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Essay 4 Draft 5

What the Heck is an Autoethnography?

Hoo-boy, I’ve got a paper to write. There’s time still. Plenty of time left to write, but what about? What topic, which details, what mode, whose voice? Give it one, just one, more day. Listen to some music and make sure to think about details and support and sources. Do some searching online. Good, I have a topic that I like. I’ve filled a paper with ramblings, but it’s coming together to be a thesis. Stop, read over the thesis and make sure it will work. Now I need to write everything down before I forget. Brainstorm until I’ve exhausted every connection to the topic. Time for my outline. Half of it has ended up on paper, the rest is in my head that I’ve got planned for single sentences or small organization ideas. I’ve written the first paragraph now, but the extra ideas are slipping away. I’ll stop work and focus on finishing the outline. Done, it’s almost as long as the paper is supposed to be. Read through the outline again. Write the rest of the paper. Every time I get stuck I’ll just scribble over the outline and rewrite. Fix some spelling and grammar. Randomly delete a few commas because I use too many. Try using some semicolons because those look sophisticated. There: exhausting, but I like this paper, I’m proud to turn it in. That went pretty well, but what about the other papers? The ones where I come up empty for a thesis, or have a topic that I don’t like. It doesn’t work. I search for that topic, and it evades me. I research, and just find it boring and unhelpful. The writing process becomes a limpid deadweight and I resent the frustration it presents me. Those papers suck, and trying to fully outline and plan them sucks worse. Even if they get a good grade I wish for a second chance to write again, this time with a topic that interests me; an opportunity to really investigate something cool. But assignments don’t get second chances, and I’m back to the part where my paper sucks. This is my writing style, my workflow. Throughout middle and high school I’ve developed to write very particularly without the use of definite revision, or multiple copies. Learning how to draft and revise papers has allowed me to better meet deadlines and avoid due date panic.

Anne Lamott’s article titled *Shitty First Drafts* provides a viewpoint of writing that reveals drafting as an integral component of finishing a paper. Lamott’s description of her writing process argues that first drafts are, as a rule, “shitty” and underdeveloped (Lamott, 2). Every professional writer faces a wall of internal apathy, anxiety, and conflict toward the first draft of a paper; provoking the conscious to overcome said wall and open up to just get some ideas formed is the bulk of a first draft’s worth. Once the draft is finished, the writer must provoke a topic or thesis to appear from the wandering, disorganized piece and begin work to refine and bolster the topic with evidence and support. In this way a paper isn’t decided, isn’t concreted in purpose and direction, until after the writer has finished it once. I like the idea of shitty first drafts; they seem like a reassured and more robust method to generate more progressed and defined articles. Unfortunately, I have yet to make a just-go-write-it or shitty first draft approach work for me. My writing defaults to a poor, unhelpful stream-of-conscious that wanders between topics and leaves my first draft with no insight to future revisions or directions. Even the sample stream-of-conscious paragraph to this paper was brainstormed and plotted before writing, just to be sure it would work.

Conversely, fully organized, outlined, and planned papers tend to either frustrate me in researching and critically analyzing an uninteresting topic or chew much too deeply into my time invested in an interesting project. I spent much of my time in class attempting to refine my approach to a well-planned paper. Granted, assignments in high school are rarely given a topic which deserves some pinnacle of insight and expertly navigated course of logic and support to adequately write, but even general transitions and organization failed me if I did not heavily outline. Often I was left with a finished assignment that was woefully malnourished in content, poise, and plot due to the lack of time allotted to both outline and hard-write a single "worthy" draft. And then on rare occasions the paper’s shape would fall together as if by magic and shine with the qualities I needed. But rare isn’t good enough, I can’t survive by only communicating well when discussing a topic I appreciate; to me it is fair to evaluate literacy as the ability to use language effectively even when ostensibly there is little need.

I don’t believe that this semester has taught me to write shitty first drafts. Instead, I’ve developed my writing to use drafts more proficiently, and found a better writing method and approach mentally. By shifting my effort from designing a paper to organizing and developing drafts, my work has benefitted from improved scheduling and better composition. I’ve also been less stressed by assignments, as they spend less time in an ephemeral state, and can be considered “completed, with adjustments needed” much faster. For example, the first essay we developed this semester felt like one of the 'magic' essays where I find the right sources and information and spend minimal time swearing at my computer monitor to find the right words for a sentence. But the situation definitely wasn't magic, nor was it a normal paper for me. This paper was partly drafted, yet still organized and controlled enough to work to my personal writing method. Thus, each step was written without the agony of perfection but with enough scaffolding in outline and brainstorm to direct the point. This high yield addition to my method prompted me to continue adjusting aspects of my writing approach for other assignments, which I feel had varying levels of success coupled with an overall loss of time to invest due to a new job. As the situation stands at the end of the semester, my writing method is far from perfect, but there is no doubt that it has been advanced considerably from my earlier school related tasks and is now ready for even more improvements.

Works Cited

Lamott, Anne. “Shitty First Drafts.” *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*. New York: Anchor, 1994.

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