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Writ 101, Section 22

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The Two R's

From the very first moment I stepped through the door, I had the mindset that a Writing 101 course was going to be a piece of cake. "My high school English classes have prepared me for anything that could possibly be thrown my way", I thought. After finding a seat however, my instructor began to explain the course, and that feeling slowly diminished. We were told that the main objective of Writing 101 is to teach writing as a process. Brittany, my instructor, continued to explain two main steps of writing as a process; reflection and revision. I became very apprehensive, and that confidence I once had was long gone by now. Throughout the first month of class, however, many exercises have been assigned emphasizing the importance of "the two R's". Reflection and revision are two concepts that seemingly go hand in hand, in which one affects or leads to the other. A writer must first reflect on their writing, before they can choose what parts they will eventually revise. During this course, I have realized that these two methods of writing are necessities, in order to become a better writer. My viewpoints about reflection and revision have changed drastically over the past six weeks, and are continuing to evolve as a result of my further application of the two.

Writing as a process is an unfamiliar task that I have been faced with during this writing course. Throughout previous writing courses I was asked to write a paper, turn it in, and would then receive a grade on that paper. Afterwards, I would tuck the assignment away and never give it a second thought. Alternately, this class has pushed me to start thinking about my work after it

is complete, and the ways in which I can improve as a writer. The extra step involved with thinking about one's writing is called reflection. The post write exercise, accompanying our personal academic argument, allowed me to not only think back on how well I did on this eight page paper and all the effort I put into it, but also urged me to begin considering things I could have done better. This exercise is an example of reflection, and it kick started my views of writing as a process. I first realized that my personal academic argument had a ton of information in it, and could have possibly been backed by more personal experience that I had with the subject. Since I had limited experience with my subject of biodiversity, I chose to include some of my thoughts and opinions instead. "In my opinion" I explained, "the human race must analyze how their actions affect other species surrounding them". I easily could have related myself more to the topic. I might have instead explained how the lack of biodiversity would affect my everyday life, or the ways in which I have noticed my actions affecting other species. Reflecting on my work during the personal academic argument has made me realize the ways in which I can improve this paper to revise it for my working portfolio.

Many exercises that were given to me in class involved revision. For the first time, I was being told that revising a paper is not an individual process. I was so accustomed to the process in which my teacher told me what they would like to see changed in my paper, I then took it home and fixed the small errors, and eventually turned it right back in the next day. Revision involving group work was an unusual thought to me, because I had never before done peer editing and reviewing that involved anything more than checking grammatical errors. When it came time for the peer conferences about my personal academic argument, I was slightly confused as to what I should expect. Would my reviewer tell me that I had spelling mistakes, or run on sentences? I was surprised once the peer conferences started, that I was being told more

than simple grammatical errors. Meghan, my peer reviewer, had a lot of insight on where my paper needed more specific examples, and where it didn't quite flow very well while she was reading it. "This part about the elephants, although I know why you put it in, just feels to me like it was thrown into your paper", explained Meghan, "one minute I was reading about the Endangered Species Act, and the next it's talking about elephants". This opened my eyes to the fact that although I knew why I put that specific example into the paper, my reader did not. I then became focused on putting a better introduction of that paragraph in, to make sure that a future reader of my paper would not feel lost like Meghan did. For example, I wanted to explain how the Endangered Species Act related to elephants, because they are a species at risk of becoming endangered. Reflecting on the peer conference allowed me to better revise the final draft of my paper, to clear up any hidden problems that my paper had.

This course is teaching me more than I had originally anticipated. Everyone thinks that they can pinpoint their specific strengths and weaknesses as a writer, but new exercises can definitely open their eyes to all of the ways in which they can improve their writing skills. I am surprised by how confident I was as a writer before coming into this class, yet I have learned many new skills because of Writing 101. However, I still have some goals that I would like to accomplish during my time in this class. The most important thing that I would like to accomplish is to take others' opinions and advice into further consideration. Although I understand that peer reviewing is set up to enhance my writing, I still have a hard time thinking that someone knows something that I do not about my own paper. I am learning to appreciate what others have to add to my writing, and the advice that they have to give. I think that the idea of trusting what others have to say can be very useful when trying to improve as a writer.