The Student Writing Anthology
2013-2014

University of Massachusetts Amherst Writing Program

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Introduction

PATRICIA ZUKOWSKI

Since 1982, the Writing Program has worked from the core belief that undergraduate students are immersed in a rich print and digital culture and that they are already writers whose ideas are worth sharing, crafting, and revising into prose that should be read. This 37th edition of the UMass Amherst Student Writing Anthology maintains this longstanding respect for student writing by collecting select essays written for first-year writing classes in 2012. It also fulfills the critical goal to help these essays circulate among a wider readership.

We invite you to contemplate the critical issues and original thinking in these essays, and for those who are reading as writers, to also consider the effects of each writer’s rhetorical choices. Thus, Part I begins with essays selected from each of the four units of Basic Writing. Basic Writing here at the University of Massachusetts serves two distinct purposes: it is a prerequisite for College Writing for some students and also grants U.S. Diversity credit. This dual mission—both process-based writing course and diversity course—means that Basic Writing students read extensively on issues related to diversity in the U.S. and then write about these issues in informal and formal ways. In this course, students read and write about the numerous literacies through which we negotiate our worlds, as we examine how these literacies contribute to identity construction. The excellent writing from this course asks us to consider how various efforts to normalize these multiple literacies lead to the oppression of some identities and discourse communities at the expense of others. Such questions about language, education, and culture are essential considerations for all college students.

Part II, devoted to College Writing, illustrates the goals of that course: to write with purpose and power, to develop one’s ideas critically, and to tailor effectively one’s prose to a select audience. In this course, students are asked to explore topics that are personally meaningful and to write about these topics to readers who need to engage with these ideas. In these essays, readers will find that students are not only writing to our university community, but also translating the thinking and research valued in the academy to a broader public. After a brief introduction to the course, this section begins with essays from three of the five units: “Inquiring into Self,” “Interacting with Text,” and “Adding to the
Conversation." Our fourth unit is called the “TBA” because each of our teachers designs a unique project; while these units build on goals and concepts covered in the first three units of the course, we have not included essays from this unit since each project is specific to each class. The section concludes with the final essay assignment, “The Writer’s Reflection.” Throughout the course, students reflect on various aspects of their drafting, revision process, and the final product of their work. In “The Writer’s Reflection,” students look back over the whole body of work they have produced in the course, consider their struggles and successes, then synthesize into one paper what they believe are the most salient lessons they will carry with them from the course. These papers offer sound and insightful advice to any writer.

We welcome readers to discover the many rhetorical choices available to us in academic writing and to learn from the wealth of ideas and experiences that emerge from each writer’s personal context. Finally, we hope our readers will enjoy the excellent work produced by UMass Amherst students.
Acknowledgments

We are grateful to so many people who made this book possible: the First Year Writing instructors who nominated their students’ excellent texts to the anthology (far too many names to recognize here), and all the students who so eagerly agreed to share their work so that others might learn from it. Furthermore, not one step of this process would have gone forward without the extremely competent, dedicated, and enthusiastic assistance of our office assistant, Jillian Sacco. Jillian’s work was key in every step of producing this book and was as professional as any permanent staff member of the program. Needless to say, she exceeded in her efforts on all fronts. Finally, we wish to thank Pearson Custom Publishing for agreeing to publish this book and bundle it with UMass Amherst’s custom edition of Lester Faigley’s *Little Penguin Handbook*, a required text in first-year courses; through this agreement, all our first-year students have access to this valuable learning resource—also a required text in both *Basic* and *College Writing*.

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The efforts of our *College Writing* Anthology Committee members were extraordinary. Throughout the entire 2012-2013 academic year, they were fully engaged in every task that it takes to put this book together. Every week, they received a batch of 25-40 papers, read them intensively and attentively, scored and commented on each one. The committee met every Friday afternoon to thoughtfully, thoroughly, and spiritedly discuss each text for consideration that week. Three volunteer graduate student committee members, Shastri Akella, Thomas Hopper, and Nirmala Iswari showed graciousness and dedication throughout the entire process of selecting the essays for the *College Writing* section. We were privileged to have our director Haivan Hoang join the committee this year. Not only did she participate in all our meetings; she also brought new ideas to the formatting of the book, including revising the general introduction, the introduction to the *Basic Writing* section, and the *College Writing* unit prefaces. Deirdre Vinyard, Deputy Director of the Writing Program, also deserves special recognition. Deirdre not only served on the Anthology Committee, reading every *College Writing* submission; she also chaired a subcommittee for selecting and editing the essays from *Basic Writing*. Finally, she also coordinated and took responsibility for running general committee meetings while I was on sick leave during fall semester, for which I am extremely grateful.

Patricia Zukowski
Editor, *College Writing* Section
I want to express my gratitude to all the teachers and students who made the Basic Writing section of the anthology possible this year. The essays here represent the talent of our student writers here at UMass and the dedication of the small group of Basic Writing teachers who coach and encourage their students through the writing process. This year, Marissa Carrere, one of our very dedicated Basic Writing teachers, served with me on a subcommittee to do the difficult work of narrowing the many excellent submissions to the nine published essays in this book. I appreciate her keen eye and close reading of all the essays that we received.

Deirdre Vinyard
Editor, Basic Writing Section
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PART I. Exploring Literacy

Essays from *Basic Writing*
My Reading, My Writing
Literacies Where They Live

Preface

This collection of essays represents some of the excellent writing done by students in Basic Writing (English Writing 111) during 2012. Basic Writing centers on issues of language and power in the U.S. Students read and write about the myriad literacies by which and through which they negotiate their worlds and how these literacies contribute to identity construction. The first essay in this collection, “Make it Personal,” serves as a student’s introduction to the course—some advice about writing for those entering Basic Writing. This essay captures in a few short pages some of the key concepts learned over the semester.

In the first two units, students write about how literacy works in their worlds—they explore their own literacy and language histories and the discourses circulating in their communities. In their writing, students interrogate the role that language and literacy have in their lives. In the first unit, “My Reading, My Writing,” students explore their literacy histories, producing essays on aspects of their own practice, either past or present. Cedrick Tabales has chosen to narrate his initiation to the written language of music in his piece, “Music as Literature.” Vicky Chang tells about the various literacies she controls through a discussion of her dual language identities, something she sees as “Unsettled.”

In the second unit, “Literacies Where They Live,” students read texts that examine literacies from an academic perspective and then apply this lens to a home literacy, discussing also the concept of a discourse community. Nicholas Ross explores the language of the restaurant worker, illustrating the importance of learning a new discourse in order to work well in a new setting, relating his experience to that described in “Learning the Language,” by Perri Klass. Xiaoxiao Hu tackles the difficult topic of intolerance, explaining that we are sometimes unaware of how our views on certain issues are shaped by the language that surrounds us. She draws on the work of David Wallace, “The Poems Came Late: Literacy as Cultural Dialog” to support her ideas.
For those who know me well, they know I am not the best writer in the world, but who is? I don’t usually write much—only when I am assigned to write papers in school. The bad thing is, when writing a formal research paper or one of a topic that does not interest me, I usually feel there is something holding me back. Sometimes it’s just a lack of concentration. Most of the time it is the lack of knowing what point I am trying to convey. Anne Lamott writes in her essay, “Very few writers really know what they are doing until they’ve done it” (20). I can really connect to this, in the way that I never know what I am trying to get across until I am already halfway there. Usually I just start to write whatever comes to mind.

After I get all my ideas down, what helps me to clean up what I have already done is to stop writing and take a step back. Sometimes I take a snack break and sometimes I leave it for a couple of hours. Then, I go back and re-evaluate what I’ve already written. I ask myself, “What is the point I’m trying to make? Do I want to continue with this? What can I do to support this?” All of these and a few more questions run throughout my head bouncing around like children on a trampoline. I think about what experiences and thoughts I can add to it to support what I am trying to say. I try to connect what I am writing to the real world and things that matter to me. It helps because at some point my brain feels like it turns to mush, and this process helps solidify it again, like pressing a refresh button. I need to filter through all of these ideas in my head, because I don’t want to draw out one boring thought process and put my teacher to sleep before the second paragraph.

My college essay is a perfect example of a time in which I used this process. I started out writing about my passions, got about 200 words into it and could not think of anything else to write. So, I walked away, went and took a shower and got a snack. As soon as I sat back down with my computer, I re-read my essay and decided it was complete crap. So I deleted it and started over. I picked a subject that I felt very strongly about and knew that the words would just flow out of me. I wrote a letter to a family member who had recently passed away, my cousin Stephanie.
I started out the letter with the exact memory of when I learned that she had passed, where I was and what I was doing. I said how hard it was and how shocking it was. I continued to write about the lessons that she had taught me, the good times that we shared together, and that I loved her. The biggest part was a final goodbye. I explained that the last time I saw her I didn’t say goodbye and that I was eternally sorry for that. I told her about all the guilt I had about it, even though I knew she had forgiven me. She was not the type to hold a grudge. I needed to write this to her because, up until that point, I couldn’t grieve her loss. I was still holding on to a big part of her, not wanting to let go. This was my version of a goodbye. I think writing this letter was the best thing that could’ve happened in this situation. It helped me let go of the past and put a new perspective on the future. It taught me to always live each day to its fullest and to never take anything for granted. It also taught me something else—that maybe my writing would be easier if I made it about something personal or something familiar to me. This was the first time I connected my personal life with writing I had to do scholastically, and I realized that it had made it a lot easier. The advice I would give to others who have trouble with writing like I do would be this: Make it about something that is personal to you—it makes it much easier to articulate the words that are needed.

Works Cited

Music as Literature

CEDRICK TABALES

Have you ever stopped to think of how much we read or what kinds of things we read besides text? I remember when I first decided I wanted to play an instrument. I was in eighth grade and was playing a video game called Guitar Hero. At the time, it was a new type of game in which one would hold a fake, plastic guitar with five buttons on the neck that you have to press while hitting the strum button to play the note shown on the screen. There was a small selection of instruments you could play: the guitar and bass guitar. As I was watching the notes pass by on the TV screen of the bass, I actually could hear the sounds the instrument created. It was a low deep sound that caught my attention. I know what you may be thinking. “This is a silly reason to get into an instrument. This video game has little relevance to an actual guitar.” I have to agree. There are only five buttons on the Guitar Hero guitar while a real guitar has six strings and over twenty frets. But I believe it doesn’t matter where your inspiration comes from.

My first bass guitar was a birthday present. I started bass lessons soon after, and it was quite an experience. It was very difficult at first remembering what notes the small black symbols represented. Once I had a good grasp on what they were, I had to translate that to my fingers on the frets along the neck of the bass. As I gained more confidence with this task, I had to tackle the syncopated rhythms of the songs I read. I had to learn how long each note was supposed to be played. This was frustrating because it took a great deal of time getting used to the jumble of quarter notes mixed with eighth notes and sixteenth notes. The difficulty of reading music is similar to learning a new language. Think of each note being a word in another language such as Spanish. It can be hard to make sense of the sentence even though you have all of the words.

I decided to join my high school’s jazz band my sophomore year. I remember my instructor mentioning the ability to read music and I thought to myself, “Reading music for the jazz band shouldn’t be too difficult.” Sure enough, I did not play one note during the first song I played. I just stared at the random notes while I listened to the rest of the band. Discouragement took over as I tried to comprehend how difficult it was to read the music that the jazz band offered. I was not nearly as talented as I wanted to be my sophomore year, but over the summer I attempted to practice every day. When I practiced reading a song over and over again, I got better at playing the song because it created pathways in my brain, allowing
me to recognize the note I encountered sooner. I think of this as analogous to sledding after it just snowed. You have to pack the snow down by going over it a couple of times before you can actually sled fast. I also got better at sight reading, which allowed me to become fast and fluent with music I had never seen before. Everything in the band became much easier as my ability to read grew.

I highly valued this talent of mine because it gave me a sense of belonging. Deciding to play an instrument changed my life because I met a wonderful group of friends in jazz band. Reading music improved my mental health because it is one of the most enjoyable things I’ve ever done with a group of people. Listening to the sounds I create is a rewarding experience. I was exposed to a new genre of music when I joined the jazz band. I began to broaden my music appreciation. Playing music with other great musicians was very invigorating. Listening to how all the sounds mesh together is indescribable. It is difficult to explain exactly what feelings music invokes in me. I personally love reading music, not only on music through my ears as well as my eyes. I like to zone out and listen to how all of the instruments combine to create extraordinary sounds. The syncopated rhythms draw my attention as much as the smell a meal would if I was starving. I’ve given names to the type of riffs and rhythms I hear, which may be very common to the genre of music I listen to, in many songs. I listen to music on a daily basis and it gets my adrenaline going. In this sense, I believe I read music mentally when I listen to it. I listen to it very carefully and I probably would not appreciate aspects of it if I had not taken up an instrument. This definitely shows how powerful reading is in general.

I believe when it comes to music, writing is much more difficult than reading. You are required to have a great understanding of music theory. I wish I could be a great composer because I would love to create arrangements for orchestras and symphonies. My favorite pieces are the songs written for “The Lord of The Rings Trilogy.” Something about the chord progressions and melodies sounds extraordinary. Writing music is what makes composers famous and that’s what makes writing significant also. Writing music is also a way of expressing oneself. You can often tell what mood the person was in when they wrote the song. Minor chords as opposed to major chords produce more of a sad and gloomy tone. Knowing what music someone chooses to listen to can give you insight into how they are feeling.

We, as humans, are required to read many things in life. I am literate in music, which is different from the everyday text in books or newspapers. I love to listen to music, and it is fun to read new compositions. It is a totally different language in which your mind synchronizes the ink that you read into sounds. The notes are transferred from your eyes to your brain and then your fingers. Reading is essential because we do it more often than most people may realize. Reading shapes your life.
“Where are you from?” This question disturbs me every time someone asks me. Often, I find myself thinking with a disgusted voice, “Do I seriously have to answer this question?” Eventually, my lips reluctantly utter out the two-syllable word, “Taiwan.” It’s not that I don’t enjoy getting to know people’s background and culture, but there is an unfamiliar and distinct style about this simple way of getting to know someone better—at least for me, that is.

Why does it bother me? I have yet to discover my true nationality. Outwardly, I’m Chinese, but inwardly, I’m not certain.

Back in Taiwan, my best friend stopped me in the middle of recess and asked me, her eyes wide open, her eyebrows arched, “Are you really moving to America?” I remember boasting, “Yup,” followed by a grin that would not leave. That grin was soon replaced with a grimace.

When I moved to America at the age of seven, I was unaware of the hardships I would have to embrace for the next few years. I fought an intense battle within myself, trying to figure out where I truly belonged. Upon setting foot in a new, unknown environment, I observed each student meticulously as I paced down the open hallways of my school. To my astonishment, my voice located its place in the air in front of my classroom and let out my first English word, “Hi,” to a girl. It tasted distant and sounded rather forceful. When I opened my mouth again to ask of her name, an invisible force stopped me as I realized that there was a barrier in communication and it was impossible for me, who at the time knew nothing more than how to greet someone. Until then, differences between culture and language were unreal to me. I hadn’t thought about the diversity I was going to face. Never was I exposed to it previously or gave it a second thought. It shocked me how so many languages were echoing in the air simultaneously. I was completely unprepared for the difference. During the next couple of months, I struggled as I tried out the new sound of strangely shaped letters, some tall and some round. By the end of the year, my mouth was moving at the same speed as my fellow classmates, and my ears were accustomed to hearing the structure and tone of English, which soon replaced my first language.

My interest in languages sprouted immeasurably as I became more aware of this concept: In order to fully know someone, I must learn their native speech. It’s fascinating how a person’s tongue can compose distinctive types of sound, even
with hand gestures and body language, which can reveal indescribable emotions through words. Learning a language allows me to breathe in another nationality and culture, making me feel as if I have become this new race for a split second. These factors, however, are not enough to suppress my greediness to absorb more knowledge. Exploring the family background and history of my new friends emerged as another obligation. I became conscious of the fact that although I may speak their language, I may not understand a single word of it. It’s similar to the example of signing a contract without knowing the content of the deal. I felt as if I betrayed myself and my friends, thinking that I know them when in reality, I don’t even know the story of how their name came about. Behind the texts are the rich meanings of words. It can reveal much more about them, how language came to have its meaning to the person, and how it played in a person’s life.

Finding a nationality to suit me isn’t my objective. For instance, the ability to speak French while traveling in a French speaking country has made me feel as if I’m part of the local residents. I can appreciate the language and respect the citizens’ customs even more because I understand their conversation. It’s a memorable experience and way to ascertain the cause of a tradition.

A little child unoccupied by old concepts can easily receive a new thought. I never settle permanently into any certain form, organization, or ritual. I am constantly exploring for a new nationality to plunge into. To this day, I still imagine myself as the seven year old girl who just moved to America, waiting for her belief and opinion to be broadened, waiting to read the world.
Different Languages

NICHOLAS ROSS

Every day we comfortably speak to our loved ones, friends, teachers, etc., but have you ever noticed how? The way you speak to your teacher is totally different from the way you speak to a friend. It may be more or less proper; it may be faster or slower; it may even be in a different language. The way we speak is something we become accustomed to, and the way it is done is easily overlooked.

Language differs from situation to situation. In “Learning the Language,” Perri Klass writes that she does not know the lingo that the doctors around her use and describes her language difference in the hospital by stating, “If I learned nothing else during my first three months of working in the hospital as a medical student, I learned endless jargon and abbreviations” (58). The abbreviations that Klass learned are what make her feel like she is a doctor. Without her jargon, she would not feel successful nor would she fit in with the rest of her staff. I can attest to this statement; working as a food runner in a restaurant, the most important task I had to do, as well as the hardest, was to learn the “restaurant language.” Once I had mastered this language, I finally felt that I could be successful as well as fit in with the rest of the workers. It had never crossed my mind until I started working that working in a restaurant would require using a different “language.”

The languages that we have are often taken for granted.

Learning the language was harder than I had expected. I had to learn all of the different abbreviations and terminology that went along with a very detailed menu. At first, I was entirely new to this language, and I never understood the importance of it. In the beginning, I would overlook its importance. I would write in full sentences and cared about my spelling. This naïve quality lasted for less than two days when I realized I could no longer write this way if I wanted to be successful.

Just like Klass became accustomed to her “jargon,” so did I. I can look at a piece of paper that would read, “2 STK MR, no pts, sal, ND” and tell you that the order in the window would read, “two steaks, medium rare, no potatoes, with a side salad and no dressing.”

The same notion with talking was also in place, and short and to the point sentences were essential. Being able to talk as fast as possible, while still being understood, was critical in the fast paced restaurant. As a food runner, I needed to learn these techniques rather quickly because I also had to make sure all of the tables were satisfied as well as keeping the overly stressed chefs on track.
This form of language was necessary to keep the connection between all of our employees and, more importantly, help relieve the stress among our staff members. Being “spoken” to was also a totally different experience that most people are not accustomed to. At first, working was emotionally tiring as I was being yelled at constantly. Over time I had become desensitized to all of it; the loud yelling became like daily life, and I knew it was helping the chef reduce his stress. I quickly learned never to respond bitterly back to the chef because this would only make things worse; they had been working day after day without any break, and this was the least I could do to help.

Even the smallest communication problems could throw us back an extra fifteen minutes, and this was not a situation that you want to be in. Communication could make or break us. Over time, it started to become like a native tone to me, and talking like a restaurant man was no longer a problem.

Interestingly enough, the way I had been communicating night after night followed me back into my home. The languages we use influence our behavior in a way that most wouldn’t expect. The angry adrenaline and rushed attitude I had become accustomed to at work began to influence how I was talking to my family. The fast-paced, short-and-to-the-point discussions that I started using more and more often did not offend my mom. She worked in a restaurant and understood the stressful environment that I had been in day after day. I did, however, need to learn the difference between when and where to use this language that I had recently just learned. The key was being able to differentiate when and where I should be using the different languages that I had acquired. This took me a while, but that comes with any new learning experience.

The “restaurant language” that had once sounded like gibberish had become instinctive and spontaneous. Being able to switch between my “regular life” way of speaking and my “restaurant life” way of speaking was becoming as easy as flipping a switch. At first a new language may sound so different, and you may even be opposed to it, but I can truly say that without this new form of communication, I would not be working in the restaurant I am in today. Communication is our way of life.

Work Cited

Write Without the Influence of Situation

XIAOXIAO HU

David Wallace states, “Literacy is cultural dialogue” (62). That is, what we read and hear affects what we say, and what we read and say forms our literacy. Because literacy is so frequent and normal around us, it has much more influence than we used to think. Believe it or not, if we read a certain topic for some time, or we hear the theme over and over again, what we write down will somehow reflect the topic we read or hear.

In my journalism class, our professor made an interesting test for us to show how the situation around us influenced everyone. The test was totally anonymous, and she wanted us to write down the first words that came to our mind that described the phrase she would say. Like for “tea party,” most of my class wrote down “Boston,” and for “homeless” they wrote down “poor.” Then my professor said that the first word that came out of our mind might not be the description we agreed with but the one we heard most about. If the situation around us were biased, we might write down the biased speech carelessly. Thus, our professor said, for us journalists, the most important thing was to write without the influence of the situation.

The influence of the situation is powerful. We might not know whether a statement is bad or not, but because everyone around us says it could bring on disasters, we start to secretly avoid the person or the thing that appears in that statement. These instances happen almost everywhere in the world. People always have negative ideas about a controversial group of people. It doesn’t mean that everyone shows their discrimination to them, but the action is showed by each one’s instinct.

I used to think I was unbiased, until I met Sherry last semester. We had many common topics and got along with each other well. A few days after we met, she started to ask me if I had a boyfriend, and I answered no. She seemed happy and tended to ask more about whether I had discrimination against homosexual people. “No.” I answered with a definite voice. She acted as if relieved of a heavy load and told me that she was a lesbian.

I was shocked. At that time, the negative common view about the homosexual came out of my mind from what I heard and read. My parents, who had lots of
old concepts and held no toleration for homosexuality, always told me, “Gays should not exist in the world. They have no benefits for human beings at all.” Also, there were lots of posts or ads that attempted to connect “homosexual” to “AIDS.” Although I didn’t mean to treat Sherry as different, the next time I met her, I was irresolute for a moment about whether to hug her or not. After just one moment of hesitation, she noticed that I was different from the last time I met her. She smiled and pretended nothing had happened, but since that day, she hasn’t appeared in front of my face anymore. It could be a coincidence; however, I might never know that about her.

Even small words might seem the big discrimination to those groups of people. Wallace states that, “Being fully literate . . . meant claiming words like queer, fag, and homo which small-minded people had spat at me in derision all my life” (62). We somehow grew up with the speech that contained bias. Although we disagree with most of the biased speech, the opinions that those biases state take root deep in our feeling. Through the test by my journalism professor, the first words to describe “homosexual” may not be “AIDS,” but the first word to describe “AIDS” for most people could be “gay,” even some of my gay friends themselves. It doesn’t mean they believe “homosexuality” leads to “AIDS,” but the society’s speech influenced them mostly to think that way.

Bias, no matter on the grounds of race, gender, sexual orientation or culture, is such an unpredictable sentiment. We could say we are unbiased, but bias is in our deep sub-consciousness. There are so many words and speeches around us about discrimination and bias. Gradually, even what we think and say are biased and unperceivable.

Thus, for journalists, the most important is verification. If somewhere happens an incident and the parties are both white and black by coincidence, we should stand on both sides of people and interview all the things that could tell what happened. Rather than letting these biases happen, a good report should be the one which can lead people’s argument without the viewpoint of the reporter.

I felt so sorry about Sherry for a long time, but I never had a chance to apologize to her. Since that, I started to take care about if my words, whether speaking or writing, are led by the biased public voice. It is not only for me as a future journalist, but also for all the people who have literacy.

**Work Cited**

Languages That Rule
Unschooling Literacy

Preface

In the last section of the course, students turn from looking at how literacy works in their personal worlds to how language and literacy policies function in their lives beyond the home. In their writing, students begin to interact more closely with the texts they read, often weaving them into essays about their own experiences or issues of interest. For the unit, “Languages that Rule,” Moa Mattsson examines how male language dominates the world of sports in “No Matter What Gender,” drawing on Wildman and Davis’ essay, “Making Systems of Privilege Visible.” Lauren Prentis reflects on how her home accent positioned her in school in her essay, “Southie.” Prentis supports her personal experiences with language by incorporating ideas and text from Gloria Anzaldua’s “How to Tame a Wild Tongue” and Alejandro Portes’ “English-Only Triumphs but the Costs are High.”

In the unit “Unschooling Literacy,” students examine educational literacies and how schools work to validate or deny certain literacies, identities, and discourse communities. The essays in this unit represent critical work on a topic of increasing importance to the students in this class, and indeed to us all. In her essay, “Lost in Language,” Ryann Parella reflects on her experiences negotiating school with a learning disability, contrasting her journey with what Maxine Hong Kingston describes in the essay, “Silence.” Drawing on Eleanor Kutz’ work in Language and Literacy, Jee Yoo explores the ways he felt caught between two languages as he navigated his school years in his essay, “The Age of Chaos.”
I am a soccer player, I am a woman—thereafter I am called a woman soccer player. If I were a man, I would be a soccer player. Language and naming show that the norm of a soccer player is a man. I have played soccer in both Sweden and at college in the U.S., two countries where this privilege is a problem.

Wendy Kaminer discusses in “Let’s Talk About Gender, Baby” how our world is gendered and how that is reflected in our language. One of her examples is that the word woman is used as an adjective, “We have ‘women doctors’ and ‘women senators’ but no ‘men doctors’ and ‘men senators’” (130). On the other hand, there are “manservants.” Her conclusion of this is “Servants are presumptively female, just as senators are presumptively are male” (130).

On the official soccer website in Sweden, there are elections for rewards for players who have performed well during the year. One of the categories is “Best soccer player of the year” and “Best woman soccer player of the year.” Using Kaminer’s words, soccer players are presumptively men.

I am a soccer player and seeing this bothers me. Like in most of women’s history, women soccer players have fought hard for being seen as athletes performing a sport and not beautiful objects running around on a field. Because I know how hard my role models have been fighting to be taken seriously, I see naming like “the player of the year” as an insult to them and the thousands of female soccer players today.

Kaminer is irritated over the use of the words sex and gender. She means that sex refers to the biological group men or women, while gender refers to “cultural norms of masculinity and femininity” (130). In other words, gender is what people think female and male should be and sex is what they biologically are. The pictures of what a man and a woman are create norms, whereas what is outside the norm is considered as different and sometimes subordinated. The picture of a soccer player consists of dominant male qualities, so when a woman is a soccer player it has to be described with “the adjective” women, to clarify that it does not exactly reflect our picture of a soccer player, which would be a man.

While Kaminer writes about the gender perspective of naming and language, Stephanie M. Wildman and Adrienne D. Davis discuss in “Making Systems of Privilege Visible” this in terms of privilege. In soccer, being a man is the norm and
by that, they have a privilege compared to women. People assume that soccer players are men, and that is a privilege itself: not being questioned for what they are doing.

Wildman and Davis discuss the privileges in our society and the issues that come with them. One of these privileges is based on gender and language, “The use of ‘he’ as a generic pronoun, stated to include all people, but making women in a room invisible when it is used, is seen as a norm” (107). They suggest that using “she” instead of “he” would cause offense to many people, and explain that with “This emotion is not about the grammatically correct use of English, but about the challenge to the system of male privilege” (107).

Wildman and Davis also write about areas where they are privileged or subordinated themselves and what they do to visualize it. An example they point to is that they make sure they treat their women and men students equally (111). In my soccer example, I am subordinated as a female both by language and naming. An expression that I use as a soccer player on an everyday basis is “man on,” which means that the person who has the ball has a defender close to her/him. Since I almost solely play with females, this expression make no sense because it is more than likely a woman, and not a man, who is the defender close to the person with the ball. Wildman and Davis mean that “we are products of the culture that instills its attitudes in us,” and that might explain my behavior. However, similar to Davis and Wildman, I am working on visualizing this privilege that men have in soccer. If I do not want to be called a woman soccer player, then I cannot call other soccer players “men” when they are not. Going back to the idea of challenging the system of male privilege, that is what I am striving for.

I have played soccer in both Sweden and in the U.S. and when I compare my experiences of the standing of women as soccer players, I find both similarities and differences. The naming of the top divisions in soccer shows near resemblance. The major league in Sweden for women’s soccer is called “Women’s Major League,” where the men’s is just called “Major League.” That is similar to the U.S. where the top divisions are called Major League Soccer (MLS) for men and Women’s Professional Soccer (WPS) for women. Both countries are facing the same problem where the naming of the top divisions are affected by the norm they have of soccer players.

My experience from college in the U.S. is that men and women are more equal than in Sweden when it comes to sports. The school provides the same resources and facilities for both genders’ teams and athletes, and the webpage does a good job of writing as much about women as men. In college, and probably the rest of the U.S., football is the biggest sport. Soccer is a lot smaller and that might be one reason why the media attention is more equal.

The organization that rules over college sports is the NCAA. They have a rule that says that women’s and men’s sports must have the same economic conditions.
I think this is an example where those with power affect the equivalent standing of men and women.

The texts “Making Systems of Privilege Visible” and “Let’s talk about Gender, Baby” show the connections between naming and social standards. These two texts strengthen my experience from being called a woman soccer player, where I am subordinated from a gender perspective.

I want a society with sex equality. To reach a society where men and women are equal, every step is important. If you think that a privilege is wrong, then I believe you should do what you can to change that. Language and naming are affected by privileges, and one of my actions to visualize them is to be aware of my language. Wildman and Davis write, “A privilege is not a right” (105), and I agree. Being called a soccer player should be a right, no matter what gender.

Works Cited:

Growing up in a traditional Irish Catholic school in South Boston was my earliest influence of learning how to speak and have a conversation. My teacher, Ms. O'Connor, spoke loudly to my second grade class when giving instructions. “Everyone, draw a map of your house. Include all rooms and floors like the parlor and cellars.” The r’s weren’t necessary in our alphabet. My parents talked like that and so did my grandparents, and that’s how I learned. I couldn’t help it. The words rolled off my tongue when I spoke. “Let’s play handball in Jackie’s yard before supper!” I never thought the way I spoke wouldn’t be acceptable outside of Southie. The Southie language, though referred to as slang, was my mother tongue. The language retained my memories of the old Southie and my culture.

I was quiet my first day of high school. I carefully listened to how others spoke, making note of the r’s. When called on by a teacher to speak, I made sure to pronounce each letter in every syllable of every word. With great precision I moved my tongue around carefully creating the intricate new sounds. I was careful not to swallow my t’s. I jutted out my chin forcing the r’s out of my mouth. I sustained some words until the g’s were roughly hung on the end. I tried so hard to fit in. The students were from all over Boston. I tried to welcome the change of dialect, but it wasn’t an easy task. I never understood why I needed to change the way I spoke, but my mother told me to soften my accent. I remember my mother saying one morning “they’ll think you dumb, if you talk like that in front of ‘em.” I was told to change my language. All throughout high school, I hid my accent from everyone except my closest friends.

The first day of band camp at UMass was daunting. I had to introduce myself in front of people from different places, and I hated public speaking. Walking in front of the band was one of the most nerve-racking moments of band camp. All I had to do was give a brief bio of myself – basically an ice-breaker. I was afraid of losing control of my speech. “My name’s Lauren. I play flute and I’m wicked good at basketball and handball. My favorite things to eat are snapdogs and Italian spuckies.” After some hesitation, the group laughed. I went through the words in my mind searching for what went wrong with pronunciation. I could feel my face blushing. A girl raised her hand and asked what Spuckie and Snapdog were. For a moment I didn’t know what to say. Weren’t they common?
Snapdogs at Sully’s were my summer ritual, and Italian Spuckies were my favorite lunch. I thought everyone used those terms. I explained, “Snapdogs are hotdogs, and spuckies are subs?” I let my accent slip in the confusion of the conversation. Another round of laughter arose. The band agreed it was the roughest Boston accent they had ever heard at UMass.

I found out the oddities of my speech weren’t only in my accent but also in my lingo. I struggled to conceal my earliest knowledge of the English language to meet the standards of my peers and to fit in. The way I speak is an integral part of who I am and where I came from. Languages are more than just a means of communication: They are the key to identification for my family and their history over generations. Losing a mother tongue would mean losing the culture from which it comes. Dropping one language like Spanish to learn English is the same as choosing the English culture’s survival over the Spanish culture’s. Gloria Anzaldua writes about the hardships of learning English while still trying to keep her Spanish intact. She grew up in southwest Texas where the educational system punished her for speaking Spanish, “I remember being caught speaking Spanish at recess – that was good for three licks on the knuckles,” (81) she writes. In the United States there was no cultural open-mindedness. Hispanic culture and the Spanish language were not welcome within the borders of the conservative education system.

In Alejandro Portes’ essay, “English Only Triumphs, but the Costs Are High” he writes about the cultural suppression of children of immigrants in the United States. Most children lose fluency with their mother tongue, and later generations lose most knowledge of the language. Portes writes how the U.S. fears that it will lose its own identity if influenced by the languages brought over by immigrants, “[The U.S.] fears that . . . cultural unity [of the English language] may be undermined” (167). The United States was built on the idea of the Melting Pot, where many different cultures came together to establish a new American culture. Now the U.S. shuns foreign cultures that threaten to alter the accepted culture. Instead of being open to alternative cultures, the U.S. rejects outside influences, leading to the decay of immigrants’ native languages and culture.

Even though I was born in the U.S., I feel that my Southie language is looked down on outside of my home neighborhood. Like Anzaldua, I want to hold onto to my language as part of my identity.

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In the essay, “Silence” by Maxine Hong Kingston, she discusses when she was younger and how she felt silenced when she was in school because she could not speak English. I can relate to her in many ways—not about the part about not being able to speak English but how I also felt silenced in school. In the third grade I was diagnosed with ADD, Attention Deficient Disorder, which makes it hard for me to pay attention, and I hold too much information in my mind at the same time. My brain has always been noisy, and it is funny to think that more noise like the radio would help me focus but it does. I also have dyslexia. It can be hard for me to read as fast as others although I think I am a good reader. Sometimes I can see that my dyslexia kicks in when I switch up my letters. For example, I have always mixed up lowercase “b” and “d.” As for Kingston, she felt embarrassed that she could not speak the same language as everyone else. She couldn’t even say “hello” to her bus driver. Most of those kids in Kingston’s and in my class were privileged because they all knew how to speak the same language, and the kids in my class didn’t have to feel like they were silenced in their education like me.

The school experience that I had was mostly about being secluded and put into smaller classrooms with kids who had all different kinds of learning disabilities. I could tell just by looking at them that some of them were into drugs and were already going down a bad path. I knew I didn’t belong with this group, but there was no other option. They even separated me from the “normal kids” during lunch. I had to sit with this group while my twin sister sat with the “normal kids.” We always sat on the other side of the cafeteria like we were contagious or something. This was probably the worst part for me because I knew I did not belong in this group. I also don’t believe there should have been a group like that. It seemed everybody stared at us as if we were animals in a zoo. At times there were only five or six of us, and the teachers would make us wait for the “normal kids” to come back inside from recess. Then we could go out and play. This was how I felt unprivileged and silent.

Nobody believed me when I told them what they did to me so I felt silent. My only escape was the girls’ bathroom. Every day I would just sit in there because I didn’t want to go back in that class. I remember a day when the principal walked by the bathroom and heard me. I was so scared because I didn’t want to get in
trouble, and I pulled up my feet in the stall so she couldn't see me. She said, "Hello." I didn't respond but I was surprised she couldn't hear my heart—it was beating like a drum. I quickly ran back to my class, and she was there so I sneaked in and got in my chair nervously. No third grader or anybody who learns differently should ever have to go through what I went through. Education is a privilege, and a good education means effort from everybody; this includes teachers and students.

Most people might not see my experience as being as difficult to learn as a new language, but depending on the type of learning disability somebody has, it can be hard. It is hard for me to learn a foreign language because I still struggle with the English language. I know I could if I put a lot of time and effort into it, but I think something else would suffer. Kingston and I have many things in common. It is hard for us to read a language that we are not familiar with and were silenced in school because we didn't learn the same way as everybody else. School wasn't very good for Kingston, since she flunked out of kindergarten because she couldn't understand anything people said. That would be a difference between me and Kingston. I never had to stay back or repeat a grade thanks to my mom who fought for my education. She was the person who let my silence be broken. Unfortunately Kingston didn't have anybody like that. When she was in second grade she had a teacher that made her feel left behind and acted like all the Chinese girls didn't even exist. She and the other Chinese girls felt like they were being shunned from the whole class. Throughout her schooling she was not privileged and the teacher never paid attention to her. The scariest thing for Kingston to do was just talking to people. Reading was an easy part for her, because if she was reading from a book then it was easier for her to see the words. She never got to have the same experience as other kids in her school and was not able to make friends. Most days she wondered if she would ever fit in. I can definitely relate to this.

I was taught differently than everybody else because I learn differently. Some people try to hide their disability, but I know I have strengths because of my disability. In my opinion I think my learning disability is part of who I am. After going through what I did and reading Kingston's story, I realized we all have issues whether we call them disabilities or something else. It matters more what I experienced in my life and how I overcame my obstacles. I had the same feeling when I was in school. Everybody looked at me differently even though I didn't look different to everyone. I was put in a smaller class, I didn't belong and I never got to have the same experience as everyone else in public schools. As I grew up, I realized the way I cope with my learning disability is dealing with it and showing people I am just as capable as someone without a learning disability. Maxine Hong Kingston finally got over her fear of speaking English, "Most of
Lost in Language

us eventually found some voice, however faltering” (154). This quote for me was interesting because it speaks to both Kingston and me. We both didn’t have an education that we deserved, but we both found our voice that brings us to where we are today.

Work Cited

I am a native Korean speaker. I know how to speak English, which is my second language. I can’t, however, proudly proclaim that I am fluent in both Korean and English nor can I perform the two languages perfectly. This is an answer I have. At this point, I have to ask a question, and I have to ask the right question. Why is it that I struggle with both Korean and English? Looking back at my history, I have found the answers. The most prominent reason is because of the clash between the two languages and the clash of two cultures that corresponds to the languages.

When I first came to the United States, I was eight years old. I didn’t know any English. I remember learning and using a first full sentence “Can I have it?” (I’m not sure if this was really my first full sentence in English, but my memory tells me it is.) I picked up the language fairly quickly, maybe because I was still a kid and was capable of learning a language with no significant difficulties. When I look back, watching the recorded videos of our family, my English pronunciation was the best at that time. I could say it was almost perfect.

I stayed in the States for a year and returned to Korea as a third grade student. I could not adjust. I was an active child who liked to make noise. But I became quiet and transformed to a shy child. I knew the Korean language perfectly. However, the use of language itself was much more suppressed and controlled than in the United States. This was the first time that I experienced a clash between two literacies. The Korean way of expression was the norm. The English way of expression was not accepted.

I came back to the U.S. to attend junior high school. Right before I started school, I went to a summer camp program just to get used to English. I didn’t have any big problems. Not many people spoke English very well, and I felt comfortable speaking English around those people. I felt equal to them. However, it was different when school started. Although I spoke out in the ESL classes, I couldn’t speak in the regular classes where a majority of the students were fluent English speakers. All it took to bring me down was a smirk. Most of the students were considerate, I believe. But still, there were always the kinds who expressed signs of disapproval of my imperfect English. I felt hopeless whenever it happened, and I became afraid to speak.
In her essay “Silence,” Maxine Hong Kingston writes about an experience that is similar to mine. She also became silent when she had to speak English in kindergarten when her native language was Chinese. She couldn't even ask to use the restroom in kindergarten. Hong Kingston writes about how a cab driver couldn’t understand what she was saying and she had to “perform again, only weaker the second time” (151). She says that “it makes people wince to hear” (151) her broken voice. And these experiences were discouragements for Hong Kingston in using her imperfect English.

It happened big time when I went on to high school. This time it was even worse because the perpetrator (from my point of view) was my English teacher. I got a poor grade on a paper so I went to talk to the teacher. He told me that I had to work harder. I worked harder next time, but I still got a poor grade without any feedback on the graded paper. I went back to him and asked him what I had to do to improve my paper. He spoke in an annoyed tone, “you just have to work harder. You don't work hard enough.” He still didn't give me any feedback. I talked to the deans and switched out of that class. I've had so many considerate, helpful, encouraging English teachers. The teacher (whom I referred to as a perpetrator) was the only English teacher so discouraging and ignorant about my effort to be an English speaker and a writer.

I knew I wasn't using the proper English. I knew I wasn't using “The King’s English.” In Eleanor Kutz's “Excerpt from Language and Literacy,” she writes about “folk theories” which are similar to myths. Kutz states, “One folk theory about language resides in the notion of ‘The King’s English,’ a better, ‘more correct’ English than commoners and ordinary people speak. In our contemporary society it is more often teachers who are assumed to be the nobility in this regard and students who are seen as smart, or good in school, are those who seem to emulate them, to learn their ways” (139). My experience with my high school English teacher certainly has to do with the “King’s English.” My poor English writing was ignored by my teacher because it was not what the teacher wanted, “The King’s English.” This led me to feeling even more deprived of self-confidence in using English.

My long lasting shyness of using English now became a habit. I always doubt if my English is correct or not when I use it. For example, when I want to make a statement in a discussion during class, I am afraid that what I say might sound wrong or doesn’t make sense. By the time I come to a conclusion that what I want to say is grammatically correct, someone has already said what I wanted to say.

There are also times when I meet new people who are fluent in English. They sometimes make jokes to break the ice when there is an awkward tension among strangers. However, I sometimes don't understand the English jokes and this makes it even more awkward and hardens the ice. As a result of the clash between
Korean and English, now I am at the age of chaos of two languages. I'm not perfect at either Korean or English. It was not long ago that I realized this.

I almost feel ashamed by the fact that I can't speak high level Korean when Korean is my native language. I also feel ashamed in not being fluent in English after quite a few years of studying in the United States. What I have to do is catching up in both languages. What blocks me from catching up is my habit of silence due to the cultural and linguistic clash. I have all the clues and answers. I just need to make a step forward and another step after another with courage and a strong will to learn. It is not easy. It hasn't been easy at all. But I want to try once again.

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PART II. Writing from &
Across Contexts

Essays from *College Writing*
Inquiring into Self

Preface

College Writing begins by asking students to examine the “self”—or one of our many selves—as a text in a unit called “Inquiring into Self.” The self, after all, is a text that absolutely must be read and re-read with great attentiveness, because it shapes how we understand, interpret, and interact with the world. Using the writing process (generative writing and reading, composing and revising, giving and receiving feedback from fellow writers, and editing), students are asked to discover new insights about how our contexts have shaped us. The challenge is to read our stories and our bodies as histories and to begin to re-see ourselves through the lenses of social contexts—e.g., towns, churches, athletic teams, ethnic communities, and more. Here, students write meaningfully about their own lives.

The following essays illustrate this inquiry into self and invite a close audience of classmates to engage with each writer’s experiences and critical reflections. In “Outcast to Airman,” Anthony Fappiano presents the tension between his family history with the Air Force and a hometown culture that tends to be skeptical of the military. This tension opens up the possibility for Fappiano (and readers familiar with our neighboring town of Northampton) to reflect critically on the complex ways in which one develops within and even against one’s context. Likewise, Robin Hammond’s essay “Confessions of a Bad Environmentalist” also engages tensions. A mix of organic vegetables in the middle of a patch of lawn with invasive and entangled vines running down a hill—such is the author’s description of her childhood front yard. The contradictions in this description are echoed throughout her essay, notable for its selective imagery. Hammond grapples with her personal context and comes to recognize that her behaviors toward being a good environmentalist are filled with contradictions. Ultimately, she realizes we are all a work in progress with our own ways of expressing our beliefs. She doesn’t want to march with an angry sign, for, as she concludes, “sometimes, isn’t it harder to hear when everyone is yelling?” Both of these writers demonstrate how we are influenced, but not determined by, our contexts.

The next writers play with essay form, and readers might consider the ways in which the writers use time and essay structure to convey their purposes. Tanner Houle’s first sentence, in “Pages from a Diary Never Written,” tells us that “convention” does not suit his purpose: “to understand what Home means.” Using the diary form allows him to break the conventions of a standard essay and, at times, write almost poetically. Rather than writing chronologically, the author moves back and forth in time according to how various memories and
sense impressions trigger thoughts critical to his context. Yesenia Vega’s essay “Selective Believer” structures her essay into sections, each one taking us to a different place (and thus a different context) where she explores the struggles of her rejecting institutionalized religion and God. She uses powerful and varied descriptive detail in the service of analyzing how she came to her beliefs. Ciara Rodriguez’s “The Bubblegum Ninja” may even be read as a kind of rebellion against expected form: Japanese Karate positions symbolize the content of each section, and readers must interpret the connections between episodes. We don’t discover the significance of these choices until late in her paper, which mirrors the process of Rodriguez’s own self-discovery. With a strong voice and effective description, she helps readers imagine her sense of self-discovery in the context of family, gender expectations, and her karate dojo.

Taken together, these essays illustrate many of the important goals of this unit. The authors critically reflect on their experiences with particular places (e.g., karate dojo, home, towns), communities (e.g., families, Air Force, environmentalists), and broader contexts (e.g., religious beliefs, gender expectations, ethnic heritage). As readers, we might consider how the writers invite us to understand their experiences by reflecting along with them: creating a purposeful image, narrating an experience, guiding readers via essay structure, developing one’s self-reflection explicitly or implicitly, and generally, making one’s “voice” suit the essay’s purpose and content are all ways in which writers work to engage us.
Outcast to Airman

ANTHONY FAPPIANO

As the names get called off one by one, I patiently await my turn to be the next graduate of Northampton High School. “Delucci, DeMeo, Dunphy.” As the principal nears my name, I think about the last twelve years I have lived in Northampton. “Durfer, Estevez, Fappiano.” Finally my name is called; a thunderous applauding from the crowd drowns out the speakers as I ascend the stairs and walk across the stage to receive my diploma. I sit back down and look at the piece of paper I had earned through thousands of hours of work. Once the final name is called, the principal begins announcing what the graduates plan to do the next year. She proclaims that a school record of 75% plan on attending college, and a roar goes up from the crowd of friends and family, proud of their graduates; 20% will seek out full time jobs, and 4% are taking the year off, she explains, as a similar applause erupts from the crowd. And then she announces that the remaining 1% will be joining the military. A familiar voice is the only one heard in the crowd; my friends and I laugh when we see my father is the only person standing up and cheering my name at that statistic.

I had always known that I would pursue a career in the military as soon as I was able. Growing up in a military family, I had been taught early in life that serving my country was the best way I could give back to my community. My father and I must have had the same conversation about the benefits of joining the military a hundred times, and how I would be crazy not to take advantage of the opportunity while it still lasted. Even though my community didn’t agree with the military, and my family was the only military family I knew, I felt an obligation to give back somehow. My father had been in the Air Force for thirty years, following in the footsteps of my grandfather who served thirty two years until his retirement. I always knew that it must be a great place to work if so many people are willing to bring their biological family into the Air Force family. I had been pushed toward the Air Force at a very young age, and preached to about its benefits throughout high school.

Growing up in Northampton, I had always been a minority for the ways I thought and my opinions on just about every political issue that arose. Northampton is an ultra-diverse, outcast-tolerant, middle class, liberal utopia
that is only tolerant to the type of outcast you would see at a circus. On any
given trip down the center of town in the so-called “Happy Valley,” you are
likely to see anything from a political protest, to a homeless man playing
the didgeridoo, to a man walking around in nothing but a rainbow flag. In a
town where the motto is “where the coffee is strong and so are the women,”
my conservative, obnoxious, judgmental personality made me a social pariah
throughout my school career.

Every year at school as we ran through the same ice breaker questions, I
got a look of repulsion when I explained that I would be joining the Air Force
after high school. Then there were the inevitable questions about how I can fly
airplanes, where I learn to fly airplanes, and even how airplanes work. Eventually
I just accepted my classmates’ lack of knowledge on the subject and played along,
smiling and nodding at their ridiculous questions. Even my guidance counselor,
whose sole purpose at the school was to set me on the road to success, was clearly
uneducated about the Air Force. I learned more from a two-year-old pamphlet I
found in my father’s office than I did in our numerous meetings.

Growing up, I always thought that my town’s opinions toward my joining the
military were a burden; I realized very quickly that without that resentment I
never would have been as driven as I was to succeed and flourish in the United
States Air Force. Even though having a father who went through everything I
did over thirty years earlier helped me along the way, I always felt that the added
motivation went a long way. I had a chip on my shoulder during basic training; I
wanted to prove that even though I grew up in a town that hated my job, I could
still succeed. I went into basic military training not entirely knowing what to
expect, and found out it was exactly what everybody said it would be like. I woke
up at 4:00 am to a man in a big black hat yelling at me to move faster; I went
through my day getting yelled at every opportunity that arose, and went to bed
late after hours of cleaning and folding laundry. I learned very quickly during
basic training that my town truly was living in its own bubble. Since my flight had
a menagerie of old, young, black, white, southern, northern, and basically every
kind of person, I saw how different my town was. All of the people on my flight
had the same general ideas about the government, and had pride in their country.
That was something I did not see at home. I used my town’s resentment toward
my job as motivation for the whole two months of basic training and the next six
months of technical school, earning honor graduate accolades in both.

The achievement of honor graduate is something that fewer than seventy
people are able to get out of a class of over 700 airmen. It is a very prestigious
award that is carried with you for the rest of your career, and can only be earned
during basic training. My family was very proud of this accolade, especially my
father who hadn’t been able to earn it when he went to basic training.
When I went home for a month after basic training, I told the rest of my extended family about what I had done and how I had earned honor graduate. They were just as excited as my family had been for me. On the other hand, my friends had a very different reaction. Not a single friend asked me anything more than, “How was it?” or “Was it funny to get yelled at all day?” When I told them that I earned honor graduate they couldn’t care less. This was just another indication for me that everything I had done, and everything I would do in my military career would be scrutinized and looked down on by my hometown.

When I went back to technical school to learn my job, I used my town’s opinions of my job to push me through school. Like basic training, I went to school with a chip on my shoulder and wanted to prove that I could succeed. I learned to be an aerospace medical technician, which is a cross between an EMT and an LPN. I did not get any certification, but I was told numerous times that with the training I had I would be able to become certified immediately in almost every state. When I returned home after my training, I was not surprised to find out that Massachusetts was one of the states that did not allow immediate certification. Still, I hoped for the best and applied for a job at the hospital near my home that I had volunteered at two years earlier in high school. I got a response within the week from the human resources office telling me that although I was very well qualified for the job, I lacked the credentials; the only way I would be able to work there was if I repeated all of my training on the civilian side. The email then went on to say that even though I was qualified on paper, my military training was considered lower quality by the hospital, and I was unlikely to get hired for the position.

Although it seemed like I had wasted the last nine months of my life, I realized very quickly that joining the Air Force was the best thing I could have possibly done at the time. When I met up with my friends for the first time after nine months, I found that they were doing the exact same thing they had been throughout high school. They all still lived at home and had no plans on moving out anytime soon. They still drank every other night and did drugs like the majority of the people I went to school with. In the nine months I was gone I had matured tremendously, and no longer had any interest in the tomfoolery that my friends were still up to. I also had grown even further apart from my hometown in my beliefs. I felt much stronger about my conservative ideals, and had more pride in my country.

Growing up in the town of Northampton was both a burden for me and a blessing. I hated living there; even to this day I try to avoid going into the center of town. After living there for so many years, I have grown accustomed to the oddities of the town and realize that it made me who I am today. The grief I got from joining the Air Force drove me to do even better and prove that I could do it. The skills and discipline I learned will help me for the rest of my life, and I am proud of what I have done in spite of what my town thinks of what I have done.
As I was growing up, my house was always the one with the crazy garden growing in the front yard. Tomatoes of every size, prickly summer squash, and enormous collard plants took center stage in a square of the lawn. Add that wild greenery to a small hill overrun with invasive vines, and you have my yard. It isn't always complete mayhem, but in comparison to my neighbors' landscaping, it's considered a little wild. Not only was I the girl with that yard, but I was also the only third grader who was familiar with composting. My class wrinkled their noses while the teacher explained the concept of using old food scraps to make fertilizer; I pictured the two large bins in my backyard, currently sagging thanks to my dog's many successful adventures with the compost. I decided not to share my composting experience, unsure of how my classmates would react to my "backyard full of goodies."

My family recycles, grows plants in our garden, and hikes from time to time. We are certainly not the most eco-friendly family, but for me, the outdoors and the environment have always been a part of the background. This has influenced me to be a little more observant about where my food comes from and what I eat. I like to eat organic and local because there are fewer preservatives and the food is fresher. Recently, I tried to tell my friends why the new natural peanut butter machine at the dining hall is so exciting (no hydrogenated oil, just peanuts!), but they preferred the Skippy, of course. I always pick whole wheat toast, and I could probably lecture for an hour on why grass-fed beef is so much healthier than regular beef.

And yet I'm not extremely opinionated. I don't like telling other people what they should and shouldn't do. My parents aren't hippies. I don't wear hemp clothes. I love driving my gas-guzzling truck. I know fast food is disgusting, but I can't help it: I love a Wendy's cheeseburger.

I know that it can seem contradictory to scoff at the preservatives and fake colors in a bag of Doritos while I dunk my Oreo. Or maybe it's wrong to eat a veggie burger as I bake a cake calling for more butter than a person should probably consume in a lifetime. However, I want people to make better choices for the environment, and I want people to pay attention to the present issues in our
society. Still, I don’t want to be labeled as the “opinionated environmentalist” because, sometimes, I’m a complete hypocrite.

At my house, I often have the option of driving one of two cars. My brother’s Toyota Yaris is little and fuel-efficient, while my mom’s Nissan Pathfinder is affectionately nicknamed “The Beast.” The Yaris is a much more logical choice, environmentally-speaking; yet, I’m always drawn to The Beast. It tempts me with its clear sound system, powerful engine, and an aura of invincibility that only a big car can exude. I’m torn between what I know I should do—making that small, everyday effort to reduce my carbon emissions—and what I automatically want to do. While I often pick the tiny car to save gas, at times I “conveniently” forget and opt for the better sound system. Although I’m grateful to have the opportunity to drive regardless of which car it is, it can be difficult to break my habit to automatically head toward that powerful, purring car.

No matter how necessary or logical, change in any form can be difficult. Often people in a society become attached to and comfortable with what they are used to, and changing these habits can be tough. I think the first step towards change is education. Climate change is a huge issue that will continue to grow whether or not our society pays attention to it. One of the biggest outputs of carbon is our energy use. The majority of the United States’ electricity and heat is produced by burning fossil fuels and coal; these emit huge amounts of carbon that accumulate and gradually change not only the climate, but sea temperatures, sea levels, and precipitation levels. This then leads to an increase in tropical storms, droughts, flooding, changes in agriculture, and many subsequent issues. I think it is also important to recognize that we have caused this. Our standard of living relies on our access to and use of energy. While this is not necessarily bad, it is significant to remember the cost of all this energy. Until the U.S. can transition to cleaner forms of energy, being more conscious can make a small difference. While I may not be stopping global warming, I still feel obligated to use reusable grocery bags, carpool, unplug unused electronics, and turn the heat down a few degrees at my house.

In the United States, we have access to an abundance of energy. Energy usage is a huge part of our daily lives. It is much easier to see just how much and how often we depend on energy when we unexpectedly do not have it. This past fall, when UMass lost power for a weekend, the effect was instant. Students were scrambling to plug in their hair straighteners in the bathrooms that ran on generators. No more doing homework on the computer, or even flipping on a light switch. People living off-campus faced even bigger challenges: no working kitchen or refrigerators, and some didn’t have water. While this event certainly put a dent in the flow of our everyday lives, power outages also force us to think about what we really need electricity for, and how we often waste it. But however ecstatic I may have been to turn on my lamp when we regained power, a few
days later I found myself, phone in hand, laptop open, lights, fan, and TV on—mindlessly wasting energy that had seemed so precious just days before. While reducing energy consumption can be easy to preach about, the truth is that it is also hard. Yes, we are spoiled and selfish when it comes to energy. However, it takes conscious attention to recognize this and break energy-wasting habits—to actually turn off the laptop, unplug the phone charger, or hold on to the paper coffee cup until a recycling bin appears.

While I really do care about the environment, I do not want to fall into the “environmentalist” stereotype because not only am I hypocritical; I can’t seem to embody the attitude necessary to motivate people. Green proponents are passionate and vocal about their beliefs. They have to be because, as I can attest, in the United States it’s often easy to be wasteful and wrapped up in your own world. I understand why many of them are passionate and opinionated: to make people understand how to make better choices you need to educate them. I like to think it is a step in the right direction that I recognize our need for environmental change and want to help. But, while I can consider myself to be a proponent for green energy, local farms, and water conservation, I can’t embrace the “hard-core” environmentalist stereotype because part of it just seems so contradictory with my own attitude.

I am a laid-back person. I pride myself on the fact that I’m generally not fazed by too much. Not to say that I never stress out or get nervous—at times I’m a complete hypochondriac, convincing myself that my backache is definitely caused by disconnected vertebrae. But for the most part, I’m not overly dramatic. I’ve always been taught to listen to the opinions and ideas of others. My mom is the same way; she has always been a role model of composure and tranquility. Whether she was tending a scraped arm or listening to both sides of my sister’s and my argument, my mother has always been able to bring calm to a heated situation. In many aspects of my life, this learned-attitude has been helpful. However, it has also made me hesitant to jump on the bandwagon of what many environmentalists believe because I think there is almost always room for compromise. However, compromise isn’t always the best way to motivate people to change.

Green pamphlets line his table. Her shirt reads “Save the planet, go vegan.” “Help the trees!” shouts at me from a neon poster board. But how? Their energy gets them noticed but not necessarily taken seriously. Do they know that I probably agree with their ideals? That I want people to recognize the damage that our current style of living causes? I want people to step a little out of their comfort zones and be open to a wind farm or a backyard compost pile. But I don’t want to yell this at someone. I don’t want to march outside with an angry sign, ordering people to pay attention. Because sometimes I’m the one that needs to pay attention. And sometimes, isn’t it harder to hear when everyone is yelling?
Confessions of a Bad Environmentalist
21 September 2012: It is an accepted convention that diaries are written chronologically, trudging from one calendar year to the next, recording the mundane alongside the extraordinary. But because life is lived forward and understood in retrospect, and because my need now, having left home for the first time in eighteen years, is to understand what Home means, I will write to you, dear diary, in violation of this convention.

But let us locate Home on the map first. Home to me is a landscape that I have known in the intimate grammar of familiarity: the fastest route from supermarket to cornfields, the best restaurants to get some food, and hidden trails through the woods. This place is Chelmsford, my hometown that I haven’t been away from for a period longer than a week and a half—not until now. It’s where the routine, the march of the everyday, year after year, gave my days their identity.

6 July 2003: A month before I turned ten, we were down on the Cape on our annual summer vacation. I couldn’t resist rushing down the old, worn dirt path that cut through the woods and led to the ocean. I could always tell when I was close to meeting the beach: broken shells layered the ground, dropped by the seagulls that patrolled the sky, and the smell of the salty air and the light breeze always hit me. All I wished to do was to get to the jetty. I would spend hours on end with a small piece of meat attached to the tall piece of sea grass I plucked from the sand with one thing in mind: catching the crabs that sat hiding beneath the rocks. I was too young to tie the meat to the grass myself, and worried that the crafty crustacean would steal it, so I relied on my older brother and cousins to re-knot it—again and again. Finally, after calling it a day of crab catching, I would join my family at the chairs positioned in a half circle a few feet from the water. I only heard snatches of the family conversations—cementing, as always, around memories of summers prior, the Red Sox, or the evening plans—getting up constantly to collect the smooth, washed up rocks by the water’s edge. I settled down when the baskets were opened and sandwiches, set in paper plates, were passed around. The outdoors filled with smells that had earlier filled our kitchen. The pebbles sitting in my pocket, taken from our garden, were to be offered to the ocean here. The rocks from here would be arranged on my window sill. The outdoors,
I realized that day, is an extension of home. The boundaries of what Home can mean were in that moment pushed and widened.

12 September 2005: Middle school had just begun. My friends and I, excited at this academic recognition of our growing out of childhood, decided on meeting at the freshly cut baseball fields down the road from my house. We were the only ones there at that early hour, sitting in the bleachers and eating popped popcorn with a raspberry slush that colored our mouths blue. We were mimicking adults who often sat there when a game was on, arguing feverishly over a particular sports maneuver or brooding over a missed call. We were in no hurry to grow up; we were eager to be given the freedom adults are granted.

After the players who were practicing on the field left, we abandoned our popcorn and slush and took to the fields. The air buzzed with our voices as we participated in a competitive game of wall ball. In under an hour, though, we abandoned our game too and ran down the side-path to the corkboard that had just been updated with the sports stats of the players. Many of our ranks had risen up a rung. Our promotion to middle school and now this: a rare day when the hours were thick with windfalls, the sort that make you look at the future with eyes full of hope and excitement.

To celebrate, we decided on watching reruns of David Ortiz making game-winning home runs on YouTube. Watching his winning streak was what first created a communal sense of excitement among us, turning us from teammates to friends. And to draw the night to a memorable close, we did what was a reminder of the age we were trying to grow out of. We exchanged baseball cards. When I got back home, I added my newly acquired cards to a stack that had grown from a single pack into a collection held together in four albums, all hidden behind clothes hanging in my closet, creating the thrill of a secret and also obscuring them from open scrutiny and from judgments that would perceive my hobby—and consequently me—as childish. It was a duality I was completely comfortable with, something that I saw as necessary to buy my inclusion into the adult world.

15 August 2012: The yearly neighborhood cookout took place at my house this summer. A splashing pool filled with the kids from our street and their screams could be heard over the music of Kenny Chesney and Jimmy Buffet playing out of the speakers that sat on the wooden bench—the electric cord uncoiled and stretched out to an indoor plug-point by the screendoor. My friends and I went into my room and spoke about high school, our last four years in Chelmsford, where the seasons were remembered by the games we played: the familiar heat of the Friday night lights of the football game in the fall; spring, the season of
baseball, times of triumphant underdog wins as the earth around us struggled to shrug off the remnants of sun-melted snow, the season when I pitched my way to headlines in the Lowell Sun, Boston Herald, and online at ESPN Boston. While the knowledge of what it meant to be a local hero was heady, the brotherhood we shared as a team is what I would cherish when it was time go. We appeared in each other’s driveways late in the night, the sound our car’s engine buzzing through the quiet hour, a coded signal in response to which our friends would run out of the door to meet us. When we were low on gas, we would tap at the windowpane of our friend’s room and take our discussions to the dimly lit back porch or pool, cicadas screeching in the background through the heady scent of crushed pinecones.

As I sat on the floor alongside my friends—who played with me on my baseball team when I was nine, the same ones whose houses I reached, running through the woods, eight years later, seeking safety when a house party I was at got busted—I realized that there was a finality to this act of sitting together in my room. We may meet again over winter or summer break, we may reminisce about the times gone by, but the act of remembering will not be part of the sequence of our childhood. It will be removed: the memories in the past, the recollection in the present. We may look back and find more meaning in our past, but the sense of continuity would be broken that evening when the cookout ended. George Steiner once said that it is not our pasts, but the images of our past, that rule us. Remembering, I realized, would become an act of submitting to images of the past and not an actively recorded experience.

Outside, the smell of sweet marinated chicken and tender steak thickened the air with a rich aroma. Someone was clapping in tune to a song. Stray laughter made its way up. An insistent clanking rose from the empty cans and bottles colliding in the bin. Voices started calling out our names. It was time to go.

30 August 2012: Now, at UMass, I am constantly surrounded by thousands of people I have never seen, walking around me, laughing or clapping each other on the back as I walk from one class to another. Clutching at the straps of my backpack, I think of Chelmsford nights when a small convoy of cars—music blaring, packed tight with friends—went through town. Now my room is smaller in what feels like a much larger world. There are new names to be learned, new landscapes to be discovered. I feel a glimmer of homesickness not just for the physical spaces of the town but also for the space people carry: a corner where I would once nestle and find warmth after an evening of shoveling the snow outside our bricked front
steps; a corner where family stories, with repeated telling, acquired the quality of a legend.

Everyone knows everyone else has been turned into a small town cliché; but it is the knowledge that shaped my hour: in Chelmsford I knew the fabric of every road, the exact places I could step on in the nighttime darkness without breaking the silence with the cracking of a twig; I knew the trails to lead you to silent, uninterrupted peace; the ponds and rivers that invited you to sit down and ponder with a fistful of pebbles, a rock offered to the water for each thought that resolved itself with a satisfying click of clarity.

Do I know what home means? Maybe not. But I haven't abandoned my exploration. Here is an epiphany for you in the meanwhile: I’m now left with an expanded notion of ‘playground’: from being the yard of my house, it became the backstreets, parks, produce markets, and trails of Chelmsford.

23 August, 2012: I began to recall memories from many of the things that really stood out to me from my past here in Chelmsford. The thoughts of walking with my dad through the old overgrown trails, past still ponds we had discovered heading towards the remnants of a lost car, eaten by ground, claimed by creepers, and beaten by countless winters. I don’t remember any of our conversations. But I remember his voice. I remember thinking that his personality resonated throughout the intimate space of my hometown, or perhaps my hometown has inherited features from him—that was what made it so familiar. He and I played catch while waiting for my bus to school every day in elementary and middle school. He taught me how to fix my broken chain on my bicycle, and later, how to work on my truck. He walked me to the fields where I practiced, and every Sunday when I was fifteen, my father and I went to the huge vacant parking lots of big corporations, circles of tire tracks left on the sand, proof of the driving lessons he gave me.

My room, that evening, was emptied into backpacks and duffel bags and loaded into the truck—drawers emptied and yanked open, the desk top bare as I had never seen it, and an empty corner where a TV once sat. The room had relapsed to a state from a distant past. My childhood had at last drawn to a close, not in middle school, but now, on my last day in Chelmsford.

16 September 2012: I am warming up to my newfound independence, and this opportunity of defining myself without supervision. As I buckle down to the academic and residential life at UMass, as I stumble upon faces that are turning
Pages from a Diary Never Written

gradually familiar in the dining hall or down the corridors of Thoreau. As friendships are formed over tales from back home and homework assignments, I think of Chelmsford, but with a sense of dull foreboding. I am no longer worried that I will turn sick remembering Chelmsford over and over. My worry is that I may forget; that someday time and distance and the euphoria of newness and freedom would allow Chelmsford and all that it meant to slip away, leaving behind nothing but a washed out image that evokes no strong emotion, nothing more than a vague sense of nostalgia. Perhaps such indifference will only be temporary, if at all, and with time, my definition of home will only expand to include UMass and the friends I meet here. I don't know, and this is precisely why it’s now—when both the past and present are fresh in my mind—that I should explore what Home means to me.
The Bubblegum Ninja

CIARA RODRIGUEZ

Ichimonji No Kamae (First Position)

Click! Click! A scorching blind light enveloped a poor child's vision. As a dozen rainbows materialized, adults cooed in the background. The child lip's trembled in exhaustion as she tried to hold her smile. In her bubblegum pink dress, the little girl looked every inch the household's precious jewel and daddy's darling princess. And why shouldn’t she? Ballet lessons, Barbie dolls, and enough puffy dresses to open a museum should have held the power to mold even the most rambunctious child into a girly flower. Perhaps in the early years the child lived up to her gender expectations, but a black sheep cannot be hidden forever. As the years wore on, the beautiful gift from above began to exhibit the telltale symptoms of the enemy. Yes, the delicate flower eventually became her mother’s worst nightmare: a sweat-suit-wearing, cursing, and violent tomboy. But to the credit of her parents, all of their great teachings were not a complete waste.

Seiza No Kamae (Formal Seated Posture)

Delicate facial features, hair straightened to perfection, neatly pressed clothes, with a dash of sparkling makeup: there you have a simple recipe for a girly girl. Eighteen years ago in a medium-sized city in central Massachusetts, I believe my parents were concocting this very same recipe as they welcomed me into the world. They were probably imagining the various ribbons that would cascade through my long brown hair, my always-manicured nails, and perhaps my elegant mannerisms. This may seem over the top, but in a typical Puerto Rican family these were the standards a young female was supposed to strive for. Hispanic society basically stamps a blueprint on a girl's forehead at a young age that says the mantra: girls are meant to be girls and boys are meant to be boys. A simple enough saying, but these few words dictated how I was raised. I was taught to believe dresses or skirts are everyday commodities and my appearance is as much a reflection of me as of my family. With that instilled in my brain, it naturally made sense for me to develop into the stereotypical girly girl.

Of course I didn’t have much of a choice during my childhood for the real power was held tightly by the matriarch. Believe it or not, it wasn’t my mother but rather my stern, no-nonsense grandmother. Born and raised in
the heart of the Puerto Rican farmland, my abuela, or “Lela” as I affectionately call her, was bred to be the proper lady of the household. As the oldest of her sisters, she was the prime paradigm of ideal female behavior. She learned to sew at an early age, her cooking was extraordinary, and she spoke only in proper Spanish to her elders. It was just my luck that these habits didn’t dissipate when she moved to the mainland. In fact she was my adopted teacher in the female arts. Standing completely erect, keeping my hair perfect as a button, and making monthly salon visits—these were the commonplace ideas she brainwashed me into thinking during my early years. And like the proper Puerto Rican young lady I was born to be, I took these lessons to heart and simply obeyed. Similar to the girl with the bubblegum pink dress, I had the highest approval from my family.

In all honesty I never despised my upbringing or the girly natures of my female family members. Embracing my girly side enabled me to better connect with my “familia” in ways that may not have been possible otherwise. Such things as having group manicures and cooking dinners together for the males cemented our everlasting bond. That bond is what I treasure most, and if I have to endure a few hours of girly behavior every now and then to maintain it, so be it.

**Jumonji No Kamae (Offensive Aggressive Stance)**

However, there were always these moments when I felt hollow—like a piece of me was missing. A sense of self I hadn’t quite achieved yet. My missing puzzle piece eluded me for a while until finally an angel dressed in a white karate gi descended upon me. All right, so Bruce Lee might not be your stereotypical angel, but to a young girl wearing uncomfortable dresses her whole life, he was a godsend. His fluid, lightning-fast movements mesmerized me, and his powerful attacks made my jaw drop with little effort. Even from a television screen he screamed independence as well as freedom. Without my consciously realizing it, my heart had fallen in love with the unadulterated brute sport of martial arts. After countless days of begging, my parents enrolled me in classes at the local dojo on a trial basis. While they saw karate as only a temporary preteen phase, the reality was that it was the key to my liberation. You couldn’t worry about what your hair looked like or stop a fight because your nail broke off. That kind of person would be dog meat in a matter of seconds. If you wanted to survive in my cutthroat dojo, you ceased to be the person you originally were once you walked through the threshold. For me that meant my girly girl persona had to disappear—only to be replaced by a warrior goddess.

With the arrival of the warrior I all but forsook my girly self, especially when competition season arrived. My fondest memory will always be my first tournament in Rhode Island. I can still recall the torrential rain pelting on
my jacket and the unrelenting thump of my heart beating against my chest as I slowly made my way to the stadium. The thunderous applause deafened my ears as soon as the great steel doors opened, and hundreds of combatants filled my range of sight. All of that barely mattered though, for I was completely focused on my first fight. Time ceased to exist for me as I made my way to the area. Eerie silence took control as I carefully strapped my gloves and helmet on. My only companion was the rhythmic exhale of my breath as I gazed upon my first opponent. I bowed to the lanky brunette girl, and we encircled one another like predators, flexing our arms for better reach, our feet barely scraping the matted floor. In an unspoken agreement, we attacked simultaneously in a flurry of movement. I managed to evade her high kick and strike a strong right hook to the right side of her helmet. I scored my first hit at my first tournament, and forever my life changed. I was no longer daddy’s little princess or a docile child sitting by my mother’s side. At that moment I felt like a deadly assassin and that feeling was like my nicotine.

**Fudoza No Kamae (Immoveable Seat)**

Since that momentous event it finally occurred to my parents that martial arts wasn’t a preteen phase. I was hard set on enrolling in the most advanced classes, and I eventually switched to a different style of fighting. In Ninjutsu, a Japanese form of martial arts, I found the sense of freedom that I discovered while watching Bruce Lee movies. Every time I learned a new kata, or technique, such as Jumonji No Kamae or Ichimonji, it felt like a simple extension of my arm or leg. I realized I could just as easily express myself by subtly switching the way I fought as I could by wearing a new style of clothing.

**Shizen No Kamae (Natural Position)**

Much to the dismay of my parents, and especially “Lela,” my tomboy side was cemented into my being thanks to martial arts. No longer was I solely into wearing my hair down, putting on pounds of makeup, or avoiding sweat like the plague. So while it made my familia slightly tear up when I traded my skirts for sweatpants, in the end they still accepted the new me. But it’s not like my girly side completely disappeared from this planet. Occasionally, I remember the girl in the bubblegum dress and realize that even now I enjoy being a “girl.” Yes, the child in the pink dress was me and she is as much a part of me as the warrior. It’s as natural as breathing to me. I’d like to think of myself as the Bubblegum Ninja: girly girl by day, deadly assassin by night.
SELECTIVE BELIEVER

YESENIA VEGA

IN THE BEGINNING

Statues of praying saints and painted angels surround me in this castle of marble and gold, this tower of purity, this place that I cannot help but find unnerving. Once a year I come, making an appearance on what has to be the hottest day of the year, as women fan themselves and boys in their ‘best dress’ fidget in their sweaty suits. An overwhelming heat encloses me, and I send out an actual prayer for rain as I stand still in this palace of stained glass. Begrudgingly, I wait in line beside my weeping relatives, rolling my eyes as I pat their backs, repeating “there, there.” Providing false sentiment is the best I can do as I stand waiting for the priest to pass on the Eucharist, his blessing—the signal for me to leave.

KISSING VAMPIRES OR KISSING ANGELS?

Growing up, my parents educated me in the teachings of Catholicism, but they also allowed me to believe in whatever made the biggest impression on me. While in middle school, vampires caught my interest, but that didn’t go over well with the church.

On one fine Sunday, in response to an old friend’s request, I attended her church with her. I was quietly waiting for the sermon to begin when an older gentleman caught me shamelessly reading the novel Vampire Kisses instead of a Bible. Although a complete stranger, the man began to argue with me, claiming that my choice in literature was clearly a sin, continuously asking me why I would want to kiss a “hell-spawned demon” instead of an angel. Contrary to his belief, I had no intention of becoming an immortal bride. As an avid reader, I was just trying to finish the book before the next volume was released. But being the cheeky girl that I am, I couldn’t resist my simple answer: that vampires were clearly more badass. Disgusted, he left me alone in a huff. With a newfound sense of accomplishment, I put my book away and watched as the pastor took his place at the altar, and to my disbelief, he happened to be the angry stranger from moments before. Mortified, I hid myself behind a Bible and listened as he sent out a prayer to a “lost little girl” in the pews. After that horrific incident, I came to terms with the fact that some adults were high strung, and I would never understand why. They were strange compared to my parents, who were open to letting my sister and me believe in whatever we thought was right and good.
THE WAYS OF MY MOTHER
My family never forced religion upon me, but I was nudged to believe in certain things. I learned the difference between good and bad from the children’s bible stories we listened to before bed, and I watched as my mother hung a picture of the Archangel Michael above our door, which she believed would ward off wicked spirits. She would give my sister and me “the eye” whenever we took his name in vain. I remember watching her take off her family ring as she cooked, the one she and the rest of our family wore on their middle fingers, a golden ring that displayed Jesus’s crucifixion.

The ring of hope, as I would call it, was a part of my family history, passed down from generation to generation. I, however, would cringe at the idea of wearing this blessed emblem. For whatever reason, I was always so oddly uncomfortable whenever I’d visit church, thinking maybe something was wrong with me when I didn’t “feel” something, that I didn’t sense a spark of enlightenment or hear the angels like the people around me did. I felt like a misfit as I watched my childhood friends and grown adults kneel and cry at the pastor’s puzzling words. I suspected that I was unwanted in this holy house, that maybe I wasn’t trying hard enough to feel “blessed.” Yet, as I continued to observe fellow church-goers, I began to sense that maybe the others were trying too hard to prove their faith—that maybe others weren’t as honest as I was taught to be. I went with my instincts and followed them along with my mother’s guidance, and although she disapproved of my decision, she did her best to respect it.

YOUTH DEVELOPMENT
As I grew older, I developed my own opinions and my own set of beliefs. Though I respect my family and any other person’s belief, I learned that we are all entitled to our own. For instance, I am not religious; however, I harbor no bitter sentiment towards a god because something tragic occurred to make me reject my family’s faith. No, I simply accepted life and took responsibility for my decisions. There was no need to blame anyone for life’s many challenges; furiously shaking a fist at the air would solve nothing. I’ve come to terms with the fact that no one, not us nor god, has a say in or control of a situation, despite what one may think. Life just has a tendency to get in the way. I felt that accepting some unknown higher power wasn’t for me; I’m someone who’s skeptical of the unknown. I’m someone who simply cannot chose to believe in a deity or deny one because who am I to lay claim to one or the other?

LIFE’S SPEED BUMPS
Life can take some very unexpected turns, and faith becomes most apparent at our most vulnerable times. So in the face of sudden events, I would sometimes
find myself reluctantly praying. To whom, you ask? I’m still unsure about that; I suppose I do it in hopes that someone, anyone who can hear me, will offer a hand to those who need it most, like a sickly relative.

For instance, when I went back home for the holidays last year, I remember how excited I was to finally get the chance to see my abuela. It had been a while since my last visit; I was busy with school while she was undergoing chemotherapy. What was supposed to be a joyous reunion turned into a painful shock as I found her room and saw her smile; she looked so small and fragile in that too-big hospital bed. Fighting breast cancer had really taken its toll on her appearance; her long, dark hair had been cleanly removed, and her frame was more delicate than I remembered. I wanted to sit by her side and cry over what had happened during the last few months, but she wouldn’t have it; she just sat there and smiled mindlessly, gliding her fingers across the family ring on her hand. For a brief moment, I was livid. There she was, so sick and helpless and still believing; but as soon as the moment passed, I realized that she needed to be hopeful, and I would never take that from her. So I sent a silent prayer for her, her doctors, and our family, hoping that whatever force out there would see her through until she was ready. Seeing her reminded me that sometimes life is too short and precious to be completely hopeless.

Even at times like that, it’s rare for me to pray. I still feel uneasy when I do so, and I feel silly for talking to myself. And other times, I worry that I’ve been wrong for not doing so before, for using someone only when necessary. I suppose growing up in my family had an unexpected effect on me, leaving me with an impulsive need to pray when the world around me suddenly comes to a sudden heart-breaking halt.

HELPING HAND

Although I’ve been a non-believer for as long as I can remember, I understand that some small part of me wants something to fall back on; I don’t deny that. It may not be on a higher power or some unseen deity; I simply want to believe in something, whether it is friends or family. I suppose it all comes from not wanting to feel alone. I don’t want this world to go on unaided; sometimes we all have to ask for help through our own various means. Sometimes we need someone to talk to, to console us, to hold out a helping hand when life gives us lemons and squeezes them on our open wounds. Though there are times when I must stand rather ruefully in beautiful cathedrals, or forced to pray to a god I don’t believe in, I think that even though I don’t believe in something specific or follow certain practices, I do believe in the good in people, and I am open to help in any form.
Interacting with Text

Preface

We often write to engage with the ideas of others, particularly in academic contexts. Because critical dialogue is at the heart of meaning-making in universities, College Writing asks students to “wrestle” with a published text in a unit called Interacting with Text. Writing to an academic audience, students work to balance understanding and fair representation of the text (specifically, effective summary, paraphrase, quotation, and citation of a text) with a critical response. This begins the process of writing to more distant audiences—audiences that are broader than fellow classmates, family members, or friends—and to understand the kinds of thinking and writing valued by academic communities.

The Interacting with Text essays included here represent student interactions with the work of published writers. Drawing on their own histories and experiences, these student writers place their own perspectives in dialogue with those of a published writer. The challenge is, at once, to contemplate the sophisticated ideas shared in Other Words and to present one’s own perspective on those ideas: for example; to re-think one’s perspective on the topic; to apply a writer’s claims to a different context; to tease apart the nuances of a writer’s assertions; to re-define a key concept in an essay; and more. To understand these writers’ ways of responding, we might imagine how the writers of the Inquiring into Self essays, based on their personal contexts, might have responded differently to the issues presented in this section.

The first two writers grapple with sophisticated essays that can’t be reduced to one simple claim. In “Regarding the Narrative of Photographs,” Robert Babcock illustrates the power personal context can play when applied to understanding a text. Reading Susan Sontag’s difficult text on the ways in which photographs shape our understanding of events, he explores and makes concrete her claims by reflecting on his own responses to photographs of the Holocaust and other atrocities of war and terrorism, as well as his personal experience with war-themed video games. In “Lara Croft: A Feminist Icon or Sexist Fantasy?”, Julia Berger writes an introduction that efficiently orients the reader to author Maja Mikula’s main points and then asserts her own clear claim. Her essay thoughtfully balances her own arguments with quotes and paraphrases from the text, not allowing one to dominate the other.

The next two writers ruminate over what they’ve read, and their writing reflects an open-minded approach toward the published essay. Initially, in “Whole Foods: Pure Pioneer or Deceptive Distributor?”, Gilson Hogan is dismayed by Field
Maloney’s negative assessment of Whole Foods. But by testing Maloney’s claims through field research—an investigative visit to the local Whole Foods store, where Hogan does a “close reading” of what the store actually claims—he arrives at a new perspective on Maloney’s text. Avery Stroman, in “Is Google Making Us Stupid?,” contemplates Nicholas Carr’s essay on the Internet’s effects on our ability to concentrate. Stroman further extends Carr’s argument to include a second concern regarding the essence of human intelligence: not quick access to facts, but an ability to interpret.

Reading these essays may inspire discussion about what it means to interact with a text in an academic context: how a writer represents another’s ideas fairly and purposefully; how a writer offers a response that offers a fresh perspective on the essay and/or topic; how a writer develops the response in an essay for an academic audience; and, in the process, how a writer develops his or her own voice.
Regarding the Narrative of Photographs

ROBERT BABCOCK

As a generation, we have taken more pictures than ever before. A historian rightly points out that whereas in the past researchers faced the problem of not being able to find an archive, now the problem is finding the right archive. My parents have two large file cabinets tightly packed with photographs. Social networking sites like Facebook allow young people to instantly upload their photos into electronic file cabinets, and any moment can be turned into a photographic spectacle for the world to take a look at and remember.

The notion of ‘remembering,’ however, becomes complicated when discussed in the context of what Susan Sontag in her essay “Regarding the Pain of Others” refers to as collective memory: memories of tragedies such as the Holocaust that have been experienced at a societal, racial, and national level. The spectators of the photographs of such events may be divided into two categories: those associated directly with the victim (such as familial survivors) or the event (Jews, for example, who escaped the Holocaust but who were still involved because of the event’s effect on the Jewish people); and those who have an awareness of but no direct association with the event or its victims. War photographs, with their haunting details, have a powerful influence on an audience of the latter kind, so that for them, remembering an event turns into act of conjuring up an iconic image. “To remember,” says Sontag, “is more and more, not to recall a story but to be able call up a picture” (263). For instance, I had learned about the Holocaust in school. But now when someone mentions it, it is not my learning that I remember. Rather, the images I found on the Internet come to mind. They fixed the Holocaust in my mind by associating it with stark images of barbed wire and watchtowers at Auschwitz, starved and overworked men with hollow faces and skeletal chests, and Jewish families being marched into cattle wagons.

These images therefore serve a very specific purpose. They keep the shocking realities of war alive in the collective memory of viewers by “stipulating: that this is important, and this is the story about how it happened . . . the pictures that lock the story in our minds . . . trigger predictable thoughts, feelings” (Sontag 261). The most reproduced war photograph—five soldiers and a navy corpsman raising America’s flag on the island of Iwo Jima, the first Japanese territory to
be captured by the US in 1945—went on to take new physical forms: it became a postage stamp and the world's largest bronze monument erected at a war cemetery in the country's capital. It became a “constituent part of what a society declares that it has chosen to think about” (261). On the other hand, events that haven't been sufficiently photographed, such as the Nan King tragedy, have not, as Sontag correctly observes, survived in public memory.

However, photographs that create collective memory often lack a critical detail: the trauma narrative of the individual. Prime examples of such haunting, yet anonymous images are lynching photographs. They create a widespread awareness of the atrocity, but they fail to identify victim people. Having emotional sympathy with the setting or the event but not the person is problematic because the event itself, lynching or Holocaust, refused to treat people as individuals and instead grouped people into a category, associating nothing more with them than a racial label. By not individually identifying “the powerless, [the photographs] reduce [them] to their powerlessness” (Sontag 259).

A photographer who came under Sontag's criticism for this kind of portrayal of the powerless is Salgado. His photos of helpless migrants, taken in thirty-nine countries, “declined[d] to name the subject” (259). Such photos make spectators aware of the widespread nature of the problem, but the viewers also feel disconnected because of the anonymity of the subjects who are “demoted . . . to representative instances of their occupations, their ethnicities, their plights” (259). Associating the narrative with the photo therefore serves the critical purpose of meaningfully associating the impacted with the impact-causing event.

Photographs are a source of safety: they assure people that they will be able to look back on an experience and learn from it. Somehow, forgetting makes the experience seem not worthwhile. Sontag, when discussing memory museums, says: “Now many victim peoples want a memory museum, a temple that houses a comprehensive, chronologically organized, illustrated narrative of their sufferings” (262). A museum like this provides people and their past with a position, a landscape in the world. There are, as Sontag points out, umpteen pictures of the Holocaust. What is the purpose of introducing these photos to more eyes? Perhaps events like this are less likely to occur again if the world knows it in all its horrid details. George Santayana once said, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” Survivors of tragic events such as the Holocaust or Armenian Genocide want the world to know what they went through so that no other race meets a similar fate. Through pictures they want to “invoke the miracle of [their] survival” (Sontag 262). And the narrative of the “miracle” must be associated with these photographs.

I was an avid video gamer in the past, my preoccupation predominantly with games such as Call of Duty that involved bloody killings. Death was administered
Regarding the Narrative of Photographs

with guns, explosives, knives, and flamethrowers, providing me with the surreal experience of partaking in a real battle. This simulation, I now realize, is nothing like a real battlefield. In these war games you can get killed, but within seconds, you are back up. The gaming space is governed by an immortality that reality does not replicate. Further, people are not shocked by these games because “repeated exposures to what shocks . . . does not use up a full-hearted response . . . for images obey different rules than real life” (Sontag 264).

Over the years these games have become more realistic: characters look like real people, and the graphic flow of images is similar in aesthetics to that of war photographs. What Sontag says about the war photographer is also true of the videogame’s graphic artists: “[Their] concern is that the images to be devised won’t be sufficiently upsetting: not concrete, not detailed enough” (258). The creator of these videocast visuals therefore has a “gaze [that is] pitiless. The image . . . [creates] a challenging kind of beauty” (257). This approach appeals to gamers because such “beautifying . . . tends to bleach out a moral response to what is shown” (260). I electronically fought and killed for hours when I was younger.

While the war videogame is similar to the war photograph insofar as it is a beautiful recreation of an act of violence, there is a critical distinction between the two. A game is entirely an invention; even if it draws some its inspiration from real wars, the game itself is not based on a real event. A war photograph, on the other hand, is a snapshot of a tragic event. And so while people approve of a well-made unreal game, a beautiful-looking war photograph, as Sontag points out, is “criticized if it seems aesthetic” (258). Sontag illustrates her claim with the relatable example of the attack on the World Trade Center, a contemporary tragedy site that is still raw in the American psyche. It seemed inappropriate, Sontag says, to acknowledge the beauty of photographs of the WTC ruins. “The most people dared say,” Sontag adds, “was that the photographs were ‘surreal’ a hectic euphemism behind which the disgraced notion of beauty cowered” (257-258).

Further, unlike a war videogame, whose sole purpose is to entertain, a war photo performs a dual role: it “generates documents . . . [and] creates works of visual art” (258). Those who criticized the WTC photographs refuse to acknowledge the fact that a photograph is also a work of art and “transforming is what art does,” alchemizing the “mass graveyard” (258) of the WTC ruins into something beautiful.

A war photographer whose work Sontag discusses is Gilles Peress, a mastermind of shock photography. He has traveled to battlegrounds all over the world, and his documentation efforts include images of the atrocities inflicted in Rwanda. The first photo of his that I saw shows remnants of a mother and child, their flesh barely clinging to their bones. Their clothes, however, remain draped over
them. Based upon their physical proximity, it can be said the mother is trying to protect her child. It powerfully resonates with the notion of ‘family,’ and how all of humanity would access their protective instinct when their loved ones are threatened by mortal danger. Indeed, war photos are key visual reminders of the mistakes we made in the past. But we must acknowledge their limitations. If you talk to Elie Wiesel, a Holocaust survivor, or survivors of the Rwandan Genocide, they will affirm that those pictures tell you very little of their stories. Personal photos help us remember an event over time because our own experience (or anecdotal retellings by a parent) informs our memory. We have both a narrative and an image, so that looking at the photograph elicits both an informed and an emotional response. When looking at war photographs that depict the pain of others, while it is important to admire the abilities of the photographer, and while responding emotionally is both needed and is, in fact, expected, we must not forget that photographs are, as Sontag points out, only the “indelible sample” (261): powerful, yet incomplete on their own. For photographs to “lay down routes of references, and become totems of causes” (261) we must understand the narrative history that the photograph depicts. We must know the story of the people who were victimized and marginalized if we don’t want the photograph to remain open to “prejudices, fancies, and misinformation” (261). Why did the photographer choose to capture this battleground—why were these battle frames important to her? Knowledge of this nature will help war photographs act as both documents and works of art. In this twin role, they will demonstrate atrocities that are far removed, but that, if we are not conscious of, as Santayana warns, we will be condemned to repeat.

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Lara Croft: A Feminist Icon or Sexist Fantasy?

JULIA BERGER

In contemporary society, women have more freedom than ever. The women of today have the ability to vote, are no longer confined to a domestic life, may work in the corporate workplace, and are not dependent on their husbands. So the creation of an independent and resourceful female videogame character like Lara Croft should come as no surprise. Yet, in Maja Mikula’s “Gender and Videogames,” Mikula questions whether “Lara [is truly] a feminist icon or [just] a sexist fantasy” (181). Lara Croft is a self-sufficient and resourceful character who defies the traditional female stereotypes. Should these qualities be negated by the fact that she is depicted as excessively feminine with “large breasts, a tiny waist, wide hips, and extremely tight fitting clothing” (180)? Is Lara Croft only able to gain success as a result of her meeting the standards of beauty in contemporary society? To respond to such questions, it is necessary to examine the context of Lara’s creation to understand the intended purpose of her character. I believe that Lara Croft’s character is closer to a sexist fantasy than a feminist icon because her character lacks the ability to act on her own will. She was modeled after a male perception of what a powerful woman should be, and her target audience is predominantly young males.

According to her creator Toby Gard, the character of Lara Croft contains “elements of such iconic creations as Indiana Jones and James Bond” (qtd. in Mikula 184). He decided against dressing her in scanty clothing because he felt that she had more dignity. In fact, Lara is portrayed as an atypical female videogame character because she is far from the stereotypical damsel in distress. Rather, Lara is self-sufficient with survival skills and more, forming an impressive résumé of “a trained rock climber, expert shooter, motorcyclist and world famous archaeologist” (Mikula 181-82). In her essay, Mikula argues that these qualities mean Lara cannot be interpreted as solely a sexist fantasy or a feminist icon. Yet, I believe that because Lara Croft was designed by a male artist means that Lara Croft’s character remains only a male perception of what a powerful and ultimate woman should be and not a real feminist icon. In order to be a true feminist icon, Lara Croft would have to be an entirely female invention without a male’s influence reflected in her character.
Similarly, while I do not believe Gard intended Lara to become a sexist fantasy, I believe that she is closer to one than a feminist icon due to the fundamental nature of videogames. Inherently, videogames allow the players to control the actions and decisions of the protagonist. Consequently, Lara loses the power to govern her own actions and body. This represents a far cry from the feminist women of today or the strong independent female characters portrayed in movies and books that are recognized for their independent thinking. Without being able to make her own decisions, Lara’s strong characteristics become irrelevant.

Moreover, video gamers can change the camera view and zoom in on Lara’s physical attributes. In her essay, Mikula argues that while some may see this as a form of objectification, women actually identify with Lara Croft. As Mikula explains, “the game makes it possible to be excited about identifying with this strong and capable archaeologist; or to enjoy looking after an excessively feminine character” (184). Thus, Mikula presents both of these views of Lara Croft in a positive light. On the contrary, I believe that the camera angles only allow for the objectification of Lara because they draw attention to her exaggerated feminine features. Moreover, similar camera angles are not present in games with male protagonists, revealing a disparity between the treatment of female and male videogame characters.

It is also important to note that Lara Croft was created for an audience of predominantly young male video gamers. Therefore, the camera angles would only be exploited for the objectification of her character, especially because males would most likely not identify with a female character. The game isn’t likely to inspire and influence young girls today because they would most likely not be playing the video game as much as boys do.

Additionally, in her essay Mikula discusses how Lara Croft’s excessively feminine beauty can be perceived by some to add to the image of Lara Croft as an ultimate superwoman. Mikula quotes Angelina Jolie to show that Lara Croft’s beauty adds to her power: “she’s [Lara Croft] like every kind of sexy Italian actress I’ve ever watched” (185). Yet, I believe that if Lara Croft is not able to have control over how she uses her body, then she loses all the power she seems to have. Moreover, her beauty actually causes her strong and resourceful attributes to be negligible given that women today often gain success and fame as long as they are young and beautiful. For example, many of today’s female pop stars and politicians are held to a different standard than males in the same position. Two examples of this double standard are Hillary Clinton and Kelly Clarkson. While one could say Hillary’s role in politics itself is impressive, she is still judged for her fashion and her beauty unlike her male counterparts. Similarly, American Idol encourages young female artists, such as Kelly Clarkson, to change themselves in order to conform to their female pop star brand that sports cute feminine clothing and
wavy blond curls. In fact, Kelly’s style and body image were so harshly critiqued over time by popular magazines and the media that the pressure forced her to transform who she was. She began her career in 2002 wearing rugged cargo pants and cowboy boots. But harsh criticism from media sources such as Seventeen Magazine, which scrutinized every detail of her outfit, caused her to exchange her cowboy boots for strappy heels.

While Maja Mikula argues that Lara Croft’s character is both a feminist icon and sexist fantasy, I believe that through the examination of the context surrounding her creation it is clear that Lara Croft is closer to a sexist fantasy than a feminist icon. Lara Croft was designed from a male’s perception, for young males, and she is objectified through the videogame format. Like Kelly Clarkson, Lara Croft is a product of consumerism. We buy into what we want to see and what we view as normal in society. Therefore, the way women are portrayed will not change unless we are able to change the larger context creating that portrayal: society.

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Whole Foods: Pure Pioneer or Deceptive Distributor?

GILSON HOGAN

The first time I walked into a Whole Foods store, it was after a morning run on an early spring day in New Orleans, Louisiana. The doors were open, and I needed bread and soup. As I got close to the entrance, a gentle breeze seemed to sweep me through the doors and into the beautiful arena of the produce section. As Field Maloney puts it, “the produce section, usually located in the geographic center of the shopping floor, is the spiritual heart of a Whole Foods outlet” (121). Spiritual was right. I had never felt so comfortable or alive in a grocery store before. It was chest-thumpingly exciting to be surrounded by such ‘pure’ organic food.

However, Field Maloney’s essay has since altered my view about the seemingly innocent and pure Whole Foods. In “Is Whole Foods Wholesome?” Maloney shows a different side of Whole Foods. After having considered what he wrote, I have felt slightly betrayed by Whole Foods. There is nothing worse than something that falsely portrays itself, no matter how much I love the portrayal.

Maloney frames his argument against Whole Foods with two powerful points. He begins by stating what the Whole Foods customer would see if he or she entered the produce section: a banner that says, “Reasons To Buy Organic” (121). On this banner, the first reason given is “Save Energy” (121). Now, to your typical UMass Amherst student, who understands that pesticides are bad for the environment and that mass production of vegetables uses a lot of energy, the heading “Saves Energy” makes sense. However, the college student is most likely unaware of where the organic vegetables come from when he buys them in winter.

Maloney does not hesitate in breaking the bad news. The vegetables are, at least in the case of tomatoes, “grown in Chile” (122). Maloney dives further into this issue by interviewing certain local farmers. One of them explains that when the food is not shipped from the southern tip of South America, “[a]lmost all the organic food in this country comes out of California. And five or six big California farms dominate the whole industry” (122).

“But what about the small family farms I know to exist?” one might ask. Maloney provides an answer to this question in his second point.
The next reason on the banner to buy organic states, “Help the Small Farmer. Buying organic supports the small, family farmers that make up a large percentage of organic food producers” (122). If most of the organic food in this country comes from Californian farms, how can family farmers make up a large percentage? The answer is that they can’t—at least not in the case of food production. As Maloney puts it quite accurately, “There are a lot of small, family-run organic farmers, but their share of the crop in this country, and of the produce sold at Whole Foods, is miniscule”(122). As for the cozy pictures of organic farm families on the wall, Maloney assures us that “[t]hese profiles may be heartwarming, but they also artfully mislead customers about what they’re paying premium prices for” (122).

Needless to say, these claims against Whole Foods are like throwing a wrench in the progressive works toward the cleaner food and water we thought corporations like Whole Foods were leading us to. As a result, I decided to do a little research of my own to get a new perspective.

I recently revisited Whole Foods in Hadley, MA, to see if Maloney’s claims were true. I first approached the cheese section. The first words that caught my eye claimed, “I’M A LOCAL” on an overhead banner. My initial question was would every sign just read “local” on it without any other information, leaving customers to accept the corporation’s hidden lies? My question was quickly answered. Much to my surprise, every cheese I could see was marked with its country or state of origin, many of which were far away.

‘What?’ I thought. ‘Is Whole Foods trying to shoot itself in the foot with this clearly self-defeating practice of labeling where each food item comes from?’ I moved on.

Next, I came to the produce section. Again, I was surprised to find on each produce selection the name of the country or state from which the organic items came. I saw ‘Spain,’ ‘France,’ ‘New York,’ ‘South Carolina,’ ‘Canada,’ ‘Mexico,’ ‘Connecticut,’ ‘Vermont,’ ‘Maine,’ and ‘Massachusetts’—to name a few. Each place of origin was clearly marked in large capital letters to remove any confusion or doubt of where an item came from. Then, the sight of farmer profiles above the produce selections grabbed my attention.

The first profile was that of Dave Jackson from Enterprise Farm in Whately, MA. His contribution to the Whole Foods business this year has been organic squash, cucumbers, and cabbage. I looked for these three items and found squash and cabbage.

‘Two out of three,’ I thought. ‘Not bad.’

The next profile was less informative, stating, “Old Friends Farm, Amherst, MA. Organic Young Ginger.” The ginger, much to my dismay, was right under its sign.
The final profile I examined was that of Mike Wiseman. He owns Warner Farm in Sunderland, MA, where he grows organic corn. Whole Foods’s comment on this profile is, “Our local sweet corn is delivered fresh from Warner Farm 7 days a week!” I looked around for the corn and discovered a large stack with its husk still on.

What’s going on? Whole Foods seems to be telling the truth everywhere I look! There are no secrets with any of their products. If they were to import fruits or vegetables from South America or any other country, the customers would know it! I still side with Maloney’s argument regarding energy saving vs. energy wasting, but on the issue of importing organic from far away, is Whole Foods really at fault or are its customers?

My visit to the outlet in Hadley, MA, provided me with a new string of questions for both Field Maloney and Whole Foods itself. I feel that both parties have some correct views. Whole Foods is a pioneer in the fight against pesticides and pollution by promoting organic food. They claim on their banners that they are fighting for “clean water from coast to coast” (Maloney 122), and I believe they are. However, they are hurting their fight by importing foods from so far away while claiming that they are indisputably saving energy.

During Maloney’s closing thoughts, he expresses a fascinating vision on how to realize Whole Food’s mission for the masses. He predicts that Wal-Mart, “with its simple ‘More for Less’ credo,” (123) might eventually do a better job selling organic foods, and at a cheaper price, than Whole Foods. If this is to be the case, Whole Foods should receive admirable praise for its initiative to turn the nation to organic farming. If, indeed, Wal-Mart chooses to respect Whole Foods’s endeavors while taking over its business, perhaps Wal-Mart will change its name and credo to “Whole-Mart: Whole for Less.”

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Is Google Making Us Stupid?

AVERY STROMAN

Ever have the feeling that you are losing focus? In his article, Nicholas Carr advocates that the use of the Internet is to blame for this lack of concentration. Not only can he no longer submerge himself in a lengthy article, but he also feels his brain is being rewired due to his increased use of the World Wide Web. He finds himself quickly skimming blogs online, and professes that his “concentration often starts to drift after two or three pages” (Carr 59) when he is required to read a lengthy book or article. Carr is not alone in these feelings, for I feel the same way. Later on in this essay, I will speak to the multiple questions that naturally stem from this observation. After all, addressing the issue of whether or not our lack of concentration means we have transformed into less intelligent human beings generates another question: what exactly defines intelligence? Logically we would expect Carr not only to inquire about the effects of the Internet on people today, but also on those in the future. However, he does not propose a solution to this growing problem for he is unsure of how he can get his own concentration back, let alone that of others. Even though he is uncertain about how the Web will affect the human race in the long run, whether it will be negative or positive, Carr does a fantastic job of leaving the reader more mindful of his or her own use of the Internet, and I applaud him for that.

I agree with Carr that the Internet has been shortening our attention span because my own experience confirms it. For instance, I allowed the presence of Facebook, Twitter, and e-mail to prevent me from reading his entire article without stopping. Without thinking, I switched from the assignment at hand to the Internet. Clicking from link to link, mindlessly absorbing key information before jumping to the next site, I found myself doing this mundane task out of years of habit. Eventually the work got done, but not before I consciously blocked out the distraction of these social media sites. While the enormous effort required of me to do so may not be equivalent to the energy used to comprehend Carr’s piece, it was not too far off. When Carr claimed that he finds the Internet “chipping away [his] capacity for concentration and contemplation” (60), I could not help but relate to his observation. How can I expect to be productive while the Internet begged for my attention? The instant satisfaction I receive from looking at pictures on Facebook, updating my Twitter feed, or reading a comical e-mail competes with the strenuous effort of writing an essay. The gratification
and fulfillment I feel from formulating my own thoughts into a persuasive or cohesive paper takes more time to achieve than surfing the World Wide Web and receiving immediate gratification. Years ago, before every given assignment required Internet access, I found myself completing homework more efficiently. Even though I was in elementary school, I feel that there is a distinction between my brain then and my brain now.

After talking to and observing others, I realized that I am not the only person who feels this way. Rather than focusing on completing homework assignments, my roommate and others on my floor prefer spending their time on entertaining yet useless websites. With the vast information accessible through the Internet, procrastination is inevitable. Except for those few who have the ability to avoid this debilitating habit, the prolonged wait to tackle our never-ending work seems to be increasing due to this relatively new invention. I watch my roommate struggle between choosing whether she should watch another online episode of the show How I Met Your Mother or start her chemistry lab. Before she gets a chance to decide, one of our neighbors usually comes in and claims he cannot focus. Of course, texting, sleep deprivation, conversing with friends, and pure lack of interest in the subject are just a few of the other factors that prevent college students from having extended attention spans. However, I would argue that the Internet is the number one distraction for both my peers and me.

While other people might agree with me that the Internet proves to be a great distraction, they could also incorrectly argue that the benefits this invention has brought us outweigh its disadvantages. Before I rebut their false notion, I want to take the time to explain why they think this idea has some validity. The World Wide Web brings us a wealth of information; picturing life without it seems unbearable and unimaginable. People use it to communicate with loved ones on the other side of the world; they stream videos from different countries into the comfort of their homes; international businesses use it to compromise on deals without leaving their offices. I am not trying to deny that the amount of information available at our fingertips has made us more knowledgeable about subjects that we may previously have had difficulty accessing. Even Carr takes time to acknowledge that his “research that once required days in the stacks or periodical rooms of libraries can now be done in minutes” (59). Understandably this makes sense. Because a Google search for “dogs” takes around 0.29 seconds and yields over 674,000,000 results, Carr, along with anyone else who has Internet access, can become smarter, faster. No human being can retain the same amount of information stored in the Web’s databases, nor spit back answers as fast, no matter how much expertise they have on the topic. But that’s okay, some people would say, because we have the Internet to retain that knowledge for us when our brains can only remember a certain amount.
While the wealth of knowledge that the Internet has provided is undeniable, excessive use may have two long lasting effects. The first effect of losing the ability to concentrate has already been examined earlier in the essay. Now let me explain the second. The idea discussed in the paragraph above is based mainly on the idea that an overload of information means people have become smarter, or at least have more access to intelligence. But what exactly is intelligence? If intelligence is defined as the memorization of facts and spitting them back out when asked, the Internet has surely helped people achieve that. However, I would argue that a person’s ability to interpret information has a higher value than merely being able to list information. This skill cannot be learned through a Google search, but rather over time and through much practice without the Web as a distraction. Due to the Internet training our brains to feel that knowledge can be searched and found instantly, I feel that we are losing our interpretation skills and Carr agrees. In the last line of his article, he worries that “as we come to rely on computers to mediate our understanding of the world, it is our own intelligence that flattens into artificial intelligence” (66). The idea that one day we may rely on robot and computer intellect rather than our own is a scary one.

I realize there may be some opposition to the idea that the Internet hinders our capability to interpret. After all, a basic factual knowledge is needed to formulate profound opinions, and this can be sought out on the Internet. However, going beyond what the Net has to offer separates an intelligent human being from an average one. Any inquiring person can read the interpretation of others on professional blogs or educational sites, but formulating a cultivated opinion of one’s own takes much more talent. Socrates worried about people coming “to rely on the written word as a substitute for the knowledge they used to carry inside their heads” (Carr 65). He worried that they would “cease to exercise their memory and become forgetful” (Carr 65). This point is very similar to the one I am trying to make. Instead of having to remember everything within the confines of one’s brain without the help of written language to jog a memory, people nowadays are relying on the Internet to retain information they might forget. According to Socrates someone could “be thought very knowledgeable when they are for the most part quite ignorant” (Carr 65), and I believe the Internet can only enhance this false sense of expertise. Nowadays it is not extremely difficult to mention another person’s original idea and pass it off as one’s own. While having access to an infinite amount of knowledge can have numerous positive effects, it can also have unseen negative ones.

In knowing how the Internet is affecting us, and recognizing our inability to prevent the future from taking place, we must proceed with more attentiveness to not harm ourselves by depending heavily on the Net. Scientists have long admitted that the brain is not impermeable and has the ability to change as we
grow older. This change can even be experienced on a neurological level due to alterations in our environment, such as the availability of the Internet. Only time will tell what adverse effects the World Wide Web will have on mankind. We should definitely not be afraid of the future because the change we will experience is coming whether we want it to or not. I also do not have the power to reasonably advocate for the destruction of the Internet since its presence is far too woven into our culture and everyday lifestyle. Even though our current level of reliance on the Internet is something we will have for a while, that does not mean we should not become more and more dependent on its presence. Being aware of its effects will only benefit us in the years to come, as we continue to strive to be intelligent, Internet-friendly people with long attention spans who know how to interpret. Only we can make this well-balanced world exist, so let’s make it happen.

Works Cited
Adding to the Conversation

Preface

For the unit called “Adding to the Conversation,” each student travels even further into a wider public audience by taking part in a larger conversation around a subject or issue that s/he finds meaningful. What appeals to each student, what they find important and meaningful, has so much to do with their own histories and experiences. Students begin with a question, research multiple perspectives on the larger conversation around their question, and then imagine a potential audience that ought to hear more about it. Finding a point of entry where they could contribute meaningfully to this dialogue, students then write essays for a specific and more public audience—essays that include representation of and responses to sources, but that are ultimately guided by the student’s purpose. Here are essays that move beyond the “academic” world.

These essays are evidence of how writing serves the community. In the following essays, the writers bring their perspectives into the “world” and make their voices integral to larger conversations. In our first essay, Victoria Alessi takes a familiar topic to us—the hatred and injustice toward homosexuality—and moves it far beyond the boundaries of our own experience. Alessi explores shocking legislation proposed in Uganda that would, among other government-approved atrocities, make homosexuality a crime punishable by death. She opens this conversation to local readers, using her sources effectively to support her argument that this newly aroused hatred is being fueled by certain American evangelical ministers as the “good word” of God. Alessi shows us how to have a positive influence in defeating the violence against gays and the legislation in Uganda.

In “Horse Racing or Horse Slaying,” Alyssa Moore’s research question emerges from what she witnesses. Moore brings original thinking and passionate insights to a topic many may be aware of: Thoroughbred horse racing. But few of us know the facts behind the sport that she carefully exposes in her essay, which balances her own knowledge with diverse and seamlessly integrated sources. Nina Pascarelli, too, uses research to understand an experience that hits close to home; by centering this essay on sexual harassment on a particular event, she at once narrows the scope of this large topic and engages readers. In “Innocence Destroyed: Examining a Sexual Harassment Case,” she structures her essay by alternating paragraphs between narrative details of a very local and personal experience and her research, and readers must grapple with this disjuncture. Readers might consider how this disjuncture conveys her purpose and what effects an alternative essay structure might have had.
The last two essays illustrate how research-based writing can be tailored to and thus engage with select audiences. Sarah Parker’s essay “The Skinny on College Weight Gain,” clearly addresses UMass students. Going beyond discussion of the well-known concept of “the freshman fifteen,” she uses local details by exploring how the UMass dining commons and students’ social interactions can contribute to a lifetime of obesity. She effectively combines descriptive detail and narrative with her research to connect with readers and to help address the temptations she and all UMass students face. Likewise, in “Smalltime Dairy Farms—Spending More, Getting Less,” Sabryna Whitman personalizes Congress’s failure to extend monetary aid to dairy farmers. By including an interview with a local farmer in her research, she emulates the style of a featured article in a news magazine and makes the effects of this national issue more immediate to her readers. Each of these writers explores an issue and, drawing on multiple perspectives provided by research (and the resources provided by a university library), voices a perspective and becomes part of a wider conversation.
Resisting Oppression in Uganda

VICTORIA ALESSI

"Who would want to live in a place where everyone hates you? . . . Where you think, ‘Am I going to survive today? Am I going to get arrested today? Or beaten?’" (qtd. in Galliano 14). These are the questions that Frank Mugisha, chairman of Sexual Minorities Uganda, a leading gay rights activist, and hundreds of gay and lesbian individuals, face each day. Imagine living every day trying to keep your sexuality a secret, wondering whether today will be the day when a stranger, neighbor, friend, or family member turns you in to the police for being gay or lesbian. Living each day in a constant state of fear, uncertain if you will be thrown in a congested, substandard prison where you will spend the rest of your natural life. Now these individuals face the possibility of the death penalty if they are convicted of “aggravated homosexuality” (Kim 9). Uganda is gripped by hatred and fear because a few individuals in power have deemed homosexuality ‘unnatural.’

The “Anti-Homosexuality Act,” created in 2009, is currently waiting to be passed by the Ugandan legislature. If passed, this bill would add harsher punishments to the already existing laws forbidding homosexuality. Currently, individuals convicted of homosexuality can be sentenced to life in prison. If the “Anti-Homosexuality Act” is passed, individuals convicted of “aggravated homosexuality” which includes “serial offenders, HIV-positive people, and those who use drugs or alcohol to facilitate gay sex” could face the death penalty (Kim 9). Homosexual activity with a minor will also be punishable by death, although heterosexual activity with a minor will not. Witnesses of homosexual acts will face up to three years of jail if they do not report the incident to police within 24 hours. Even with pressure coming from the international and domestic communities, and a petition signed by 500,000 people protesting the bill, it is still being considered by the legislature.

While Gay Lesbian Bi-Sexual Transgender (GLBT) groups have struggled for rights in Uganda for some time, the increased oppression proposed by the “Anti-Homosexuality Act” appears to be directly correlated to a conference held in Uganda featuring certain American fundamentalist Evangelical leaders. Scott Lively, head of Abiding Truth Ministries, preached that homosexuality causes “higher rates of divorce, child abuse, and AIDS” (qtd. in Kaoma 20). Gays and lesbians are often accused of being one of the main sources of transmitting AIDS in Uganda. While some refer to AIDS as a “gay disease,” AIDS is a...
“threat to everyone [and] does not discriminate on the basis of age, race, gender, economic status, or sexual orientation” (qtd. in Herbst 115). Suggesting that only homosexuals can contract or transmit AIDS is like suggesting only blondes can develop cancer. Some individuals, like Stosh Mugisha, contracted HIV after someone tried to “cure” her homosexuality via “correctional rape” (Xie 6). Lively continued to say that homosexuality was on the same level as the “molestation of children or having sex with animals” (qtd. in Kaoma 20).

The conference also declared that homosexuality and gay rights were not human rights and should not be treated as such. This coincides with what antigay Evangelical pastor Rich Warren told Ugandans the previous year: “Homosexuality is not a natural way of life and thus not a human right” (qtd. in Kaoma 21). Lively suggested that people supporting gay rights and human rights in general are “outright liars” who “manipulate history” (qtd. in Kaoma 20). He even alluded to the notion that US activists were trying to indoctrinate Ugandan youth into a homosexual lifestyle and homosexuals had a “gay agenda.” The term “gay agenda” suggests there is some collective political motive supported by all gay or lesbian individuals. This is not the case. The GLBT community is too diverse to have one political agenda. They do not desire any advantages over heterosexuals but rather an end to homophobia and the discrimination of individuals based on their sexual desires.

Many analysts suspect that the push for stricter antigay laws in Uganda by certain American Evangelical churches is a result of the “culture war” in the United States regarding homosexuality (Kaoma 20). Because their radical ideas toward homosexuality are not being received in the manner they are hoping for, these antigay churches are taking their “teachings” to Uganda. Uganda is a deeply Christian nation and views these pastors as speakers for God. But instead of preaching acceptance and tolerance, they are teaching hate and discrimination. These preachers are taking advantage of a country and people who trust them to spread the “good word” of God and instruct them on what is morally right.

Even if the “Anti-Homosexuality Bill” does not pass through legislation, the teachings of these pastors have already taken the lives of innocent people. David Kato was one of the leading gay rights activists in Uganda until he was brutally beaten to death by an unknown assailant in his own home. The year before Kato’s murder, a Ugandan tabloid, The Rolling Stones, released Kato’s activists’ photo, phone number, and address, along with those of other leading Ugandan gay activists in the newspaper. They labeled them the “top homos” and wrote “Hang Them” underneath the headline (Delaney). The police still have no suspects and deny that Kato’s sexuality was the reason for his murder. Even if homosexuality does not become legally punishable by the death penalty, it is clear that citizens are willing to take matters into their own hands.
So what does all of this have to do with anyone living in the United States? Is it really our place to get involved in another country’s internal affairs? Shouldn’t we mind our own business? No. It is our business and it is our problem. We are helping to fuel this violence and hatred in Uganda. The U.S. culture war regarding homosexuality is causing these pastors to fly to Uganda and preach hate because they are not receiving the reaction they desire in the U.S. We are individually and collectively perpetuating the persecution of the GLBT community in Uganda. We cannot initiate a cultural war in another country and then leave the persecuted groups and individuals to defend themselves without our help. The United States is supposed to be the land of the free and a promoter of tolerance and universal human rights. But instead we allow our own culture wars to cause oppression, persecution, and discrimination in other countries?

But what can we do about the problem in Uganda other than hopping on a plane and flying there to protest? Sometimes just starting with the little things can have a major impact. The next time you are tempted to use ‘gay’ to mean stupid or in another disparaging way, stop and reconsider. Using ‘gay,’ ‘homo,’ or any other term referring to homosexuals in a disparaging way is hate language. It is not only offensive and hurtful to the individuals who are the targets of this hate speech, but also to their friends and family members. Not only can you stop the hate by refusing to use that language yourself, you can inform and encourage others to do the same. When your friends call something they disapprove of ‘gay,’ tell them you are not comfortable with that language. Explain to them how hurtful and discriminating it is. If ten people decided to educate just one other person on hate language toward GLBT groups, and then those people educated ten more and so on, imagine how quickly ideas of tolerance could spread.

On a larger scale, you could write a letter to a newspaper or start a blog to inform other people about the oppression of homosexuals in Uganda as well as in the United States. You could join protests advocating gay rights or join a local advocacy group. One person’s decision to become a supporter of gay rights can easily inspire others to do the same. On an even larger scale, it is important to examine where the resistance to homosexuality came from. Why are people so against it? Has it always been like this? As a society, we need to scrutinize how the institutions of the media, the educational system, the family, the government, and the economy affect views toward homosexuality and how they can perpetuate oppression. As we slowly start to discover these answers, we need to resist by refusing to just believe what these institutions tell us to and actively advocate for gay rights. Only by actively advocating for gay rights and human rights can we hope to help the innocent individuals being persecuted in Uganda and in other areas of the world.
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Horse Racing or Horse Slaying?

ALYSSA MOORE

Despite having second thoughts, I convinced myself that participating didn’t make me a bad person or less knowledgeable about the subject; it was just for fun. I hesitantly handed over my one dollar. In return I was given a horse’s name, Big Brown, and was told that the Kentucky Derby would start in a few minutes. Although much excitement and laughter engulfed the room, I felt dirty for supporting and encouraging horse racing. But I told myself to relax; I was at my best friend’s birthday party, for heaven’s sake. Since my friends and best friend’s family was surrounding me, I knew I could handle watching one race. I might do it with one eye open, but at least I wasn’t missing out.

My deep thinking was abruptly interrupted and my eyes were quickly drawn to the television as the loud shot started the race. The family room exploded with yelling as people stood up from their chairs, as the suspense of who was going to win took over the room. I began to enjoy myself as the two-minute race was coming to a close, finally beginning to feel comfortable about the idea that all of the horses were going to safely make it across the finish line. Big Brown won 4 ¾ lengths ahead of Eight Belles, and as everyone looked to congratulate me on my win, I breathed a sigh of relief that nothing bad happened. However, I might as well say that I jinxed myself because the second place winner, Eight Belles, suddenly collapsed on the track. My stomach dropped and my heart beat faster and faster. I knew something like this was going to happen. I was near tears, praying that Eight Belles merely took a stumble. The rest of the room was surprised by the collapse and curiously watched the scene like traffic slowly driving by a car crash. Within minutes, the nation became aware that Eight Belles had broken both front ankles. Within minutes, Eight Belles was euthanized right on the prestigious Kentucky Derby track on which she had just proudly won second place. I looked around the room, expecting everyone to be horrified by her death, but despite the expected shocked expressions, no one seemed to be interested.

This event happened four years ago, and to this day I am still scarred and disgusted by it. I’ve pondered it on multiple occasions and still have not figured out which is worse: Eight Belles’ death, or how my friends and my best friend’s family reacted to it. My opinion always seems to change, but I have come to the conclusion that my friends and my best friend’s family cannot be at fault for their uncaring actions.
People like my friends, her family, and the majority of the United States view horse racing in a positive light—the ungodly amounts of wealth, the glamour, the gambling, the big hats and beautiful people. America sees endorsements for horse racing by Hilary Clinton, and watches honorable movies such as *Seabiscuit* (2003) and *Secretariat* (2010). With these ideas flooding our minds, how can America not think that horse racing is wrong? But being involved with horses for the majority of my life, I know the hidden truth of horse racing. Although horse racing has been built on false notions of excitement and suspense, sadly, it is giving an inaccurate representation of what horseracing has come to be about.

When we think of the horses that compete in the Kentucky Derby, we think of how lucky they are. We wish we were those horses; they are each worth millions of dollars and are treated like royalty. While we are sitting in a boring cubicle all day, these horses get to perform a job they love—galloping and running all day. Then, while we tiredly come home to taking care of the kids or cleaning or cooking dinner (maybe even an overwhelming mix of all three), the horses get to come home to the best feed, the best stalls, the best grooming, and the best maintenance. But what needs to get added into this beautiful vision are the injuries, the drugs, the slaughterhouses, the cheating, the lies, and the multiple abuses the horses face every day. I know what you’re thinking: I couldn’t possibly be telling the truth. But with Eight Belles’ death as an example, you must consider the reality of it.

Thoroughbred horses begin their training at the tender age of two, during the time when their skeletal structures are not fully and properly developed. The harsh training they endure, which is simply getting run into the ground each day, causes stress and pressure on their fragile bodies. In turn, their bodies begin to conform to the stresses they face. This improper way of developing causes weaknesses and permanent skeletal damage for the horse, which is the exact reason why Eight Belles broke both front ankles. But why do trainers have to start training the horses so young? The reason is that Thoroughbreds are at the peak of their speed when they are at a young age. Dan Rosenberg, the president of Three Chimneys horse breeding farm in Midway, Kentucky, proposes “the market wants a faster, earlier-maturing horse, but there is an incompatibility between speed and durability” (Kluger 54-6). Also, with the breeding fees of famous horses that can profit up to $30 million dollars, owners want to race their best horses sooner so they can retire them for breeding.

Although horses are built to run, they are vulnerable to injury and end up suffering catastrophic breakdowns due to their young and delicate bodies. As a result, the Jockey Club’s new Equine Injury Database has found that “on average, 24 horses die each week at racetracks across America” (Bogdanich et al. 24). But instead of working to help build durable horses that can handle the stresses, trainers
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routinely dope and drug the horses to mask the pain and continue training them. The masking of the horse’s pain allows the horse to keep participating, but causes the injury to get worse.

This constant and consistent drugging of horses has increased, and “since 2009, records show, trainers at United States tracks have been caught illegally drugging horses 3,800 times, a figure that vastly understates the problem because only a small percentage of horses are actually tested.” According to the *Times* analysis, as a result, “in the same period, 6,600 horses broke down or showed signs of injury” (Bogdanich et al. 24).

So why not routinely drug test every horse before it enters a race? Trainers have become sneaky and have experimented with a variety of drugs such as “chemicals that bulk up pigs and cattle before slaughter, cobra venom, Viagra, blood doping agents, stimulants, and cancer drugs [where] laboratories cannot yet detect the newest performance enhancing drugs” (Bogdanich et al. 24). Trainers have also found ways past drug testing because they have started to drug the horses in private farms where few states can legally test the horses. According to Dr. George Maylin, the longtime head of New York State’s testing laboratory, “they are pharmacist shops, nobody has any control over what they are doing” (Bogdanich et al. 24). To fix this problem, programs such as the National Thoroughbred Racing Association (NTRA) have developed measures to help improve the safety and care of the horses.

To help reduce injuries, epidemiologist Dr. Tim Parkin believes that research relating to the numerous trends and factors involved with racing injuries can lead to strategies for their prevention as more data is gathered for the future. Parkin suggests that “as part of data collection, track veterinarians [should] fill out standardized reports whenever an injury occurs, providing details about track surface, length and configuration of the track, the location of the injury, type and body location of the injury, equipment involved, and the type of track the horse is accustomed to competing on” (qtd. in Whitcomb 7). The NRTA is also proceeding with an accreditation program for racetracks, certifying those that meet new industry safety criteria. The famous Churchill Downs was the first track to receive accreditation (Lewis 10). However, despite these nationwide reforms of injury prevention and race track safety, based on a count conducted by the Associated Press in 2008, “the number of horse deaths on racetracks dropped only 3 percent in 2008, to 1,217 compared to 1,247 in 2007” (Lewis 10). But besides the ethical dilemmas regarding age, breeding, drugs, and failed reforms, what happens to the horses when they break or have to be retired?

We like to compare the horses to ourselves and think that because they worked hard, they should enjoy a nice retirement (somewhere in Florida, right?) But once the horses serve their purpose for racing and breeding and are not adopted by
another farm or family, they are sent to slaughterhouses. People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) has found that Thoroughbred owners and breeders in the United States foal 30,000 Thoroughbreds each year, but 10,000 of those horses are sent to slaughterhouses. These horses include those who are either too slow or unable to compete any longer. We want to think that this doesn’t happen to all of the horses, especially the ones that successfully compete in the Kentucky Derby, but it does.

You would think that Ferdinand, 112th Kentucky Derby winner, for example, would have lived the rest of his life contently grazing in a field. However, once Ferdinand was done breeding, winning the biggest race in the world meant nothing. Since he was an unsuccessful stallion and had no economic value, Ferdinand was killed in a slaughterhouse in Japan. Congressman Ed Whitfield (R-KY) was disgusted by this. During a conference call to get support for the American Horse Slaughter Prevention Act, which, if passed, would abolish horse slaughter in the United States, he explained, “that’s how I became involved in this issue” (Finley 1).

The horrors of horse racing are always surprising to people because the popularity of racing has been around since the start of the Olympic Games in Greece. But the fun of racing has sadly turned into injuries, deaths, drugs, and slaughterhouses because of greedy owners and trainers. The horses are a commodity used to support a million dollar business that has cost the horses their lives. Having said this, how do we help the horses despite the failure of numerous reforms, and the trainer’s sneaky ability to get around the rules?

To help the horses, stricter laws should be put in place to see that drug testing is done on every horse during a race. Laws should also be put in place to raise the training and competing age for horses. If the Thoroughbred horses do not mature until age four, then why should they be allowed to race if it ruins the development of their skeletal structure? If a trainer is caught breaking the rules, harsh penalties should be put into place, such as the suspension of a trainer’s license. The United States needs to be aware of this abuse so that trainers and owners are no longer able to take advantage of the defenseless horses. The abuse and inhumaneness of racing needs to come to an end.

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Horse Racing or Horse Slaying?


Imagine a typical day on your college campus. How much time do you spend sitting around? Sleeping? Eating? Socializing? As a freshman, the transition from being a high school student to an on-campus college student is no less than extreme. You are your own personal motivator and ultimate decision maker now. Having a new sense of independence and freedom is certainly exciting, but some of the little decisions you make every day can have long term effects on your body. The term “Freshman Fifteen” is commonly used when describing weight gain during a student’s first year on a college campus, but is this term necessarily accurate? And what are the primary causes of weight gain in new college students? It’s all about the change in routine.

Obesity is commonly an overlooked topic on college campuses, especially at the University of Massachusetts Amherst where other topics like drinking, drug use, and safe sex are higher on our college’s priority list. Over the years, an underlying health problem is creeping its way to the top of that list. The American College Health Association estimates that three out of every ten students are overweight or obese today, and the numbers are rising (Strout). Also, according to a study done by TeensHealth, “students on average gain 3 to 10 pounds during their first 2 years of college,” disproving the Freshman Fifteen myth. However, the same study found that students do ingest an “extra 174 extra calories each day” (“Beating the Freshman Fifteen”). Though it may not seem like a few additional calories are a big deal, it is not a student’s food consumption that is the sole culprit of obesity. It is the harmful patterns set by bad habits that students adopt in their first year at college that lead to obesity in the long run. Changes in sleep, eating habits, social activities, and hormonal responses are the top causes I have discovered that account for weight gain in college students.

Walking into a college dining common, the first thing that hits you is the aroma of freshly prepared foods: hot and steaming cheesy pizzas, succulent rotisserie chicken, stir fried vegetables, and don’t forget the warm and gooey chocolate chip cookies. This is what initially influences your choice of a meal, but when students are overwhelmed by such an eclectic variety of healthy and unhealthy foods, chances are they run to the most appealing counter, nutritious
Sarah Parker

or not. UMass, in particular, is known and recognized for their “Award Winning Dining Services.” They boast about their mission to cook and serve “home style meals” using “freshly prepared ingredients” (“UMass Dining”). Walking through the dining hall, I noticed that they are true to their statements, but fail to be up front when it comes to the calorie-loaded choices like desserts and deep-fried foods where no nutritional information is given. Even their promise to use local and fresh ingredients is true, but they often doctor up fresh fruit with sugar for desserts. There are small coolers with fresh whole fruit to snack on, but what would you chose if you were given the choice of a simple apple or delectable and juicy apple cobbler?

After surveying twenty-five UMass freshmen and fifteen freshmen from surrounding schools, I found that more than half of each category says they do not watch what they eat when in the dining commons. Most males said they choose burgers, fries, and pasta over the healthier choices of a salad and stir fried vegetables. Female students tend to be more aware of what they eat, but about half said they do not pay attention to calorie and fat content. This is where the real problem lies. When students develop routines of eating fatty and sugary foods every day, like having dessert at every meal or going to UMass’s “Late Night,” it contributes to life-long patterns of overeating. So next time you decide to run to those chocolate chip cookies and the triple layer chocolate cake after a meal, try limiting yourself to a couple times a week in order to develop a healthier eating routine.

Besides ever-changing eating habits in college, socialization also plays a large role in weight gain in college freshmen. Being thrown into a new environment and knowing very few people allows students to rebrand themselves and make new friends. With this comes the issue of partying, drinking, and drug use. These activities are commonly associated with college campuses and are used to get people together, socialize, and have fun. Staying out late and subjecting yourself to large amounts of foreign substances puts a lot of pressure on your body. Several studies were done at Indiana University and Tufts University to analyze weight gain and living habits on campus. Amanda Wood, a researcher at Indiana University, mentioned that “12 ounces of beer has 100 to 175 calories,” and if you drink two or three beers a few nights a week, “that’s a lot of extra calories” (Hellmich). In the same study, students reported that their consumption of alcohol doubled or tripled in their first year of college (Hellmich). If you combine unhealthy eating habits and a significant increase in drinking and drug use, you are just asking to pack on extra pounds. In the beginning of the year, my friends and I would all hang out and get wings or pizza late at night because it was just something to do. A few weeks later I realized I had gained a couple pounds and knew I had to stop the habit then before I created a terrible pattern. Instead we watched movies and had smaller snacks so that we wouldn’t eat so many fatty
The Skinny on College Weight Gain

foods right before we went to sleep. So even from personal experience I have found that limiting your choices when with friends and at parties is possible and will allow you to be a part of a social community without subjecting your body to the extra calories and stress.

When socializing with friends cuts late into the night hours, sleep deficiency is the result, and this also contributes to weight gain leading to obesity. As a college student, it is safe to say that getting a solid eight plus hours of sleep each night is difficult when it comes to getting everything done, but only averaging 6-6.9 or fewer hours a night, according to the University Health Center in Georgia, causes your body to react in more negative ways (Sleep Rocks!). Through their studies they have found that getting different amounts of sleep each night and going to bed at different times confuses your body, causing it to work less efficiently. They also mention that consuming alcohol also interferes with sleep. Besides feeling exhausted, cranky, and stressed, “sleep deprivation increases levels of a hunger hormone and decreases levels of a hormone that makes you feel full,” concludes a study published in USA Today (Zich). If this is true, then students are at an even higher at risk. If their bodies desire more food from lack of sleep, and then they are faced with a cafeteria filled with counter after counter of delicious and often unhealthy food, the natural instinct is to eat as much as you can. Your body requires a rather delicate balance to stay healthy and maintain an average weight, and college certainly provides a counter for all of our normal instinctive habits.

In addition to hormonal responses from lack of sleep, several mental responses are triggered from the pressures of school work and other responsibilities. As I mentioned earlier, beginning a college career is no walk in the park. Students are faced with challenges every day that require them to make decisions that will benefit them in the short and long run. A common response to stress is overeating. From personal experience, I find myself turn to snacking and comfort foods when I feel overwhelmed with schoolwork and other responsibilities. I am currently eating a bag of chips as I write this paper and glance over to my lengthy “To Do” list of the day. Snacking is a good way to keep yourself energized throughout the day, but if you resort to it when you are bored or overworked, your body will get used to it and begin to crave food when you aren’t really hungry. Stress is a normal component in any educational or formal career, but it is important to handle it in ways other than just overeating.

Looking back at the four leading causes of overeating and weight gain, it is probable that most freshman students at UMass and other campuses are guilty of taking part in one way or another. Seeing what ultimately can lead to obesity will perhaps encourage students to change some of their harmful habits. In order to keep away diabetes, heart problems, and physical constraints as we get older, it is imperative to keep watch on our actions now. Being overweight affects both the mind and body. It can cause even more stress, lack of self-confidence, and
depression as well as heart disease, arthritis, and diabetes. Heart disease is the most common result, where arteries become smaller and can become blocked. This ultimately can lead to stroke and heart attack. Arthritis forms from stress on joints and can be extremely painful. Diabetes is also very common and is a lifelong disease where levels of sugar are too high in the body. To put it simply, nothing positive comes out of being overweight, so the goal is to create healthy life choices now that can turn into positive habits down the road.

In order to keep college students on the right track with their eating, social, sleeping, and mental habits, it is important for the administration to motivate young adults from the beginning of their college careers. Often walking around dorms I see signs posted promoting health habits, but none of these signs stress the long term effects of creating bad health patterns in college. Several campus health officials “predict that some colleges will have to increase health-services staffing to handle an influx of students with chronic diseases related to obesity,” if no effort is put into helping students manage their weight and eating habits in college (Strout). When there are so many distractions in college already, some sort of concrete effort needs to be made. Some campuses are creating classes specifically for freshman students to help them make healthy living choices. Phillip B. Sparling, an educator at the Georgia Institute of Technology, suggests “instituting an across-the-curriculum course on healthy weight with information on nutrition, physical activity, energy balance, and self-management skills” (Sparling). If healthy patterns are created early, it will motivate students to continue good efforts. Clubs, associations, and performances are also a way to intrigue students and get them involved in making better choices. First and foremost, it is important to educate students on obesity as a rising problem on college campuses. If the issue is not raised early on, bad habits are even harder to break.

Before you go to dinner tonight or decide to go out with your friends, take a step back and look at what will happen. Will you still go up for seconds at the DC? Drink an extra beer at a party? Or go to bed in the early morning hours? Think of what you are doing to your body. Freshman year in college is a chance to reevaluate your life choices and improve upon them for the long run. In order to keep yourself from being another statistic in young adult obesity, it is important to create healthy habits from the start.

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Innocence Destroyed: Examining a Sexual Harassment Case

NINA PASCARELLI

The restaurant at the intersection of routes 139 and 53 in Hanover, Massachusetts, is a little white house with a red door and flower boxes underneath all of the windows. It’s quaint and inviting; it almost seems as though someone lives there that constantly has company flowing in and out of the front door. The atmosphere within the restaurant is just as comfortable as the outside: the smells wafting out of the kitchen are reminiscent of home-cooking, the waitresses all seem to know the customers by name, and everyone has a favorite meal ready to be served to them by their favorite waitress. However, appearances are deceiving. This quaint homey restaurant is the location of a violation of Title VII, which, according to the American Association of University Women, is the prohibition of “discrimination in employment on the basis of sex, race, color, national origin, and religion” (“Title VII”). In this case, the gender of the victim was the basis of the violation in a form of harassment known as sexual harassment.

I worked at the little restaurant with my mother and a slew of family friends when I was thirteen. My family helped get the restaurant up and running: we donated shelves and electric appliances, helped with advertising, and campaigned for everyone to come to the restaurant. The restaurant eventually went on to become a huge success, thanks to the time and effort we all put into it. Unfortunately the owner of the restaurant decided it was time to move on to bigger and better things, and he left the restaurant in the hands of another man. This man initially gave off a creepy impression; nevertheless the employees ignored whatever negative vibes he gave off and continued to work as though nothing had changed.

Social scientist Heather McLaughlin observes that occupations where the leaders and head owners are men tend to be the main locations of sexual harassment. Even though reported sexual harassment victims tend to be female, the gender of the harassed does not seem to matter in male-dominated workplaces; both males and females are susceptible to being sexually harassed (626).
My job at the restaurant was to hostess and bus tables; it was only a difficult job when the restaurant was mobbed with starving customers, but even so it was manageable for a thirteen year old. My mother was a waitress and also worked the deli counter from time to time. She was very popular with the regulars; my mother is a kind and caring woman who has impeccable social skills. She is also a beautiful woman, which accounted for plenty of compliments from the little old men who sat at the breakfast counter in the restaurant. Those little old men were not the only ones who noticed her good looks; the new boss also appeared to take an interest in my mother. At first it was subtle: he would constantly talk to her and make her laugh; he would tease her about her appearance; and now and then he would pat her on the back or rub her shoulder. Often these actions made my mother feel uneasy, but she would just move away from him or start conversation with someone else when the boss invaded her comfort zone. I noticed that the boss paid more attention to the employees who happened to be prettier, but I never thought that anything would come of it.

Studies have shown that victims and instigators of sexual harassment have distinct characteristics. Paula McDonald, a professor at the School of Management at Queensland University of Technology and author of a managerial standpoint on sexual harassment, states that sexual harassers often “lack social conscience, [are] naïve about heterosexual relationships, and engage in immature, irresponsible, manipulative, and exploitative behaviors” (8); victims tend to be “vulnerable, young women in non-traditional jobs” (7), women with disabilities, lesbians, ethnic women, and, in general terms, women who appear to be out of place. However, these characteristics are not typical of every sexual harasser and every person sexually harassed; it can vary from case to case.

After working for the new boss for a year, I realized that he often asked to keep my mother and me a little later than the rest of the employees. He would state that he needed us to help him “close shop.” This did not bother me too much because I would get leftovers from the kitchen, and I really enjoyed spending quality time with my mother. My mother was not as comfortable staying late as I was; she had obligations to my family that she needed to take care of, and this new boss was keeping her from doing what she needed to do. One afternoon my mother and I were helping to close the restaurant. I was folding napkins in the kitchen, which was located right across the stairs that led up to the boss’s office. I was able to see the light shining underneath his office door, where he and my mother were talking. Suddenly my mother ran down the stairs and ordered me to get in the car. I tried to argue back that I needed to finish folding napkins, but she grabbed my arm and dragged me out the door.

A few days later I discovered what had occurred in the boss’s office, though my mother would not tell me all the details: the boss had suggested to my mother that they have an
Innocence Destroyed: Examining a Sexual Harassment Case

affair. If she would accept his offer, he would give her more hours at work with a higher rate of pay and more responsibility. Obviously, my mother said no. However, her denial of his offer made the once comfortable workplace awkward and hostile. We were never going to return to the restaurant again. Our absence was the source of nasty rumors by the employees: my mother was asking for the boss to do this to her, and she was probably lying about what he had said to her anyway. My family later learned that this was not the first time that the boss had done this to an employee; even worse, his wife and daughters were aware that he did this to his female employees and simply turned a blind eye toward the situation.

Raymond F. Gregory, an attorney specializing in employment and discrimination law, defines sexual harassment as “the unwanted imposition of sexual requirements in the context of a relationship of unequal power” that can be used as a way to create male control in the workplace and “express or perpetuate” the normative male-dominated workplace hierarchy (1). Gregory also states that sexual harassment diminishes a “woman’s humanity” and the respect and standing she should receive as an employee (2). However, according to Christine Hinkle, there have been cases where actions such as kisses on the cheek, comments about a woman’s appearance (including mentioning her buttocks and breasts), pats on the back, and repetitive date-asking were not “severe or pervasive” enough to be considered sexual harassment (413). Federal law clearly states that there are three main categories of actions that are considered sexual harassment: gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention, and quid pro quo (Hershcovis and Barling 876). While the first two are self-explanatory, quid pro quo is the coercion of sexual cooperation by an aggressor to a victim in exchange for “job-related considerations,” such as a raise or more responsibility (Hershcovis and Barling 876).

My family does not speak about this event much, if ever. But it was a turning point in my life; I realized that there are people out there who are willing to hurt others and their families merely for their own pleasure. The protective bubble surrounding my innocence was popped, and the cold harsh truth of the real world was finally able to slither its way into my life.

The media often portrays the whiner hypothesis in cases of sexual harassment; they show sexual harassment as a “harmless prank or sex crime” (McDonald 4). The whiner hypothesis also states that victims of sexual harassment tend to exaggerate the events that occurred. However, McDonald reveals that victims of sexual harassment are apt to have many psychological issues such as irritation, anxiety, feelings of “powerlessness, humiliation, [and] depression,” and they often suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (4). Sexual harassment is not only just the
physical contact between the aggressor and the victim; the psychological damage resulting from sexual harassment is oftentimes worse than what the aggressor has physically done. It leaves a lasting imprint on the victim’s mind.

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Smalltime Dairy Farms—Spending More, Getting Less
SABRYNA WHITMAN

Myles Goodrich grew up on Molly Brook Farm in West Danville, Vermont. In 1984, he officially became a partner in the farm, helping his parents Sally and Walter Goodrich with all the daily chores. Recently, he took over Molly Brook Farm from his parents, who are both in their 80’s. The farm is small, with 120 milking cows and an additional 80 heifers and calves. Unfortunately, Molly Brook Farm may be forced to sell their entire herd and close their barn doors for good due to the recent expiration of the Milk Income Loss Contract. Sadly, they are not the only farmers in this situation.

The Milk Income Loss Contract (MILC) was a program that paid participating dairy farmers a premium check whenever milk prices dropped below a specified level. The program was a part of the 2002 Farm Security and Rural Investment Act, also known as the 2002 Farm Bill. In 2007, the farm bill expired and in 2008 a new one was passed. This farm bill recently expired on September 30, 2012 due to Congress’s failure to pass a new one (Rathke A1). The MILC was seen as an extremely important agricultural program included in the farm bill, although it is easy for the public to see it as a waste of government money. Original estimates made in March 2002 indicated that the MILC would make $963 million in payments to dairy farmers (Sandrino 192). However, the program has actually made $3.5 billion in payments due to a number of factors acting against the dairy industry (D’Antoni and Mishra 476). It is easy to see why people would make assumptions about the program, and the media is not doing a very good job of showing the public why the program was so beneficial to dairy farmers.

Lisa Rathke, an Associated Press writer, interviewed the Goodrich family. She wrote an article titled “Dairy Farm Safety Net Dies with Farm Bill,” and it appeared in The Recorder, a Greenfield, MA, newspaper, on October 16, 2012. I was interested in learning more about the Goodrich farm, so I called and talked with Sally, asking her a few questions about the farm and its participation in the MILC. She told me that they spend approximately $15,000 on feed for the milking cows and approximately $3,000 on feed for the heifers and calves, for a total of about $18,000 a month. That’s around $216,000 a year! Goodrich’s last monthly MILC check was for $2,300. I asked Sally if the program was really
Sabryna Whitman

helpful to them even though the checks seemed so small compared to their bills. She replied, “Yes, it is helpful. It’s a couple more thousand dollars coming in, plus the milk check. Every little bit helps.”

The MILC was much more beneficial to smaller dairy farms than larger ones because the program had a cap on the gallons of milk produced. Once farms hit a specified number of gallons, they would no longer be eligible for the program. That is why smaller farms like the Goodrich’s are just starting to feel the effects of the expired farm bill. They have been receiving monthly checks from the program right up until its expiration, whereas the large farms hit the specified number of gallons much earlier in the year. The loss of the incoming checks, although they may be small, makes it even harder to keep up with all of the payments.

Daniel Imhoff wrote an article titled “The Farm Bill Matters” on October 31, 2012, for Slate, an online magazine. In the article, he discusses how the MILC has been especially helpful in the past year, not only because of lower milk prices, but also because of high fuel and feed costs. Imhoff writes, “Feed grain costs are shooting up, pushed up by drought, the use of corn and soy for biofuel production, and overseas demand.”

To help put this issue into perspective, let’s look at some numbers. Currently a gallon of milk costs around $3.60. That price could potentially skyrocket to $7.00 a gallon if the 2008 Farm Bill isn’t passed or a new one created (Imhoff). I asked Sally what she thought would happen to milk prices. She told me, “You know, I don’t have an answer to that. Unlike other industries, dairy farmers don’t have the ability to raise or lower their prices. They have absolutely no control over the price of milk. I would say that the potential is there for prices to skyrocket, but I honestly don’t know.”

She also pointed out that “Dairy farming is very important to the nation. There are lots of products that are made from dairy products or by-products. Up here in New England, it’s very expensive to raise dairy cows, mainly because of the climate. Farms in the Northeast have to have shelter for their animals, unlike in the South, where it is almost always warm and large shelters are not required.” Many people probably don’t take those factors into consideration. There are just so many costs on a dairy farm: veterinarian, electricity, feed, insurance, equipment, labor, etc., that people don’t even think about how expensive running a small dairy farm can be. “Smaller farms with a lower number of cattle are being forced out of the industry,” says Sally. “They just aren’t making enough money to cover all of the costs.”

I also asked Sally if she had a general idea of how many farmers in New England would be affected by this recent farm bill expiration. She responded with, “It’s hard to say. Connecticut and Rhode Island don’t have large numbers of dairy farms. Massachusetts has quite a few. Up here in Vermont, the number of
farms has already decreased significantly.” According to a Vermont dairy website, in the 1980s, the number of farms was in the 3,000s. In 2011, the number had dropped to below 1,000. It is clear that smaller farms are being forced out because of all of the factors acting against them: low milk prices, high feed and fuel prices, and the recent expiration of the MILC. The same website noted that dairy farms in Vermont produce 560 million dollars in income, as well as create 7,500 jobs. One can only imagine what would happen if all of that income and all of those jobs were lost.

The media, while it may be covering the issue, is not focusing on what the local impacts of the MILC expiration may be, such as losing dairy farms and potential price spikes in dairy products. I have only seen one article published in a local newspaper. When doing an online news search, there are quite a few articles published, but very few of these articles focus on what the local impact could be. By focusing on the potential local impact, the public can personally relate to the issue and see how it is directly affecting them. As Sally said, a lot of products are made from dairy products and by-products. Dairy products are a staple in most American households, and they certainly do not need to be another thing that we are overpaying for in this economy.

Rathke’s article did include a small example about Molly Brook Farm, as well as a few paragraphs about farms in Wisconsin. But the article does not do enough to show the public what the possible consequences might be now that the MILC is gone. An editorial written for the Hartford Courant does use a few good examples to get the point across to the public. The article states, “Dairy farming runs counter to the usual supply-and-demand rules because cows can’t be turned on and off like machines; no matter what, they must be housed and fed” (“Price of Milk Will Go Sky-High without Deal”). The article also says, “The issue is important in Connecticut, where almost 150 dairy farms contribute $1 billion to the state’s economy.” While the article isn’t using specific farms as examples, it is still proving to the public how important dairy farms are to the economy in Connecticut and that if those 150 farms are lost, the economy will certainly suffer.

Another article, published on November 4, 2012, and written by staff writer James Haggerty for The Times-Tribune, does a good job of showing what the local impact is. The Times-Tribune is published both online and in print. Haggerty writes about Paul Fetter, a dairy farmer in Wyoming County, PA, who milks 70 cows and participated in the MILC. Haggerty quotes Fetter as saying, “You lose a little bit of the safety net [...] A lot of months, you are kind of looking for the check. Sometimes, it’s at the point where [the MILC check is] just enough to scrape by” (qtd. in Haggerty). Haggerty writes that Fetter was paid $13 for every 100 pounds of milk produced in the 1980s; now he is paid roughly $22 for every 100 pounds of milk produced. However, in the 1980s diesel fuel only cost $0.48
a gallon whereas now it costs $3.81 a gallon, and a ton of feed that used to sell for $85 now sells at $340 a ton. The price per 100 pounds of milk produced has only gone up $9 in twenty years, while feed prices have gone up $255 a ton! It’s easy to see why small dairy farmers are struggling in today’s economy. Haggerty does a good job of showing how Fetter is struggling by giving specific numbers and facts about his farm.

The article that Imhoff wrote for Slate magazine touches upon important details, but it does not take that extra step and make the local connection. Imhoff writes, “Many operators are selling cattle to survive. With fewer cows producing, the cost of milk and dairy products could soon spike.” While that is a very true fact, Imhoff could have taken it a step further and given an example of a small dairy farm that has to sell cattle to survive. Even though Slate is published online, and doesn’t have a connection to one specific town, any small dairy farm that has to sell cattle to survive would have shown the public that this is happening all over the nation.

The public needs to be aware of how the expiration of the MILC is going to directly affect them. The consequences of the loss of the program could be catastrophic. The number of small dairy farms in the nation is dropping at an alarming rate, and this could directly affect the price of milk. There are many examples of small dairy farms all over the country to prove the fact that they are being forced out of the industry because of all of the factors acting against them. These examples should be included in the articles being written about the issue, and while there are some articles that have specific examples in them, many do not contain any type of example. Including specific examples would make the articles so much more relevant to the public if they could see how the problems facing small dairy farms is affecting them and their towns. Small dairy farms need a price support system like the MILC. Without one, they will be forced out of business, which will mean fewer cows will be producing, causing a potential spike in dairy prices, just like Imhoff said in his article for Slate. As I said earlier, consumers do not need to be paying extra for yet another product in today’s economy. If all of a sudden milk prices spike to $7.00 a gallon, consumers will suffer. Even though the MILC, along with the dairy industry in general, is a complex system, it’s extremely important to our nation, just like Sally Goodrich said. If something isn’t done soon, who knows what will really happen.

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Writer’s Reflection

Preface

College Writing ends with a Writer’s Reflection, where students review portfolios written for the course and harvest some of the most important insights they have discovered—about writing and about themselves as writers. By analyzing their struggles, their choices, and their triumphs, they compare their past learning with their present knowledge in order to illuminate where they will need to go as writers in their futures. Learning to write well is a never-ending process, so this Writer’s Reflection is, in fact, a beginning that launches the student into the world of academic writing. They consider the various “tools” they have assembled in their writer’s “toolbox”: revision, responding to writing, reflecting on writing, writing for an audience and context, writing with purposefulness, and the consciousness of crafting an idea into extended prose.

These following texts are the result of each student’s unique experience of College Writing. They range from larger insights about the self and about learning to wonderfully pragmatic advice for any writer. We hope you enjoy reading about these students’ journeys through College Writing, and the wisdom they gleaned as they worked throughout the course. Their advice and the insights they share serve as inspiration for us all.

Covering one’s history as a writer from kindergarten to College Writing seems a Herculean task, but Richelle Cohen accomplishes this through narrating key experiences, selecting critical details, and exploring her personal context as a writer. Thus she implicitly explores how she met the goals of College Writing and explicitly expresses what she has learned about her writing process. Hillary George arrived at college stripped of any confidence in her writing ability, but, fortunately, credits College Writing in helping her develop a “writer’s toolbox,” filled with new stylistic approaches to assignments. She moves chronologically, unit by unit, exploring the tools that helped her succeed in each assignment and prepared her to embrace future assignments with enthusiasm and confidence. Pat McDonough enters College Writing with low expectations for the course, but is soon surprised to learn how different its methods and goals are from his past experiences. The rhetorical choices he makes in writing this assignment illustrate many of the goals of the course, and he helps readers understand both the atmosphere of the class and its assignments with various quotes from his own writing.

Finally, an apt closing to this section on College Writing, Carolyn Nutting’s letter offers writing advice to incoming students. Her tone is both formal and caring as she covers some of the key rhetorical goals of College Writing—goals that are applicable not only across the course’s various units, but to all her future writing.
With the pencil clenched between my three fingers, I drew a quick breath. Months of practice culminated in this point. I could either spell my name or I wouldn't be accepted into my first year of grammar school.

What seems now like a perfunctory task was originally the most difficult I had ever encountered. It wasn't that I didn't know how to write a name; I mastered those hand motions months—if not years—before: R-I-C-K-I. Somehow this told adults that my name was Ricki, though I didn't yet understand how. The trouble, however, was that I didn't know how to spell my real name: Richelle. My parents thought up my nickname before finding the real one. I was raised using the name Ricki; I didn't even react to the name Richelle. How was I supposed to know how to use letters I didn't understand to form a name I didn't respond to?

And yet, with the coaching of my parents during dinner—using the scientifically-proven doodling-in-mashed-potatoes method—and some residual confusion (during which I would introduce myself to others as “Rickirichellebeth Cohen”), I spelled my real name well enough to be admitted into kindergarten. My struggle with writing had begun.

After mastering the writing of my name, I learned about the intricacies of the paragraph. To do this, we used a color-based system. We placed sentences inside green rectangles if they were the introduction or conclusion, placed the main reasons inside pink rectangles, and placed the supporting details in yellow rectangles. Every sentence had its place; nothing could fit outside the context of those little rectangles. If it didn't fit within a rectangle, it didn't belong in the paragraph. That was the only way to write a proper paragraph.

With the paragraph under my belt, I could now learn how to tackle the five paragraph essay. I found the exercise daunting, but realized that it didn't really differ from an extensive paragraph. You had to introduce your topic. After introductions, you listed the main arguments, supporting them this time with entire paragraphs instead of sentences. Simple enough.

Just after I thought I understood the mechanics of the essay, they challenged us with the research paper. Papers were a never-ending source of anxiety because I had to focus on supporting a meaningful and concise thesis while simultaneously
expanding the thoughts to satisfy that word count. (Signing my name became the best part of writing an essay by absorbing two whole words from the word count.) Research papers were expansions on essays, which, in turn, were expansions on paragraphs, the inevitable outcome of learning to spell. For the research paper in American Literature and Humanities, my teacher explicitly taught me that writing a research paper was simply writing a five-paragraph essay and expanding the supporting arguments themselves into five-paragraph essays. (Talk about a written fractal!)

Though all these systems were just expansions on previous methods, I still found more tribulations when trying to complete the next step. Writing became more than just the ability to spell words, but rather the ability to use them to convey a pertinent message. Suffice it to say, I abhorred the entire process. Writing a loquacious paragraph—not to mention a 10,000 word paper—required hours of contemplation and drudgery. The link to Thesaurus.com became my most-frequented bookmark. The night before my research paper in American Literature was due, I stared blankly at the screen for twenty minutes before comprehending that I simply couldn't edit it anymore. I had combed through the lines so many times that I believed every word inarticulate. Nonetheless, it fit within the structure of an extensive paragraph.

Then I took AP Literature and Composition; I consider it the turning point in my writing experience. Our teacher, Mr. Demaret, never seemed to teach in a pedantic manner. For example, on the day we talked about the existentialism in Kafka’s *Metamorphosis*, he flipped all the chairs upside down and moved them to the edges of the room to give us a new perspective on the class. “Why not?” he asked, in response to our questioning glances. We sat on the carpet-covered concrete and discussed why Gregor's insect state wasn't abhorrent. Gregor found so many different perspectives when he was able to crawl on the walls of his room, which opened his mind to true happiness.

Like Gregor, we learned that every paradigm about sentences, paragraphs, and essays didn't need to be followed. I don't need to count every paragraph to make sure they contain between five and seven sentences and that every assertion is supported by at least two details. My essays can be messy and complicated; my prepositions can be ended on. I don't need to begin the essay with my given name, though I can if I so choose. I don't need to flip constantly to an online thesaurus to find words I would never use in my personal dialect. Writing is a process of learning and unlearning. Once I could handle the name, sentence, paragraph, and essay, I discovered that I could also break all the rules I learned in the process. Now that I know the rules, I can choose the most effective ones to convey my message, in the same way that I can sign my real or nickname depending on the
tone or context. My parents, in addressing me by my nickname first, taught me that formalized systems aren’t the only methods.

In college, I began first semester continuing this mentality, though my writing pursuits still largely reflected my first endeavor in spelling. When I sat down to write my first paper for my RAP class, I started a week and a half before the other students in my hall and finished just a day before them. My friends watched movies in other rooms, talked until the early morning, and spent hours debating who the best Disney princess was. Meanwhile, I listened to the satisfying click of the keys while brainstorming intricate ways to describe my thesis. I wanted to join the other students, but a premature satisfaction kept me too smug to abandon my paper for procrastination. I was satisfied with myself for sitting down to write the paper—even without parents breathing down my neck about it—while my friends procrastinated. In my mind, the more time one invested in a paper, the higher quality it would become. (This was based upon the same principal that good cheese was formed only after enzymes ruthlessly picked at the milk.) My roommate started the night before, the day after I finished editing. Surely, I believed, my work had rendered a superior paper (or at least it would taste better).

I cultivated this superiority for two weeks. When our professor handed back her graded final copy, my frustration overwhelmed me. If it took me over a week to receive a B in college, how could I possibly spend the appropriate amount of time to garner an A? She handed out the prompts only two weeks in advance, after all. We compared our grades over dinner; even the guy who began the midnight before the paper was due received a better grade than me. How was this possible? The smugness I felt quickly dissipated. I visited my professor later, who told me I was too ambitious in my thesis. College-level ‘A’ papers weren’t always the ones to search too hard for an answer, but rather reach a well-supported, self-standing conclusion. My conclusion didn’t succeed because I tried to cover too much material in three pages, frustrated myself, and could no longer edit it.

I often wonder why other people didn’t have to spell their name with a fork at dinner, why they can write an essay in six hours that contains fewer mistakes than the one I wrote and re-wrote in nine days. But other people don’t write the same way as I do; writing is an intrinsic practice that requires more time from me than others. I’ve never been satisfied with one word when another elusively tickled my memory. I also want to address too many points and frustrate myself too much to continue working. This often causes me to burn out on papers, refusing to work on them after a certain amount of time. My classmates, in comparison, understand how to choose a thesis that matches their page limit. Comparing your writing process with others’ is like comparing names. The more you wish you didn’t need additional time to practice something so fundamental, the more

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frustrated you become. Just because my roommate earns better grades than I do on papers doesn't mean that my writing falls lower on a hierarchical scale. That's a childish belief; she likely has problems in areas that I excel at. Writing is personal, much like a name. I should only compare my writing to my best, not the work of others.
“Your essay lacked evidence, structure, and sentence variety. Your portfolio was incomplete, not properly cited, and your vocabulary needs enhancing. Grade: C-.“ As I walked away from my freshman year English class, I threw my newly graded research essay in the trash and made my way to history. Stupid Miss Olson. What does she know anyway? I quickly retaliated by giggling along with my friends about her wretched fashion sense, curly ginger hair, and obsession with her cat (an obvious replacement for her lack of a husband). Initially, these little jabs took my attention off of such harsh criticism. But despite my attempts to brush those comments off—they stuck.

That was where it all began. I felt my confidence as a writer diminish essay after essay, comment after comment. As freshman year came to a close, that class had taught me one thing only—I was a horrible writer. Instead of working at it, persevering regardless of my apparent lack of skill, I made excuses. After four years of mastering the art of tip-toeing around writing, I’d hit an unavoidable roadblock—College Writing 112.

My legs trembled uncontrollably as I sat in an uncomfortably small classroom. Not only was I intimidated and nervous, but I felt extremely unprepared. I tried to think back to the last time I wrote a decent paper and drew a blank. And as my teacher began to speak about her hands-on methods, I came to the grim conclusion that writing was something I couldn’t run away from anymore.

I cracked open my writers notebook to fresh page and titled it “Writers Toolbox,” where unfamiliar stylistic methods were being thrown about left and right. I stared down at these meaningless phrases next to a blank Microsoft Word document and cringed at the thought of more deconstructive criticism. Here goes nothing . . .

Three weeks later, the time had come. I gingerly opened my corrected portfolio and nearly fell to the floor. Did I really just get an A? With this grade, I considered a new possibility: maybe I’m not so bad after all. Maybe College Writing 112 was less of a death sentence, and more of an opportunity to regain my wounded writer’s confidence.

As the semester continued, my toolbox grew larger and larger. Since I had no tools of my own to work with, I found myself glued to the ones we had generated in the classroom. Every unit, I found one tool that stuck out, one that I found
particularly useful in my writing for this class, among others. And with each unit and each new tool, I found my writing improving and growing as a result.

**Unit I—Show, don’t tell:** Prior to taking this course, this skill was something I referred to as “fluff”: flowery, cheesy, and unnecessary. What’s the point? Why couldn’t I write what I needed to and be done with it? After reading a peer’s zesty, descriptive, perfectly executed Unit I essay, I glared at my lonely looking sentences and realized the importance of this tool. Since it was a personal essay, this paper allowed me to be creative with my wording. “My sisters always made fun of me” could be turned into something so much more colorful and engaging for my reader. It didn’t just add length, but voice. And to my surprise, this tool allowed me to reveal my personality. Perhaps this was why I enjoyed reading and writing my Unit I essay the most. Unlike my previously short and dry essays, I was able to add my quirky and sarcastic voice.

**Unit II—Tempering the argument:** Although I came to enjoy this tool, it was a difficult one to apply to my writing. Despite its difficulty, this tool adds so much to an essay, such as credibility. I was able to manipulate the text I was responding to, allowing it to support and defend my own arguments—even if they didn’t directly agree with the author’s.

**Unit III—Proper citation:** I once cringed at these words. No matter what class I was in, I always felt as though my peers knew much more than I did about formatting, citing, bibliographies, and the like. The night before my papers were due in high school, I would hastily Google “proper MLA format” and hope by some miracle I had done it correctly. College Writing 112 taught me that I need not fear this, but realize it is a critical organization method—especially in multi-source research pieces such as this. During Unit III, the *Penguin Handbook* and I became close friends. It was filled with tips and reference points that finally made me feel like I was on the same playing field as everyone else. I also found that learning how to properly cite adds more credibility to my papers. And although this unit and the tools along with it were challenging and tedious, I accomplished something I never thought I would prior to taking this course. After weeks of trial and error, I produced a well-informed, well-organized, and properly cited research paper that I could be proud of.

**Unit IV—Being Concise:** In this unit, I was introduced to an entirely different format of writing: letters to the editor. After writing a six page paper filled with long, technical sentences and paragraphs, it was difficult to generate a short and punchy piece. I had to consciously stop myself from tangling up sentences with semi-colons and using vague references. The assignment seems like the easiest one yet—300 words is nothing. On the contrary, I struggled with this unit and the use of this tool the most. How can you squeeze in all you need to say in such a short space? But this tool reminded me that writing isn’t always about the “fluff.”
It’s about getting a point across as effectively as possible and in a way that the reader can understand. This unit reminded me that there is a proper place for every variation of writing style.

Overall, College Writing 112 was far more than a writing class. After years of dreading writing, throwing in the proverbial towel, I discovered an ability I didn’t think I possessed. I once greeted writing with uncertainty and subdued fear—staring at that blank Word Document with a feeling of impending doom. I wrote with no structure or purpose and prayed I would get a decent grade, prayed I would escape a teacher’s criticism. For years, I went along thinking my writing would never quite measure up to what the teacher was expecting from me. My papers never seemed cohesive, but just a bundle of sentences and thoughts thrown on to paper that never made much sense to the reader (a vice I assumed was just “my style of writing”). That excuse justified my lack of effort. Furthermore, I stopped trying out of fear of disappointing myself and fear of vain efforts.

Through this semester-long journey, I’ve gained intrinsic motivation to improve my work regardless of the grade. It’s been surprisingly rewarding to see how much my work has improved from my first draft to my final copy. For the first time, my final products were exactly as I envisioned them to be. The “tools” I’ve picked up in this class are applicable in so many other forums and now I can look forward to next semester. I will read the syllabi and no longer cringe at the sight of future writing assignments, knowing I have acquired skills that I can take with me to these new classes. I can now greet these assignments with a revived confidence and ambition as I continue to improve as a writer. So take that, Miss Olson.
My name. That is all you know about me, reader. In fact, I am willing to bet that many of you completely ignored my name and just began reading. You don’t know what I look like, where I grew up, or what I do when I’m not writing essays. You don’t know that as I write this I am lying in bed in my dorm room in my pajamas, listening to Weezer while trying not to wake my roommate. Unfortunately, my name is the least important and least interesting thing about me. In order to keep you, a complete stranger, invested in what I have to say, I must establish my own personal voice through unique language and perhaps a few personal anecdotes.

On the first day of class, I stumbled into the room after everyone else and took a seat in the back. I had taken several writing classes in high school, and this one was not going to be any different, or so I decided. We were going to talk about using more sophisticated language in our essays, and maybe about how to form a persuasive argument. In essence, everything I had been learning about writing since the sixth grade. I had taken this exact class—or a close variation of it—so many times now that I wouldn’t need to pay attention. Then, the teacher asked us to take out our laptops.

This, too, I had been expecting. We were going to be asked to write a brief journal entry or “all about me” piece as an icebreaker to get to know everyone. That was when we were told to open Facebook and look up our most recent status update. I obliged, wondering where he was going with this. I would be fine, however, as long as I didn’t have to share. I was in a new place, after all, surrounded by people I’d never talked to before, and the status I had selected was somewhat odd. But there was no way that we would be asked to share something like that out loud, and if somebody did, it was not going to be me.

Of course, I was the first person asked. I paused, cringing as I reread the half-sentence spread out over my Facebook page. The fact that I had updated my status about the season finale of my favorite TV show now seemed incredibly nerdy. I took a deep breath, and conjured up as much courage as I could. Loudly, I read, “Dude, Breaking Bad, I’m gonna die.” There were a few chuckles from around the room, but nothing as bad as I had thought. The teacher began explaining how we use different terminology and writing styles in different contexts, based on our audience, and that I likely would never have written that status that way if I had known I would be sharing it with the class. Or for that matter, if I was going to talk about the show, say, to
my parents. It is important to know your audience and to write to them so they can receive the thought you are presenting for their consideration.

Sharing our work turned out to be a big part of the class. Most of it took the form of peer reviews; we would trade our essays with another member in our group to give and receive feedback. I was truly thankful for these exercises. It gave me a break from looking at my own work and see the same topic through someone else’s point of view. Because we swapped essays with the same group of people every time, we were able to get comfortable with each other and give constructive criticism instead of incessantly complimenting each other’s writing. Responding to questions such as “How can the essay be extended?” or “What specific areas of the essay did you connect to as a reader?” as part of our peer feedback compelled us to read and respond critically and thoughtfully. But sharing peer feedback was not the only instance of sharing our work with our classmates.

I was a gymnast in high school. Somehow I was allowed to compete in the meets as a freshman, unlike some of my teammates. The first time I competed, I was very nervous. I had been practicing all season and now I finally had a chance to show off what I had worked for all season. I hopped up to the pommel horse and began my routine. About halfway through, I missed one of my moves and ended up in the wrong position. Under the pressure of having my team, my parents, my coach, and the judge all watching me, I had messed up. I did the only thing I could: I made up the rest of my routine on the spot. It was quite clear that the judge had noticed my mistake and docked points accordingly, but at least I finished my routine without crying and running out of the gymnasium. Similar occurrences happened over the next four years, but I usually managed to keep my cool and at least finish my routine.

In my College Writing class I was faced with my biggest fear: presentations. We would get into our peer groups and be asked to respond to a music video or movie clip, connecting it to a composition concept we had learned, such as specificity of details, or to an essay we were reading, like Sontag’s essay on war photography. My group and I would try to use all of the time given to us in order to come up with the best responses we could. Despite all of the preparation, in the beginning of the semester I would occasionally forget what I was going to say and start stammering. But then I would remember gymnastics, and how I would be able to rectify a mistake with a little bit of confidence. I was able to do the same in my presentations, and towards the middle of the semester, with the presentation being a regular feature of my class, I eventually stopped forgetting my thoughts and would not stammer anymore. Presentation and public speaking are skills that will always be very prevalent in the business world, the space I hope to work in when I graduate. So I am lucky to have learned to master them.

We learned skills that were tangible and that we could use beyond our classroom. For example, one assignment involved looking at photographs:
In the photos of Ron Haviv, it is clear that he keeps this in mind when reporting on events. One of his most famous photos is of Guillermo Ford, the former Vice President of Panama. In 1989 Ford was attacked by a hired thug after a rally in his support. The image shows the two men in a standoff, with the attacker brandishing a weapon and Ford drenched in blood. The color of the photo is loud and chaotic, an action shot that calls attention to itself. The attacker’s right arm and weapon is blurred in motion, moving in on Ford, who appears to be giving off a rather submissive gesture. The amount of action in the photo is enough to generate a surge of adrenaline, with the viewer wondering what happened.

While helping us observe the relationship between art and journalism, the assignment was also an exercise in articulating analysis. We learned how figure out the objective of the photographers and what their pictures meant in context. Analysis is a very important ability in real life because it helps us to understand the things that surround us. In order to properly communicate with others, we must be able to understand what they mean. Helping others to understand us is also an important technique, and attention to detail is the best way of doing so. Our first essay had us writing about our homes:

My town is in the middle of a forest. The omnipresent trees made me feel small. After many years, you got used to seeing the changes from the brown and red of the autumn to the bare snow-covered branches of the winter, the small buds in the spring. Being used to these giant beings did not make me comfortable with them, however. They often blotted out the sun, forcing any life that lived below to live in their shadows. The trees held secrets, and during the dead of night on calm summer nights you could hear them whisper to one another.

For those few short, hot weeks I could fit in. Gazing over the ocean, with the pungent marsh air pushing my hair up, I found that I could see for miles in any direction.

By using descriptive language and specific detail, I was able to convey my thoughts about my hometown to the reader. Instead of simply telling how I felt, the details allowed me to show my feelings. While the readers might not feel the same way I do about the forest or the beach, the detailed descriptions I gave of each are enough to simulate the same thoughts for them. Specificity and attention to detail can make writing relatable, even if the reader does not agree with every word. One of the last (and one of the best) assignments in the class involved writing about our favorite genre of music and the artists within that genre. We used both our analytic skills and attention to detail to craft a personal and meaningful piece:
The song that can send me back to 1999 immediately is “The Sidewinder Sleeps Tonite,” by R.E.M. It starts off with an upbeat guitar and steady drums, with the lead singer coming in with a falsetto imitation of The Tokens’ “The Lion Sleeps Tonight,” in what is a clear homage to the track. With those first four notes, I am always catapulted back in time. When I was little, my mother would do what she called “spring cleaning.” It was essentially the same as what everyone else calls spring cleaning, except she did it around once a month, the whole year round. Every time she decided to clean the house from top to bottom, she would dig through her CD collection, (My mother is an avid fan of any and all kinds of music. Except gangsta rap). Half of the time she would pull out R.E.M.’s Automatic for the People and pop it into the stereo. Cleaning the house was her way of clearing her head, and the music relieved her stress as well as made the floor-to-ceiling scrub downs less abysmally dull.

Writing about music provided excitement as well as a challenge. We had to find a way to express the emotions we associated with our beloved music. I realized that the only way to accurately portray these songs was to dive in headfirst and show the readers my personal thoughts. By putting myself in the spotlight, sharing stories and feelings, I easily captured the essence of the music that I had been listening to my entire life. While showing how I actually felt was a bit tough at first, it definitely paid off in my writing.

Adrien Brody plays an English teacher in Detachment. He points out the perils of constantly consuming visual media. If the images are constantly supplied, we never use our imaginations. In order to stir our own imaginations, we must read, he says, for reading enables us to create our own images. We live in a world where the visual constantly surrounds us: iPods we stare at when walking across campus, the video games we play, the TV shows and movies we watch. So this class was a welcome challenge and an important learning experience. The multiple exercises in this class—on specificity of detail, on taking analysis another level deeper, and on responding to non-textual media with a written response—helped me not only stir my own imagination but also articulate my imagination while bearing my audience in mind.

My experiences with the class far exceeded my expectations. I will always remember it as my first college course, but it was also more than that. We formed a sort of community in that room, joking around and engaging in the friendly competition between groups. It was the only class I looked forward to every day. I am sad to see it go, but I know that the friends I made and the techniques I learned will stay with me.
My Conviction of Creation

CAROLINE NUTTING

Ladies and gentlemen of the freshman class of UMass Amherst,

I have come to you (I hope) with some helpful advice for your upcoming semester of College Writing 112. When reflecting on past years of my academic and experiential learning, I think of a saying that seems to be applicable to almost all learning practices—the key word being practice. An old Chinese proverb I once came across says, “fall down seven times, get up eight.” For me, this saying is a reminder to never stop learning or improving.

Upon my entrance to College Writing, I was reminded that skills must be exercised, repetitively and thoroughly, if there is any wish for improvement. One skill that can never be truly perfected is an individual’s writing. My own writing is always in a state of improvement, as I am continually developing my structure and style, as well as consciously being aware of new skills that I may apply to a piece. Without the following three declarations, my writing would never progress, thus tragically leaving me forever with the abilities of a seven year old.

1. **Say what you mean (as clearly as you are able!):**
   Essentially, this point is emphasizing the tone of a work. It is important to always be sincere with your words if you want your writing to be understood the way you intended it to be. Take the time to edit and revise more than once or twice, always keeping in mind that your first draft is not perfect. As a writer, you have the power to control a reader’s mind, and this is much easier done when your words are organized, clear, and genuine. At the start of the writing process, it is perfectly acceptable to lack good structure, proper grammar, or fancy words, but when your writing is finished, it should be logical and sincere (whatever you interpret that to mean).

2. **Know your audience (and work with them!):**
   It certainly helps, when writing a good essay or any piece of work, to know who will be reading it. The saying, “Knowledge is power,” can be applied here; being aware of your audience greatly influences how a work is written. For example, if writing an informal letter to a friend, casual conversation, every day terms, and
SoManyDifferentEmotions may be used however you see fit. Contrary to colloquial writing, if your goal is to write an academic essay, it is important to know if the audience is the general literate population or a specific group of people. This allows you to use the right words and structure that will best please and influence the reader.

3. **Have a purpose (and stick with it!):**
   Why write, if you don’t? I think it is fair to assume that if you begin to write something, there is a reason behind it—whether academic, personal, or otherwise. Without purpose, you risk losing the respect of the reader, or maybe even the reader herself, leaving your work unread. The intention of writing will vary from piece to piece, but each work needs a reason to be written. This purpose is a commitment to both the writer and reader, and it should be evident throughout most of the work.

   I stress these three things—tone, audience, and purpose—because they dictate how you write. The writing process comes more naturally for some than it does for others, as is true with almost any skill. Because of this class, I shifted my focus from creating a perfected final piece to embracing the process of writing as a whole, and embracing each step I took along the way. If you find anything to value from this lesson, let this be your mind-set.

   Writing an essay is an art. A practiced writer knows the power a single word can hold, or the placement of a comma; a practiced reader can appreciate these decisions. I believe writing is a type of beauty, and as clichéd as it sounds, “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.” Not all authors or pieces are loved, and I now know—as you too will soon learn or rediscover—that you can never be done learning, and through the frustration and mind-blocks, if you fall, you must always get back up.

   Best of luck on your endeavors and may you also be able to pass on advice for those to come.