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From Mediocre to Okay

I will state my initial theory of writing before coming into the course but I will not state the final rendition of it. It is as if an author were spoiling the ending of a mediocre book in the opening lines. I also purposely do not maintain a single tone, because this is a journal of my days in this class. As such, you can imagine I had some weird days where I did not adopt my usual attitude. I have chosen to do a journal because it accurately depicts my growth and experimentation with and the development of my theory of writing over time and how each assignment individually affected it. Although it is easy to ascertain the effect of a given assignment on my theory of writing based on my length, it should be intriguing to note that things are not always so cut and dry as you would expect. One would expect the eight page research paper to have the most impact on my theory of writing but this honor actually belongs to some loquaciously trite sentence I overheard regarding coffee. I was heavily inspired by the world immersion rhetoric undertaken by one of the textbook examples provided in the class regarding a person’s struggle with learning the English language and as such have adopted several of the tropes employed by that essay. My initial theory of writing is what I believe most students had as a theory of writing before taking challenging courses in college. The theory of writing simply consisted of the thought process that went as such “what can I write that will get me an A,” and as the readers of this journal will see, I do have some elements of assigning importance to grades rather than using it to gauge the success of my work towards a specific member of the audience, for whom, sometimes the work is not even intended for. I had never pondered on whether my work is useful to anybody except the teacher who is being paid to grade it, nor did I care. My theory of writing simply consisted of the most efficient way of checking off a provided or inferred checklist in getting an A either it be two citations per paragraph, or a first person point of view needing to be adopted. I never thought on my own, rather I let the instructions do the thinking for me in approaching the audience, while I just followed them. It was like playing rhetorical legos with the instructions laid out in front of you. Sure it is quite simple to do well, but the euphoria gained from completion remains inversely proportional to the amount of time spent on it, rather than the opposite. For me, there was no greater underlying thought process, there was no theory of writing.

**September 4th Rhetorical Analysis**

I am given the liberty to do a rhetorical analysis on any medium I want. The professor said something about being interested to see if someone would do an analysis on a facebook post. I could just do a facebook post and infer more from the the text than it actually says, and then plead that my interpretation of subtext is just as valid as anybody else’s when the professor confronts me about writing 250 words on a single line of a facebook post. But how would I find such an apt facebook post and what would it even be about? I could just create a fake one and set the account to private so the professor will never find out. Would that be academic dishonesty? Do I really want to go through the trouble of all this to simply write 250 words? Yeah I don’t think so. I’m just going to do a textbook rhetorical analysis on the Myth of Sisyphus so I can namedrop Camus and sound smarter than I actually am while hoping he doesn’t find out that I’m a pseud and call it a night.

**September 13th Rhetorical Analysis Grade**

I got the paper back and it is a 90. It’s technically an A- but that is really just an A right? That’s like a 4.00 for this class, nice.

**September 14th** **Rhetorical Analysis Grade contd.**

You really do learn something new everyday. An A- is not treated the same as an A nor is an A+ just an A with a hint of ego boosting diagonal cross sections. They are worlds apart. Well ⅓ points on the GPA apart really. I really don’t want to end up with a C- in a freshman class, I think I should actually read his comment on my paper this time to explain the my grade. Okay, nice. He caught on that I simply ticked off the 4 minimum requirements for completing this paper of talking about the audience, genre, purpose, and tone. My sentences are structured boringly without ever elaborating in a manner which is not superficial. I mean it’s quite obvious I don’t really care about the assignment when, after introducing the essay, my very next sentence is “Camus’ audience are people who are…” which is then followed by “The purpose of this essay is…” without ever delving in deeper on why Camus intended his audience to be so, and why I believe this to be the purpose without offering counter examples and playing the devil’s advocate in arriving to the conclusion. I really didn't do much other than what was expected of me. I guess the next assignment when I read the phrase you “you should discuss topics such as (but not limited to),” I should spend more than a few seconds on contemplating the parenthetical phrase. I should have included my own opinions on the text and maybe engaged the audience a bit more rather than simply summarizing and regurgitating what is already present. Also all of my quotes to the text have only been to the first page rather than actually doing the essay justice and discussing it in its entirety. Let’s just be happy he didn’t give me a C-. It’s like he actually wants me to make an effort for this class.

**September 12th** **Summary of Four Sources**

I have finally been given the chance to prove myself and am tasked with finding a topic worth discussing and debating about and will have to stick with the topic for basically the entirety of this semester. I will choose a topic that impresses everyone and the professor in how fringe and unknown it is, but after my work it will become almost ubiquitous in everyday lexicon. What will I discuss, the reasoning behind footpaths being paved over in gardens with actual rock and how this carries over to technology in various factors, or will I contemplate the socio-economic factors that play into the proximity of food vendors? Whatever it is, I am excited to show the professor of my ability to work hard.

**September 16th** **Summary of Four Sources contd.**

I am a fool. I am a fool in a man’s shoes. I have spent the previous four days playing (read as losing) videogames and have completely ignored any and all work. I am currently in the library 45 minutes before class starts. I googled “cool topcis college” and after correcting the typo, clicked on the first link. It said euthanasia was pretty popular among academics to discuss. Why the lives of young kids in Asia so hotly debated, is something I don’t have the privilege of googling and finding out. Right now I am only concerned with typing as fast as possible whatever comes in my mind and playing off of my stream of consciousness. It is perhaps the height of hubris to consider yourself to be too good for a remedial class yet succumb to the pitfalls of students in the perceived derogatory status of a remedial class. If this is the last journal entry, then you will know that I have dropped out of college and decided to live my life as a hermit selling shoe laces.

**September 18th** **Summary of Four Sources contd.**

I was graded and given a 99. I think maybe I operate better under pressure and a free flowing stream of consciousness to guide me. Maybe those transcendental writers were onto something. I also perform much better in an environment where I literally have no ability to distract myself, either due to social ostracization or the technological inabilities. Because procrastinating on a computer that other people need for their assignment that is due in a few hours makes me feel like karma is going to get its kiss for me. I think writing in the library rather than at my home would be much better for my productivity. I think I’ll keep coming here. It’s like my own little office.

**October 3rd** **A Source Based Essay**

I followed the procedure that I previously thought to have worked. I sat down in the library and wrote out the entirety of the source based essay one hour before class. I let my stream of consciousness flow freely. And I got given a 92. Maybe I still have a ways to go with finding out in which environment I perform the best. The major problems in my paper could be traced back to my excessive use of my stream of consciousness approach when writing. I end up with a lot of run on sentences that never really end. For instance, consider this amalgamation of thoughts in the introductory paragraph of the essay discussing euthanasia:

There is much contention around this topic [euthanasia] as many people consider this eugenics, as a way of cleansing the gene pool of the less fit members of society when euthanasia as a topic is brought about regarding minors, as they die before they are able to continue their progeny, however, others are concerned that we try and play God deciding to whom we can and cannot bestow death upon and the grim fashion in which we empirically consider the pain and suffering a person should go through before it is morally allowed to let them take their life with the consent of the government or the hospital.

All I have to say is “Damn you Faulkner for giving me false aspirations.” I try to introduce way too many topics in a single sentence, and don’t really finish one thought before going to another. Although this would be acceptable if it were a first draft where you are simply printing your thoughts onto the paper and how they lead you from one situation to another, it is not appropriate in a literary paper whose main grace is cohesiveness. And since I don’t structure my thoughts I usually end up spending way to much time and lines on a trivial subject in the paper and talk sparsely of the matter that I am actually concerned with discussing. This means I get side tracked way too easily and spend way too much time talking about things that have no relevance to my paper. My work ends up being a jumbled mess of someone’s thoughts an hour before the work is actually due rather than a composed work of literature. One of my sentences sounds like I had a stroke while I was typing. It reads “the purpose of the article is to inform the reader that society is degrading to as it allows minors and the elderly that are unfit to die by the government.” As you can see, this clearly not the gold standard of cohesive writing. Furthemore, since my current work is based more around how I process information rather than how I would actually present it, I frequently leave out pivotal information that is necessary for the audience to know. For instance, I left out the publication of the magazine article by Munkittrick and leave out the headline for the New York Times article. I believe the least I can do before turning in my work is to work on it at least a day in advance and to proofread it on the train on the way to school and make last minute adjustments before class so it has some semblance of cohesion. Also, I might want to wait for the computer with the good keyboard unless I am fine with graduating with carpal tunnel syndrome.

**October 15th Loquaciously Trite**

So we were briefly discussing our last topic for the course which was our theory of writing. And everybody said how they absolutely needed to have coffee before writing. “You cannot speak to me before I’ve had my coffee. Orange man bad, am I right dude.” It is like there are only a limited number of thoughts that people are limited to thinking. They always talk about the same old topics, with the same old positions and regurgitate the same opinions that they hear everybody say so they can fit the mold while claiming to do all but just that. Yes, how opinionated it is for you to claim that the travel ban is bad while adding nothing new to the conversation or playing the devil's advocate for a change. Yes, we all know that the private sphere of familial life interferes with the public spheres of women’s lives and how it creates an unjust dominance hierarchy for men. But are you going to contribute to the argument? No, you’re going to keep on letting the scholars do all the thinking for you and allow yourself to record their thoughts in the neat handwriting of the illiterate and consider them your own.

But Anas, the poem we read today about depression isn’t supposed to say anything new but add someone else’s perspective to the situation. Yes, I am aware that no two poems are alike, but what is the actual purpose of the poem. I am not asking of the literary purpose which is to inform the audience of such ailments and the difficulties in depression, I am asking of the genuine purpose to humanity that such a work serves. Does it only exist to serve as a temporary distraction in our lives and to let us dissociate if even for a moment. Those words have never forked any lightning, they are as pointless as a scream into the void. Now I am not advocating for the dismissal of any and all works unless they are absolutely original and have within them words and ideas that have never been thought of before. Instead I am arguing for consciousness in your writing. To actually imbue your work with a meaning of purpose that will actually be of use to somebody. And not in the sense that somebody needs a few sources to finish their english assignment so they skim through your work and add it on to their list of citations, I mean your work should genuinely be useful to the people for whom the work is intended. I feel as though a lot of people are writing for grades rather than using their grades to assess themselves. They lock themselves into a corner wherein they are too afraid of taking academic risks and doing something unconventional. It begs the question of what separates my work from the millions of other works on euthanasia? Is isn’t the actual content, but the manner in which it is presented. The poem about depression still is unsuccessful in this regard. It takes on no new perspective nor presents it in a special manner. If I were to genuinely struggle with depression and I came across the poem perchance, it would be utterly useless to me. I would be able to acknowledge that it was written for me and I can see the purpose it attempts to accomplish. But it absolutely fails. It would not consolidate me either in the simpleness of its words and the broken structure to which I could relate to or in the rhyming scheme that I would lose control over like my hypothetical disease would want me to believe. There is no beauty or grace. It simply says what is best said by Henry Thoreau that happiness is like a butterfly and the more you chase it, the more it eludes you. The only true way to acquire it is to turn your attention to other things, whereupon you will find it finally gracing you with its presence. If she had merely paid homage to such a work I would have been okay, but she didn’t. But my argument falls apart when you consider it being an attempt at an objective analysis of a subjective prospect. I don’t know myself what it means for work to have a purpose. I don’t know what it means to create knowledge in a meaningful way. I don’t know whether any of my works for this class have a genuine audience rather than my professor, and the farcical audience I claim to have just so I can check off one of the criterias for the assignment. All I know is that there is a math test next class which I haven’t studied for. God I hope he doesn’t test me on trigonometric integrations.

**October 22nd** **Research Paper on Euthanasia**

Some goober took my usual computer seat and now I am typing on one of the worst computer keyboards known to man. Some say this keyboard was placed here as a practical joke by the Museum of Torturous Instruments. Regardless, today in class we were talking about how to differentiate your research paper and drafting a question worth asking and worth answering. One of the simple tests you can do to any question is to see if it can be simply answered with a simple yes or no. I thought this was not at all accurate since there plenty of binary questions that are still quite hard to argue such as “Should abortion/ gun control/ marijuana/ death penalty be legal?” But then an appended constraint would be that the question at hand should also factor for the argument behind arriving to the conclusion and questions such as “Did it rain on the 5th of November 2018 at 1:25 pm in the City College of New York?” would be terrible research questions, but I disagree once more. The question sounds like an intriguing book title if one were to argue the philosophy of epistemology(the investigation of what distinguishes justified belief from opinion), metaphysics (nature of reality and whether we can verify it), and/or linguistics in an ethnographic concept (what constitutes as rain in a desert does not constitute as rain in a rainforest.) And then an idea struck me. Eureka! I should just swap out the keyboards of the two computers when she goes to the restroom. But the second idea was that if you are unsure about how you would further your research question and exponentially increase its depth, then you should look to philosophy. Any question can be a research question, thus I think you should consider the mass literature on what are bad research questions as heuristics for arriving at a good research question rather than gospel which you have to abide by to make your work have any validity. In my opinion, the best research question is one which the researcher has genuine interest in. All else can be appended. Interest, however cannot be.

However, I also needed to limit the scope of my philosophical analysis to that which could be answered in eight pages. So I settled on the question of the ethicality of the placements of impediments on the autonomy of euthanasia using a contemporary school of thought regarding natural rights. I believe that my work is genuinely useful to those lawmakers and doctors who would need reasoning for their beliefs. It can be used by people to come up with reasoning after a belief has been established or if they need reasoning in coming up with a belief. My work helps both types of people. Since my topic is something so universal and egalitarian as universal rights, I believe nobody should have a problem with the base I use in order to state my argument as opposed to if I were to have a base on continental Marxist philosophy. Thus, I believe the most important part in your writing is to work off of a base that is universally accepted or claim a base you adopt should be so and provide reasoning for it. Surely the former is easier, but the latter is much more rewarding and stimulates much more debate. I think I have some semblance now on what it means to create knowledge and what is the essence of knowledge. Knowledge is information with intent. For instance, consider the one of the main arguments in my research paper regarding Camus. The information provided is that there is no meaning in life and life is an existential vacuum, it is absurd. This information although important, can be regarded as trivia if the person reading this is religious and does not conform to such heretical arguments. But if the reader is skeptical and agnostic, then this information will take on the role of knowledge if he were to consider this in an absurdist point of view. How would one assign meaning to life and why is the only serious philosophical question suicide? If the researcher or the reader did not have any intent on what to do with that information it is useless. What my drawn out example hopes to elaborate is that some research questions, although are appropriate research questions still do not constitute as knowledge unless the researcher has some intent with the information that he is presenting. And if the intent is simply to get a good grade, then it was never written to be used after being graded. It becomes trivial. Thus my theory of writing is that before one even drafts their first piece of writing, they should consider what the genuine purpose of this work is. Who are you actually writing for? Work without purpose is merely labor. It will not stand the test of time and will be forgotten as soon as it is graded. You should attempt to immortalize your work or if you are not interested in that, then at least attempt to write in a manner that great nuances of your time period can be extrapolated from your writing. The information presented should have a purpose, or else it will merely fall into the realms of trivia. Creation of knowledge need not be original and never been thought of before, it can also be something that has been known for a long time, but if you merely share that knowledge with a broader audience by making it more successful, then you are successful in my book.