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Major Assignment 3: Autoethnographic Essay

Everything I Learned About My Writing

When I think about my writing identity, the first thing that comes to mind is how much it has changed over the years through practice. I learned to write in school, the same way most people do. I started learning it in elementary school, continued through middle school essays and high school research papers, and now major assignments in college. Writing has shifted from something I used to dread to something that feels a lot easier and more natural. Over time, I have developed certain habits and skills that shape who I am as a writer.

One thing I've realized this semester is that writing becomes an entirely different experience depending on whether I care about the topic. When I'm actually interested in what I'm writing about, it doesn't really feel like writing an essay for school. Instead, it feels more like I'm just explaining something I already think about all the time. But when the topic is something like a 200-year-old book written by a guy who spent most of his life farming goats in England (I'm pretty sure this was an actual thing in high school English III Dual Enrollment), the essay takes a lot longer to write. I stare at the screen, type one sentence, delete it, close my laptop, take a 3-hour break, then come back and do it all over again. This idea connects to Mike Rose's argument that strict rules can shut writers down. In "Rigid Rules, Inflexible Plans," he says, "The five students who experienced blocking were all operating either with writing rules or with planning strategies that impeded rather than enhanced the composing process." (Rose 390). That's exactly what high school essays felt like. But when I can choose the topic and write semi-casually, as if I'm giving a speech, the writing comes naturally. Writing is ever so slightly enjoyable to me when I can sound like myself and write about something interesting.

My writing process feels like thinking out loud on paper. I start by reading the prompt, and then I think about what I'd say if someone asked me the question in real life. That helps me figure out what I want to write. After I finish writing the essay off the dome, I go through a couple of stages before submitting it. First, I go back and reread it, fix anything I don't like, then have Grammarly fix the grammar and wording to make it sound more advanced, and fix the sentence structure to be more cohesive. And finally, I run it through ChatGPT against the rubric so I don't miss anything important (I recently started doing this. If I had done this for MA1, I probably could've gotten a higher score).

One thing I've noticed is that I write speech-style essays well (like what I did for MA2). If my essays were read out loud, they'd sound natural, like someone giving a speech. That works for me because my thoughts come out in full sentences anyway. Laura Carroll actually explains why this kind of natural reasoning happens in "Backpacks vs. Briefcases." She says, "Chances are you have grown up learning to interpret and analyze these types of rhetoric. They become so commonplace that we don't realize how often and how quickly we are able to perform this kind of rhetorical analysis." (Carroll 48). My writing uses the same natural reasoning, walking the reader through how I see something rather than forcing a fake perspective to fit the essay guidelines.

Even though I'm getting better at writing in my own style, I know there are things I need to work on. One of those things is making sure I do every part of a rubric. Sometimes I get really into one idea and go way too deep into it, and then I don't give as much detail into other parts of the essay, which can feel uneven (like my essay in MA1). My brain gets focused on an idea, and then suddenly I'm three paragraphs into something the rubric only needed a couple of sentences for. That happens because every assignment belongs to a different discourse community, and

each one expects slightly different things from me as a writer. In Dan Melzer's "Understanding Discourse Communities," Melzer says, "Each of these academic fields had their own goals, their own genres, their own writing conventions, their own formats for citing sources, and their own expectations for writing style." (Melzer 106). Understanding that helps me see why I have to balance my writing and match it to the specific writing situation. For example, in MA1 I wasn't writing an essay about my experience being a production technician; I was writing an essay on how that experience resembled being in a discourse community. I'm good at writing when the topic is interesting, but I want to improve my ability to put that same effort into all the parts of the essay.

My feelings toward writing have changed a lot over time. Most of my academic writing experiences before college were negative because I had to write about super boring things. Not only the topic, but also the way the assignments were structured. A lot of the rules felt unnecessary, and I was writing to meet the rubric criteria rather than to get a point across. I care about a topic, I don't mind writing about it, but if the topic is boring, outdated, or feels way off from anything I care about, then writing becomes a lot harder.

Over this semester, my view of writing has gotten better. Being allowed to write about things I actually care about made an enormous difference. For example, writing about my discourse community as a production technician for MA1 didn't feel like a dreadful assignment; it felt like telling a story from my own experience. And MA2, where I turned my essay into a YouTube video, made writing feel like something I could blend with something I actually enjoy (video editing). That combination made the whole assignment feel more creative instead of strict and traditional. Because the assignments this semester allowed more freedom, I actually felt like

I could write more about what I actually felt, and less like I was just checking boxes on a rubric. I think that goes back to what we talked about on the first day of class: anyone can be a writer.

What My Recorded Writing Sessions Taught Me

After reflecting on my writing identity in Part 1, I wanted to see how closely that identity matched what I actually do when I write. Describing myself as a writer based on memory and experience is one thing, but watching myself write in real time is something completely different. Recording my sessions and taking observation notes gave me a chance to compare the writer I believe myself to be with the writer who appears on camera. This transition from self-description to self-observation allowed me to understand my writing process in a much more honest and detailed way. Once I began reviewing the recordings, I realized that some of the habits I discussed in Part 1 were accurate, and others I did not know about. What stood out the most was how consistent certain habits were across two completely different environments.

Before doing this assignment, I never thought much about what I actually look like when I write. I knew I checked my phone sometimes, and I knew how long it took to do certain things, like thinking about what to write. However, recording myself and taking observation notes revealed a lot about my writing process. These observations helped me see the difference between the writing identity I imagined in Part 1 and the writing habits that actually showed up

when I watched myself write. I learned that some of the things I believed about myself were accurate, but I also discovered habits I did not realize I had.

Across both writing sessions, I always begin slowly. In both my Cocoa Beach and Nike sessions, I spent the first 10-15 minutes rereading the instructions, reviewing what I had written before, and getting mentally ready. This matches the warm-up period I described in Part 1. What was interesting was how consistent the pattern was. After any breaks or interruptions, I would always reread before continuing. This shows that rereading is essential to my writing process. It helps me get into the right headspace to continue writing.

My observations also confirmed my belief that once I start writing, I become very focused. In Session 1 at Cocoa Beach, I wrote for long stretches without stopping. I only paused to check a notification or take a sip of lemonade. None of those distractions pulled me out of the writing mindset. They were small and predictable, and they did not interrupt the flow I built once I started typing. This supported what I said in Part 1 about momentum playing a significant role in my writing. Once I build that momentum, I stay locked in.

Session 2 at Nike revealed another side of my writing process. The environment had more unpredictable interruptions, which affected me much more than the small breaks in Session 1. Talking to two Vivint recruiters and taking a client phone call forced me to restart mentally. Each time I returned to the assignment, I reread my work before continuing. This showed me that the environment matters more than I initially thought. In Part 1, I mentioned that I adjust my communication depending on the community I am in. However, these observations showed that I also adjust my writing behavior depending on the physical setting and the level of control I have over it.

Interpreting these observations through ideas from the course helped me understand myself more clearly. Boroditsky talks about how the languages we use shape the way we think. Watching myself write reminded me that environment plays a similar role. The beach environment influenced how I approached writing, as did the campus environment, filled with unexpected interactions. The physical and social surroundings shaped what I paid attention to and how easily I could build momentum. My observations showed that it has a notable impact on my writing process.

Rose's ideas also helped me make sense of the patterns I noticed. I do not use rigid outlines or detailed plans. Instead, I rely on allowing my writing to unfold naturally. When I saw myself pausing, thinking, rereading, and then writing in long focused stretches, I can see that these actions are my own way of creating structure without enforcing strict rules. My writing strategy is flexible, but it maintains a recognizable pattern across different environments.

One of the most meaningful things I learned about myself came from comparing my imagined writing identity to what the recordings showed. In Part 1, I described myself as someone who writes best through momentum, who prefers thinking while writing instead of outlining, and who adjusts tone depending on the situation. Watching myself write confirmed all of those things. However, I also learned that I rely on structure more than I realized. I start by reading, then write, go back and correct with Grammarly, and repeat that every time I write. This structure helps me stay organized mentally, especially after distractions. The observations made me realize that my writing process is not based solely on momentum. It is also built on a consistent writing process.

Overall, this assignment taught me that my writing process has a pattern, is flexible, and is heavily shaped by the environment and my mental clarity. I learned that I need time to warm

up, that momentum drives my productivity, and that rereading helps me get into writing mode. I also learned that I am resilient when faced with interruptions, even when they slow me down. Most importantly, I now understand that the writer I am in my head and the writer I am in reality are very similar. Watching myself write revealed the habits that truly define my writing identity, and these insights will help me refine my process moving forward.

Works Cited

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Session 1

Location and Environment: At Cocoa Beach, sitting on a chair on the beach near a condo building. It's sunny and partly cloudy with a light breeze, and I can hear waves and people talking nearby. Two people are throwing a football in the water. People occasionally walk or jog past me. My girlfriend is sitting on a chair next to me. I am playing beach music on my JBL quietly in the background.

Day and Time: Thursday afternoon, 3:53 PM (when I started).

Background and Physical Appearance: Wearing a bathing suit, using my laptop. I have my phone, a lemonade, my beach bag, my JBL, and my girlfriend next to me (life is good).

Minutes:

0–10: I open up the assignment sheet for Major Assignment 3 and reread the directions. I scroll through Canvas to make sure I have everything I need. I get distracted briefly, and I go through some emails, but I quickly get back on track.

10–13: I start a new document but pause for a bit, trying to figure out how to begin. I ask ChatGPT for some ideas on where to start.

13–14: After getting some inspiration from ChatGPT and the "Portrait of a Writer" questions, I begin writing.

14–32: I start writing, and I am locked in for a good amount of time.

32–35: I stop for a second to look at a notification on my phone. Then I look around the beach and drink lemonade.

35–54: I go back to writing.

54–66: I check my phone for a minute, then continue writing.

66–67: I save my work, close my laptop, and enjoy the rest of my day.

End of Session 1

Session 2

Location and Environment: Sitting on a bench outside Nike Residence Hall at UCF. It's afternoon and it's quiet except for a few people walking by. The weather is really nice. I can hear the AC units and the faint sound of cars in the distance.

Day and Time: Friday at 1:32 PM (when I started)

Background and Physical Appearance: Wearing a t-shirt and shorts. I have my laptop on the table and my backpack and scooter next to me.

Minutes:

0–10: I open the same document from yesterday and reread what I wrote.

10–20: I continue writing.

20–31: Two people approach me asking if I would be interested in a Vivint internship. I don't feel like talking with them, but I still do to be nice. After about 10 minutes, they finally leave, and I get back to writing.

31–41: I take some time to get back to where I left off, but after a quick reread, I continue writing.

41–53: I get a phone call from a client and we talk for about 12 minutes.

53–62: I make a few notes on what I discussed on the phone with my client, and I add a few tasks to my reminders to get done later. I start with one of those tasks briefly before getting back to the English assignment.

62–79: I continue writing after rereading some of the essay to get back on track.

79–81: I reread what I have so far, fix a few grammar mistakes with Grammarly.

81–82: I save my work, close Google Chrome, and open a Disney+ tab. I watched *Captain America: The First Avenger*.

End of Session 2