

The Balance of Truth

To be candid, I seldom enjoy writing. If I must write, I prefer to deal with subjects I find interesting, especially if I have already formed definite opinions about them. Along with the freedom to choose specific essay topics and develop my own point of view, this class helped me better understand the process of writing. The two essays in this portfolio, “In Search of a Balanced View” and “Loose Change or Feeble Reconstruction”, explore the ways in which documentary films can manipulate the truth. Directors can transfer their own biases and agendas to the visual and narrative content they present to audiences. To provide a more truthful message, a director must balance the film’s presentation through a process of critical review that excludes self-serving themes and addresses more than one side of an issue. In a somewhat similar fashion, a writer must critically review the written output and revise it to ensure that it has a clear theme and provides sufficient detail to support the arguments presented.

To help prepare each essay, I took notes during the film and prepared an outline and several rough drafts to organize my thoughts. With the help of reviewer input, I found some easy ways to improve my writing. As noted in “Tightening Up Loose Ends”, I significantly improved my thesis statement for the essay, “In Search of a Balanced View”, just by adding more specific wording. I also started using a thesaurus to find synonyms and avoid using the same word repeatedly. More importantly, I began to get better sense of how to organize the essay content to support my thesis.

Still, my writing suffered from a major weakness. I tended to provide too few details to explain and support the points I wanted to make. My family has described me as a man of few words, so I facetiously wondered if this tendency was an inborn trait. Often, I could analyze source information and come up with the arguments to make. However, I found it a struggle to fully incorporate those thoughts into my writing. For this class, I often had difficulty figuring out what I needed to explain to the reader and ended up not providing much detail to back up my position. For example, in the essay entitled, “Loose Change or Feeble Reconstruction”, I pointed out that the director avoids making statements that are easily refuted and, instead, poses leading

questions or frames the evidence in ways that the audience cannot readily disprove. My natural inclination was to leave it at that, but, of course, I needed to add supporting evidence.

After making improvements in my own writing skills, I can look back and see that the input I gave to other writers could have been more helpful. In “Getting It Right”, I show the types of peer feedback I provided. In some cases, I offered corrections on punctuation and verb tense. My more useful comments involved recommended word choice and sentence rewording to clarify the writer’s meaning. I noted the irony in the fact that I could find a flaw in someone else’s writing, but be oblivious to that same error in my own work. Lastly, I made several comments that were probably of little help to the writer. Here again, I needed to more clearly convey the point I was trying to make.

With each essay, I became progressively more aware of ways to improve my writing. I worked especially hard to correct my major weakness during the revision process. While I am a long way from claiming that writing is a fun and easy task, I have some new skills that help make the process less perplexing and painful. The ability to write clearly, develop a thesis, and prepare compelling, detailed arguments is a skill I need to acquire in order to meet the writing requirements for other courses. I became painfully aware of this fact in a recent history class. With an awareness of my natural writing tendencies, I can work on expanding my arguments to include specific examples that support my viewpoints.