched and well-written." From this statement and my success, I knew just how much my writing process had changed for the better.

Thinking back to 2006 during my first English course, my revision process was long and drawn out. I used to copy and paste, and then scramble around sentences in a nonsensical way. Now in this course, the revision process has a structure. I spent time planning, copy-editing, and conducting paragraph analysis. Although the projects this semester took much longer than a procrastinated paper in 2006 would have, the quality of the writing and content is orders of magnitude greater, and I am much more proud of my work.

Now, I am 27 and realize the lack of effort in English as a study in general has hurt my progress as a student. If I could retake the first semester in particular I would have put in much more effort instead of coasting by with a C. I approached this course with a different mindset and I don't think I would have done anything differently this semester.

I put all my effort into learning everything the course set out for me and I can say I have truly done my best. I have a lot of respect now for those who take the time to do the research before posting a public argument. I feel I owe much to you who helped me achieve this level of writing via the helpful criticism in the peer review process. Looking forward, this writing course will help me significantly in my current and future life through technical papers, emails, scholarship essays and personal statements. I found that I will be able to carry these skills with me the rest of my life, and this is only the beginning of my journey to become a better writer.

Sincerely,

Andrew D. Rocha