

(Un)Learning Memoir

“Literacy has a history. Our individual life histories contain many literacy events from early childhood onwards which the present is built upon. We change, and as children and adults are constantly learning about literacy.”—David Barton

Preface

For the next few weeks, we’re going to investigate how writing can help us ask questions and conduct research, create new knowledge, and communicate with others. This means we’ll reflect on and articulate the lessons we learn as we think hard about the principles of rhetorical analysis, paragraphing, creating evidence, etc. Indeed, writing and learning (to write more effectively) open up pathways for learning about ourselves, about others, about culture(s), and about the power of language. In order to start this process and set some goals, we have to look backwards to our previous experiences and uncover the lessons living in our past.

To explain, the community organizer Saul Alinsky notes, “Most people go through life undergoing a series of happenings, which pass through their systems undigested” (69). In fact, when it comes to our previous educational experiences, most of us hold the idea that learning is simply repeating the facts we’ve memorized, adapting to a particular teacher’s style or calling upon strategies that have worked in the past. According to the activist and philosopher Ivan Illich, many of us have been, “‘schooled’ to confuse teaching with learning, grade advancement with education, a diploma with competence, and fluency with the ability to say something new” (1). Yet, deep, robust learning stems from an intentional “(un)learning.” That is, learning something new means not behaving or thinking in the ways you did before learning that new knowledge.

Purpose

So, for this first project, I want you to think and write about a time in your life when you had to “(un)learn.” Put simply, use a “happening” (or more than one) to “say something new.” Let’s recognize with Alinsky that “[h]appenings become experiences when they are digested, when they are reflected on, related to general patterns, and synthesized” (69). In thinking about that time, ask yourself: **who might be interested in reading about this? And, what might they learn from my experience?**

Invention

To begin inventing this paper, think about a moment of “(un)learning” and consider the following questions...

- What happened? When was it? Where was it? Who was involved?

WRA 101: Project #1

- How did you respond to the situation? Why? What did you want to accomplish/revise in your response?
- What did your response look like, sound like, feel like, etc?
- Had you ever dealt with a similar situation before?
- Did you respond in way that you think was effective? What would you change if you could do it again?
- Did you possess a way of thinking, communicating, and/or understanding that put you at an advantage or disadvantage?
- What was the result? Did you learn something? Did you teach something?
- Who was participating/watching/involved?
- How might others benefit from your experience?

Arrangement

For this project, you *may* wish to construct a chronological narrative. Or, you *may* wish to provide a non-chronological analysis, selecting non sequential scenes that tell a story when placed together. Regardless, be sure to keep in mind S.W.A.P. as you consider R.A.I.D.S! Tell your audience a story, but do so with a clear purpose and sense of audience.

Audience

To whom you write is up to you. However, please have a clear understanding of why they might be interested in reading about your experience(s), as well as what they might gain after reading about them.

Delivery

Your typed essay will...

- Be 4-6 pages.
- Formatted according to MLA (watch this: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=24Y31UrG2q4>).
- Be submitted with a cover letter that helps me understand your decision-making and writing processes. .