

## Reflective Essay

The work I've done over the past semester has allowed me to explore some of the areas of my field that classes do not usually cover. Through the past four units, I've touched topics covering the analysis of hashtag research, using the Redmine webapp, beta testing Windows 10, and researching autonomous vehicle technology. The pursuit of these topics and the forms of writing covered in each unit has allowed me to accomplish many of the learning goals specified in the course syllabus and, consequently, has expanded my knowledge of my field of study.

In Unit 1, I analyzed a document from a technical discipline for elements such as its presentation of information and the discourse community it is presenting to. The piece that I chose to delve into was a research document from Facebook that covered the strategies used in predicting hashtags with machine learning. I discussed methodologies used such as the inclusion of tables and using formal language to discuss a typically informal topic. As I explain: "Hashtags are most often used by adolescents on social media websites such as Twitter, Instagram, or Facebook; because of this, the use of hashtags is commonly associated with immaturity or casual situations." Ironically, this sentence was not originally in my paper, meaning I just assumed my audience would be able to infer why hashtags were considered informal. In a technical document such as the one I was analyzing, expecting assumptions like that to be self-evident would be extremely unprofessional and unwarranted. I found that undergoing a thorough reading of the paper I chose was very difficult because the topics being discussed were extremely advanced and required a huge degree of technical knowledge. Through the first unit I was able to hone my close-reading abilities by forcing myself to read technical documents for more than just information about the topic of discourse. In addition, I gained exposure to research papers in my field of computer science which helped guide my own style of writing in subsequent units, specifically Unit 4.

The second unit of the course focused on instructional documents with particular emphasis on being unambiguous and organizing information to maximize readability. The submission I made for this unit was a wiki page from my workplace's internal wiki that we use to teach trainees and display common practices. The wiki page covered how both developers and non-developers at ResNet can contribute to improving some of the software projects we maintain in the office by reporting bugs and suggesting features using a webapp called Redmine. Using tables to organize the different types of bug reports available and images to clarify where the user should click to navigate to certain pages, I was able to create a well-designed instructional document that will likely aid future ResNet techs for years to come. Even my information was organized into sections: accessing Redmine, issue reporting, and project monitoring. I found this unit to be extremely satisfying because I was able to work with my fellow ResNet technicians to craft a reference document that would directly remediate a lot of questions they had about bug reporting in the office. Through this unit, I learned how to design a well laid-out webpage to clearly showcase information, and also argue for the necessity of having an instructional document for a certain topic with a cover letter. This is important because in computer science one will, more often than not, find more diagrams and pseudocode than walls of text in technical documents, and it's necessary that these non-textual elements are presented in readable ways.

In the next unit, instead of creating a document to be presented to a member of a technical field, a technician at ResNet for instance, I was tasked with writing about technical material for a general audience. For this unit, I chose to write about a topic that many non-technical people would still be interested in: operating systems. More specifically, I chose to test out the Windows Technical Preview, a beta version of Windows 10, and present how I felt about some of the features in Windows 10, taking my background of never switching to Windows 8 into account. This paper was interesting to create because a lot of the research I was doing was hands-on. That is, I had to spend more time playing around with my version of Windows 10 more than I did reading up on any topics. Like with Unit 2, I enjoyed creating an article that would be beneficial for others. Writing is, at its core, a method of sharing important information, and I feel like I am most excited about writing when I am producing something that will satisfy that function. Through Unit 3, I was able to learn how to rely less on technical jargon to get my point across to a less-informed audience, how to find and discuss a topic that would be interesting to non-technical people, and how to do research beyond simply reading the works of other people.

Unit 4 was, in my opinion, the spiritual culmination of all the work done in the previous three units. Although each unit covered independent topics, the skills I acquired through each piece I wrote played a part in the literature review I wrote for the final unit. My literature review involved research on the field of autonomous vehicles, specifically to analyze what more has to be done in order for self-driving cars to become commercially available for all people, effectively replacing manually driven cars. I analyzed everything from hardware and software to how autonomous vehicles would affect certain industries. I also presented this research in an organized fashion. My work in Unit 2 aided me in the organization of my sections and subsections while the analyses I performed in Unit 1 guided the style of my writing. The amount of hands-on research I did in Unit 3 helped me synthesize information from readings I did both on the topic of driverless cars, and on topics indirectly related to the field. Unfortunately, I felt like the writing I was doing for Unit 4 was barely brushing the surface of autonomous vehicle technology and didn't present any noteworthy ideas. All in the all, I wasn't particularly satisfied with my final piece because the pool of knowledge I tried to present was far too vast to be analyzed in the little time I had to write my paper. The final unit of this course allowed me to further improve a lot of the skills I had practiced in previous units, and allowed me to combine said skills in completely new ways. Although I honed my skills a bit, I still remain unsatisfied with the amount of research I was able to put into the topic and how pitifully unremarkable the final conclusion was.

Aside from improving my writing through practice, peer feedback played a huge role in improving my writing in this course. One overarching theme I found from reading comments on my work throughout the semester was that I tend to write run-on sentences all the time. One example of this comes from my Unit 3 piece:

The Windows users in question are the ones who were skeptical when the tablet-desktop hybrid OS that was Windows 8 first came out, the ones who saw the Metro and Charms Menu and just shook their heads in dismay, the users who stuck with Windows 7 because Windows 8 just wasn't their cup of tea, these are the users who now want to know: is it time to switch to Windows 10?

It was pointed out that a new sentence should have been started after "tea", right after my list describing my target audience. Now, I actively try to proofread my work, looking specifically for

places where I could have ended a sentence but didn't. Although I still make run-on sentences quite often, revision club sessions have at least made me aware of the mistakes I typically make while writing. The reverse also holds true: by revising the writing of others, I am able to see mistakes that are frequently made in all sorts of writing styles. With this knowledge, I have become more aware of common errors to look out for in my own writing.

Through this course, I learned how to clearly display and communicate the knowledge I am able to gather using research and my own experience in computer science. With certain units specifically, I was also able to accrue experience in skills such as critical reading, source citation, and discussing my opinion as well. Also, through the writing process, I was able to improve my ability to revise both my own work and the work of others and effectively map out outlines of my pieces before I start them. Overall, this course has improved my writing ability, forced me to explore different aspects of technical writing, and has exposed me to many of the mistakes I often overlook while proofreading.