Reflection on Discourse Community Analysis Essay

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ISP100: Writing for University and Beyond

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When I walked into the first ISP100 lecture, I falsely believed that I could copy my writing style from creative writing over to academic writing without issues. However, as I learned more about writing in genres and rhetoric, I became aware that my writing had much room for improvement. Throughout the term, I gradually practised applying the concepts and theories learned in ISP100. In the midst of this transition between stylistic writing and academic writing, I wrote a Discourse Community Analysis Essay about the solo guitar discourse community, in which I explained how the existence of the discourse community allowed guitarists to find originality in their playing. The idea had potential, but my execution left it unrealised. I want to talk about things I did well in that essay and things to work on to improve my academic writing.

To start off, the premise of the essay was very strong. The theme–that a community can inspire individuality–makes for a very interesting piece of writing. Additionally, I felt that the structure of the essay's body was logical. I started by providing necessary knowledge about guitar in order to understand the essay. Then, I talked about authority in the guitar community. After that, I described how authority is attained during the process of achieving goals, transitioning into how those goals are actually achieved. The ideas come together in the conclusion, where I explain how the process of gaining authority brings about originality. I am pleased about how each idea leads to the other, and how it all comes together in the end.

However, the writing was too long. Lengthy explanations spanned nearly every paragraph. First I explained what solo guitar playing was. Then I explained what "creation" was. Next I explained what guitar tablature was. There was too much explaining. In trying to make sure the reader understands the topic, I overlooked the fact that the exposition would be too long,

which distracts the reader from the original purpose of the essay: to show how a community can spark individuality. Because of my unending rambling on guitar, most of my analysis was surface level. For instance, after defining guitar tablature, I gave the audience the expectation that I was going somewhere with the idea, only to ruin it by writing one sentence about how tablature is indeed a genre, and immediately jumping to the conclusion. In the future, I will write less explanation and more analysis.

Overall, reflection on my Discourse Community Analysis Essay allowed me to recognise effective strategies for writing, as well as important improvements to be made. As I write more in my upper years, I hope to continue polishing my writing skills.

The Reason to Write

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The first word you read is never the first word written. In fact, the sentence you are reading right now was written after the first draft of the essay was finished. In my experience, essay writing consists of moving and deleting paragraphs more than actual writing. Over time, I figured out what made writing "click". In this essay, I want to share my developing theory of writing, which is made of three components: the significance of evidence, the idea that a piece of writing never starts good, and the importance of the audience. I will attempt to articulate the theory by explaining my writing process in four steps: conjure, record, organise, and cohere.

First, in order to write effectively, the main arguments must be strong. However, they cannot be strong without the use of evidence (Thonney, 2011). Evidence comes in several forms, one of which being sources. Referencing other works effectively borrows its credibility (Warrington et al., 2020), therefore reinforcing the argument being made. I keep this in my mind during the conjuring step. In this step, I try to imagine how I want the writing to look by brainstorming ideas I want in the final draft. These include arguments in the body paragraph, potential introductory hooks, or general writing structure. When I think of arguments, I consider how I can integrate sources to support them. In doing so, I ensure they are supported by a strong foundation of evidence that does not fall apart under scrutiny. By taking advantage of the power of sources, I can amplify the strength of all my arguments.

Another thing I learned is that every word should not be perfect from the start. This sentiment is reflected within the recording step. At the same time as I think of ideas in the previous step, I type them out. I try not to think too much about how to word those ideas; the only purpose of this step is to jot down ideas. I do this so that when I wake up the next morning, I can pick out good ideas with a fresh mind. Once I determine which arguments will make the

final draft, I crudely use sources to support them. Everything is refined in the later steps. Not thinking about the final draft allows me to pump out ideas uninhibited by concerns about sentence structure and flow.

The final component of my theory of writing is the most important one: You. To an author, the audience is everything. As Singh-Cocoran (2011) succinctly points out, "Writing always has an audience" (p. 25). Without anyone to direct the writing towards, writing is pointless. Thus, authors must always write with the audience in mind, even if the audience is themself. The remaining two steps—organisation and cohering—are where I refine my writing to a readable state.

In order to write proficiently, an author must understand how to conform to the reader's expectations (Jacobson et al., 2021). No matter the type of writing, readers place certain expectations on the text. For example, a person may read a paper to determine whether it can be appropriately used as a source. In this case, they will likely only read the introduction and conclusion because that is where they expect all the important information to be (Carillo, 2017). Another expectation readers have is for the text to be capable of clearly communicating ideas. After the first two steps of the writing process, the document is a mess of incoherent thoughts. I repair this in the organisation step by rearranging my ideas in a logical order. For example, I ordered this essay chronologically, explaining step-by-step how I write. Reordering my ideas allows them to be easily understood by the reader.

While the ideas were reorganised, every idea is worded poorly and transitions poorly from one to another. The last step—the cohering step—is where ideas are rearticulated and transitions are added to combine those ideas. When I reword my points, I think about the context I am writing in, as different genres call for different styles. For example, academic writing places

an emphasis on sentences densely packed with meaning (Thonney, 2011). As someone who enjoys creative writing, I tend to use flowery language, which can obscure the main points of the writing. In an academic context, I suppress the habitual stylistic choices I make and condense the writing as per Thonney's findings. However, for this essay, I opted for a more colloquial tone since it is a reflective piece. Additionally, to further enhance the reader's understanding, a key tool that provides clarity in writing is metadiscourse. Utilising metadiscourse to communicate to the reader allows them to focus on the content, rather than the structure of the writing (Samuels & Garbati, 2019). When transitioning between ideas, I place an emphasis on using metadiscourse. For instance, in this essay, I am attempting to convey my theory of writing made of three components by exploring my essay-writing process that is split into four steps. The writing structure is rather complicated, so an effective use of metadiscourse is mandatory for the writing to be cohesive.

To summarise the last component, the audience is critical to a piece of writing, so much so that they completely dictate the organisation and style of the writing.

In conclusion, when conjuring ideas, it is important to think about how they can tie in with sources, which are critical for a convincing argument. After thinking of ideas, do not be concerned about how to word them, just get them on the page. Finally, during the reorganisation and rewording stages, always consider the reader's expectations. I hope that going through my writing process has helped shed some light on my developing theory of writing.

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