

Reflection on a Semester of Interdisciplinary Writing

This course has been the first (and last, due to the fact I am graduating next semester) I have taken at Northeastern that centers around writing. Through each unit covered in the class, I've encountered several types of writing, some of which I was already somewhat familiar with, others which I had never experienced. I will reflect upon how I experienced each unit, challenges I faced, and what I learned from them.

In the first unit, I was tasked with choosing and analyzing a piece in depth. Out of all the assignments, this was the one I felt most comfortable with from the start. In general, I have always striven to analyze arguments and word choice in what I read, so I this felt familiar to me. I wrote my first piece on a project I had been exposed to during my first co-op. Given that I had some understanding beforehand of the aim of the product, coupled with the analysis tools I learned from in class, I felt that I was easily able to pick out and present information. I discovered my central argument for the piece and described it succinctly: "the primary goal of this page is to demonstrate the efficacy of buildpacks, rather than explain how they work, and to market them to developers." I then focused upon "specific wording chosen" in order to strengthen and support my argument. I believe this an effective tactic and that I succeeded in my implementation of it. Out of all three of the units, I find this one to me the most useful for my life going forward; work and personal communication both require a thorough understanding of what others are trying to communicate with their words, and I believe this unit was an exercise in discovering ways to accomplish that.

The second unit I found to be the most difficult. I have little to no experience writing persuasive pieces. The process of even determining what I would write about was a difficult one. Even when I had finally arrived upon proposing a Stack Overflow improvement, I ran into

several issues. Firstly, I approached the letter, originally, as a very argumentative, almost philosophical, piece. I included lengthy and complex sentences such as, “This idea might seem problematic to some; after all, if any information at all is encouraged to be contributed, would this not degrade the conciseness and quality of the community’s answers? This is not the case.” My peers pointed out to me that such verbosity and complexity may not be the most effective way of making my point. While I did keep argumentative aspects to my paper, and I believe they are vital to it, my first draft read as very similar to an ideological argument about the merits of Stack Overflow, rather than proposing concrete change. Additionally, I struggled with the design aspects of the assignment. Design is not my strong suit; I envisioned in my mind the comparisons I wanted to communicate in my reference document, but what I ended up with in my rough draft did not align with my vision. The peer review process helped immensely with both of these issues. My peers identified which parts of my letter were confusing or too abstract, suggesting that I “cut down” and “make more clear” certain sections. This allowed me to revise my paper into one more concise and incisive. Additionally, the feedback I received on my reference document itself allowed me to make very effective changes. While I still am no designer, I incorporated feedback, leading to the inclusion of zoomed out pre- and post-proposal changes of the overall site, which greatly increased the clarity of my proposition’s effectiveness. Though this assignment was the most challenging for me, I also learned the most from it, as I had little previous experience with creating reference documents and writing this style of cover letter. I will certainly use cover letter writing in applying for jobs. Though I expect as a programmer new to the workforce, I will seldom write letters proposing large-scale changes at a company, as my letter did, this assignment gave me a great deal of information on how to write proposals in a

diplomatic manner. Such diplomacy is undoubtedly a lifetime skill I will utilize greatly in future interpersonal interactions of many sorts.

For the third assignment, I requested writing a literature review, as I had experience with this in high school. Despite this experience, I found parts of this assignment challenging. I was discussing machine learning, but, as I had never taken a course on machine learning, I felt that my knowledge was lacking on specific implementation details. In encountering so many people writing in-depth and highly specified papers on machine learning and medicine, it felt difficult to believe that I, with much less technical background and no medical background, could offer any insight that was worthy of note. Nevertheless, I read and analyzed my sources carefully, and, drawing upon what I had learned in unit 1, I focused on what different authors prioritize in their results. Drawing upon my different sources, I point out “an important difference in what output is prioritized in an algorithm.” My peers once again helped me a great deal in the review process. Fortunately, they were also pursuing machine learning related topics. They provided insight in ways that I could improve my paper, citing points I should expand upon or articulate more. Very helpfully, they also affirmed that the analysis I made was important. After reading statements such as “Really important argument... this is rarely discussed in detail,” I become much more confident that my topic and analysis was important and truly did fill a gap in literature. Despite this affirmation, I still wish that I could have a fuller technical understanding of the papers I analyzed in order to bring about a more technical analysis. I do, however, believe that I followed the literature review process well, and put effort into this paper, despite the other deadlines that coincided with it. I synthesized information from fifteen different sources, and I read all of them carefully, noting the similarities and differences between each of them. I do not think I will likely write literature reviews in my discipline, as I do not see myself going into research. However, it

is beneficial to understand more about literature reviews, since I may very well read them, and I am proud of the effort I put into this assignment.

All in all, I learned a great deal about distinct types of writing this semester. While I believe some will help me more than others, I am glad to have had the experience to write them all. Additionally, one of the greatest assets of this class was my peers; the advice and analysis of my classmates was invaluable, and I am fortunate to have such adept people to analyze and give feedback on my work. Knowing how to write for a variety of situations, and understanding the importance and value of the suggestions of my peers, I feel prepared to write in any situation I may find myself in during my career.

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