

Post-secondary educational classes are put in place to assist students along their path to a career, unfortunately, the information taught in GEP courses is too often memorized merely to pass the exam, and then forgotten. Students are rarely so impacted by such a course, that the knowledge gained while enrolled in it is taken with them in their future educational and professional lives. I have personal experience with such incidents and was initially concerned that the same events would occur during this course, as I had little interest in writing at its beginning. Now having come to the final days of the class, I am overjoyed to have proven myself wrong. Not only has this class enhanced my writing capabilities, but it has completely changed my outlook on the subject, to whom I accredit my to my professor Mr. Gillespie. The documents in this portfolio demonstrate the skills and knowledge that I have acquired while enrolled in this class, as well as the development of my writing dexterity, and most importantly, my attitude towards it.

Contained in the portfolio are a collection of major papers, discussions, and free writes that were assigned throughout the course, including rough and final drafts for the major papers. Each item in the portfolio demonstrates different skills and newly learned information. The first major paper assignment prompted students to expand upon their writing career before the start of this class. In her research article, *Sponsors of Literacy*, Deborah Brandt explains, "Literacy is sponsored by people, institutions, and circumstances that both make it possible for a person to become literate and shape the way the person actually acquires literacy" (68). Literacy sponsors, educational backgrounds, and past experiences influencing one's rhetorical strategies were all described in great detail. My writing had already seen improvement from the start of the

class, and I began to open my mind to writing more and more with each word I typed. I analyzed a scholarship essay that was written prior to my admittance to UCF in order to reflect on my overall use of rhetoric and establish a better understanding of its definition in the second major paper. As Ann Johns defines them, communities of practice are “complex collections of individuals who share genres, language, values, concepts, and ‘ways of being’” (322). The third and final major paper was the most exciting and most beneficial in my eyes because it provided me the opportunity to reach beyond my comfort zone, and explore a community that I was interested in. The process in writing the work consisted of interviewing individuals from a particular community of practice, (in my case, the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics) and reflecting on the specific genres that are used to communicate within the community.

The weekly discussions assigned each prompted students to respond to questions that encouraged anticipation for the upcoming major paper. I appreciated that these weekly assignments were not just meaningless homework grades, but that they actually helped me better understand the topics we were discussing in class, and how to prepare for the major paper following. Free writes were advantageous in encouraging spontaneity and freedom from constraints; they helped get my brain prepared for class and made it easier to focus when I started the class productively.

Not only did the assignments help develop my writing, but my peer reviewers and instructor acted as fresh eyes to analyze my work, and provided comments to further improve it. After we completed the rough draft of each major paper, my peer reviewers and I would share our writings and were encouraged to look for certain aspects in it, as well as any suggestions and praise we had. By exposing my writing to individuals other

than myself, I was made aware that not everyone reading my work has the same mind as I do, not everyone can fill in the missing pieces, and not everyone can follow my stream of consciousness. This realization made me explain more details in my writing as if I were writing to someone who knew nothing about the subject. I was also made aware of the truth that Anne Lamott described in her article, *Shitty First Drafts*, "...writing is not perfectible, that writers always have more to learn, and that writing is a process of trying and trying again" (852). As someone who has always strived for perfection, coming to terms with this reality was difficult at first, but has changed my outlook on writing by allowing me more freedom and room for experimentation. My instructor assisted me by reviewing my writing and explaining why he was suggesting what he was and then elaborated by providing multiple examples of how I could accomplish those goals. By reviewing and editing others papers, and having mine reviewed, I developed a more critical eye in my writing and a more acute attention to detail.

Changes in my thought process after I have written something have changed, but also my writing overall. I have witnessed my writing tendencies to evolve with much more meticulousness and purpose than ever before. At the beginning of the course, I was insecure and lacked motivation in my writing. As the class went on, I noticed myself becoming more excited to write, and establish a sense of confidence in my abilities, and it was evidenced in my pieces. My papers began to exude this newly found confidence, established more flow and cohesiveness, and demonstrated a more refined language facility. With this new confidence, came new interest, I started to actively seek new ways to improve my writing. I began reading more, looking up unfamiliar words I came

across while reading and taking the time to write to the best of my ability. A previously dreaded task evolved into an exciting challenge that I was eager to take on.

To only pick a few items that illustrate the changes mentioned above is a difficult task. I feel that my writing improved with each assignment that I completed; that each homework piece provided improvements in different areas. Discussions enhance my citing and research capabilities, free writes encourage spontaneity, and major papers improve on all multiple aspects of writing. With each assignment, I was learning more by preparing for the writings and practicing the control and utilization of language that I was beginning to develop a better understanding of. If I had to select one item from my portfolio that best illustrates my change in writing, it would have to be discussion thirteen. By writing this reflection and looking back at the first piece that I wrote in this class, then at the words I was typing on the page in the present, it was clear to me that I had made significant strides in my writing capabilities, and my confidence in those capabilities. As Malcolm X explained in his article, *Learning to Read*, "I have often reflected upon the new vistas that reading opened to me. I knew right there in prison that reading had changed forever the course of my life" (113). Coming into this course, I could never have foreseen the profound impact that it has had on me. It was amazing to see how far I had come in such a brief amount of time, and what an impact the course had on my writing. I had never experienced such growth and change in perspective in a subject in all my years of schooling, especially not in one solitary semester.

Provided this opportunity of reflection, I have come into new insights about my writing that were previously unseen. Having taken some distance from my former works, I have noticed several things about myself. One: I have more abilities than I give myself

credit for. I used to believe that my writing was and always would be incapable of insighting such emotion and impact that I had read in other's work. I believed that I simply was not good enough. I have now gained the knowledge that I can be intuitive and inspiring if I put my mind to the task. Two: when I write about something I am passionate about and that I have an interest in, I can be persuasive and sometimes even a little profound; this enhances my writing abilities. For example, as seen in the most recent major paper: "The curiosity of the human mind fuels our ambition and the acquisition of knowledge; without the efforts of communication, human life would be bleak, unimpactful, and unfulfilling, with little advancements in any field of exploration or research." Three: writing is not as unpleasant as I made it out to be. With the help of my professor, peers, and my newly discovered mindset, I have established a higher capacity for writing, and a deeper sense of appreciation for the efforts and talents necessary to be an impactful communicator with people from all walks of life.