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### Am I Truly a Better Writer?

Terry Hayes once wrote that "the world doesn't change in front of your eyes, it changes behind your back," a sentiment that I find rather comforting as I look back on the experiences that I have had and shared this semester. I walked into an English class in January knowing little of what to expect besides what I had experienced in classes prior. As time passed I found that the class I was expecting was vastly different from the one that I received, but I was able to adapt to the challenges and see that my understanding of English was growing each day. Now I see a future where I will not only be expected to write, but to provide insight into the situation at hand. Despite this knowledge that I have now, I did not always see this class as a way to strengthen my understanding but time makes that detail clear. Yet as I made my way through the course I was forced to struggle with conducting research like I never had before, understanding how I needed to manage my limited time, and even taking care of myself in order to become a proficient writer.

When looking back upon my high school years, I am consistently amazed at the lack of research that I conducted compared to even the most cursory searches that I now complete. The first true project that required extensive research that I worked on was not even for an English class, but rather for Advanced Placement United States History during my junior year of high school. My teacher had called it his "I Don't Care" or "IDC" project to ensure us that we would

be able to talk about any topic we wished as long as we could make it relevant to some change that happened in the United States. Early on I had decided to craft my required nine pages on the history of John D. Rockefeller, one of the richest men in world history and a driving force behind industrialization in America. At the time however, I knew very little of the mysterious man, so I was forced to dig up information about him from many different places, ranging from biographies to online sources. I was forced to become immersed in the life of someone that I barely knew, something that would not happen again until researching new topics this semester.

After sitting down in class and learning that the rhetorical situation of a piece is of paramount importance, I realized that a new approach to my research was going to be needed. This revelation was further stressed by the research reports we completed as process work leading up to the creation of our rough and final drafts for each project. In the blog post entitled “My Sources” I was researching not only to find sources, but to find information about the sources themselves as evidenced by me delving into the author’s own background such as when I discussed an article “written by Peter Fairley, a freelance writer who writes almost exclusively on energy around the world, he writes for IEEE Spectrum, Nature, and MIT Technology Review” (Allred, “My Sources” 1). I even came to discuss the author’s potential bias while writing, noting that “he may be slightly biased on the subject as he argues for renewable energy in various nations across the globe such as France, Canada, and the United States” which is something that previously I would have never considered (Allred, “My Sources” 1). At the time I was certainly unhappy with all of that seemingly useless work that I was being asked to do, but now I have come to see that by looking at all aspects of a piece before using it in my own work I

have a deeper understanding of what the author was really trying to convey with their writing.

#### SOME TRANSITION

Before I can even starting writing through, my mind has to be in a creative state where the ideas are able to flow freely to the paper. For me this is no easy task, requiring a focus which I rarely have at my disposal. From lacking a proper sleep schedule to horrid nutrition habits, I haven't exactly been able to treat my body as the temple it should be, and that has shown its ugly face this semester. Whether it be through my constant lack of proper food or seemingly endless state of tiredness, I've found that without treating myself well, there is no way I can expect to approach working on anything with a positive attitude.

This is most evident in the fact that I often felt exhausted during the day, even right after I heard the indistinct buzzing of my morning alarm. My sleep schedule can most effectively be described as non-existent since really I haven't been able to find anything that can manage with my ridiculous work schedule. On some nights I am required to stay up until 1 AM, 3 AM, and even until 6 AM to finish out my shifts which is a problem that wreaks havoc upon my attempts to go to sleep earlier on "nights" when I have class the next day. Getting up at 1 PM on Saturday afternoons just to get seven hours of sleep certainly doesn't seem worth it, but it's what I do so that I can keep an income and still go to school at the same time. I never thought that it was going to be easy, but the sleep deprivation certainly has hindered my ability to write effectively on more than one occasion where I would rather be taking a nap, and sometimes I do just that. This problem is definitely the most severe issue I face on a daily basis, but is also only one of many.

It seems like everyday I end up taking a trip to the union to find something to eat for the one meal a day that I do end up getting to eat. Other than a small chance of me having a bowl of cereal for breakfast, it seems like I only ever end up eating once a day, and the meals that I eat are not enough sustenance for it to keep me going. Far too often I head back to my dorm room with a bag of Chick-fil-A instead of something healthier from On Deck or Cactus Grill, or even rather than something that I cooked myself. I know that my diet contains a woeful lack of the vitamins and nutrients that I need in order for my body to function at its regular ability. Yet I find myself lacking the time and often the willpower to find better options, and that has certainly hampered my ability to get work done in almost all of my classes as I find myself snacking on rice crispy treats and candy rather than working on whatever it is that needs to be finished. However, I feel as though the worst problem that I have faced so far in my college career and will continue to face in the future is not personal care, but time management.

What I know now is that it's really hard to balance 19 credit hours, 2 science labs, working 22 hours a week, being a club officer, and having any sort of social life all while trying to get more than an hour of sleep every night. At the beginning of the semester, I pointed out that the biggest flaw with my writing process was that "its main weakness is the lack of time I give myself to prepare for writing, instead hoping that I'll be able to sit down and get it done just in the nick of time before it's due" (Allred, "The Writing Process" 1). As I started the semester I found that it was going to take a serious work ethic to make it through alive.

With so much time going to school and work every week, it was almost impossible to find time to sit down for a couple of hours and just write without being interrupted by something else. Whether it be leaving for work or just having another assignment due sooner, it was

difficult not to keep pushing my English work back until the weekends, which is often what happened as shown by the vast majority of my submissions coming in on their Sunday due dates (Allred, "English Endeavors" 1-11). This harmful trend began for me in high school where I was consistently able to complete my assignments on the night before and still receive an A without putting in much effort. Even for the monumental "IDC" project of my junior year I began actually working on it the Sunday afternoon before its Monday due date, and to my best recollection I got something like a 96%. This sense of success without much effort followed me into my first semester here at the U of A, and I know that it has been and will continue to be a serious detriment to my academic career.

Even as I began to realize how debilitating being such a terrible procrastinator was last Fall, the trend still continued, the habitual byproduct of years worth of similar actions. After finishing the first project for this course, I wrote in my reflection that "I didn't plan my time very well at all ... While I was still able to achieve all of the deadlines, I know that there were a few where I definitely cut it close and I hope to not make that mistake again" yet I continually made the same mistake each week as I put off the work every time (Allred, "Brutally Honest" 1). In my future writing endeavors I must work more diligently otherwise I will end up missing deadlines which rather than a 10% docking of a grade could mean the loss of my job. If I have learned anything this semester, it is truly that time management will either make or break both my academic and professional careers, and that it is a skill which will need continual improvement and monitoring from now until I retire.

A few days ago, I left Ina Gittings Room 203 for the last time this semester and with that I've nearly completed English 109H, but there will always be writing to be done. While it hasn't

always been fun and I certainly haven't had an easy time with it, I feel like I'm leaving a more insightful writer, ready to tackle the challenges which will certainly face me in the future.

Whether it be technical reports, presentations, or any other genre which I have not yet written in, I know that the skills I have learned this semester will make me proficient in whatever I need to tackle. Despite all of the hardships we endured to get here, I'm thankful that I've gained a new set of skills.

## Works Cited

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