



Assignment Sheet: Portrait of a Writer

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1. BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

You have started to explore academic writing and have seen how Sondra Perl studied her students. Using a similar process, you will study yourself to see what you can learn about your own writing habits. To do that, you must first observe yourself while you write. This assignment serves as an introduction and as material for you to study later.

2. PROCEDURE

Before you write your self-portrait:

- (1) Document your writing environment in detail. Use as many senses as possible, and describe elements that may not seem immediately relevant.
- (2) Set up and test your recording equipment. Use video, if possible. If not, audio will suffice.¹

Once you are ready to write, begin recording yourself and complete these steps:

- (1) Compose two pages of text that describe you as a writer. Consider the following questions as potential prompts, but do not make the document a Q&A session:
 - What is your writing history like? What kinds of writing have you done?

- What about writing do you enjoy? despise?
- How do you write? What procedures or rituals do you have? What do you leave to chance?
- How much pre-writing do you do? Do you compose everything in your head before you start, or do you develop your ideas as you go?
- What are your reactions to your own writing?

- (2) After composing the first draft, perform your typical initial edits or revisions. Keep the camera rolling.
- (3) When your document is “complete,” submit it to We-bcourses as an attachment. Note: **do not** submit your video. That’s for you to keep and use later.

3. ASSESSMENT

Because this assignment exists to give you something to record, it will be assessed for completion, not quality. I will use your submission to get a sense of your writing style, writing ability, and self-perception. Will I notice the kinds of “errors” that Tony was constantly trying to correct? Probably. I’m an English teacher. Will I take off points for them? No. Not at all; that’s not the point of this assignment. To show you the way I typically assess major papers, a *hypothetical* grading rubric is presented in Table 1, but remember that it will not be used on this assignment.

TABLE 1. Hypothetical Grading Rubric

STYLE	CLARITY	STRUCTURE	SELF-PERCEPTION
A Draft has strong individual style, distinct from that of peers. Could only be written by you.	Draft is easy to read and understand. No issues muddle the ideas being expressed.	Sentences and ¶s are arranged logically; descriptions flow naturally together.	You understand your writing process as a component of your development as a writer.
C Draft has slight sense of style. Personal and interesting, but not remarkable.	Draft is generally easy to read. Few technical errors exist, but they do not distract.	Sentence-level organization may occasionally be rough, but ¶s are logically organized.	You show evidence that you are aware of your own processes and thinking.
F Draft is lacking a sense of style. Text is dry. Writing is notable for being formulaic.	Mechanical errors make drafts difficult to comprehend and detract from content.	No organizational structure is evident; ideas wander rather than progress.	Draft includes no recognition of writing process or fails to present a portrait.

¹It is up to you to choose a suitable recording method. Sometimes the simplest solutions are the best. On a Mac, I recommend using QuickTime Player. Selecting New Movie Recording from the File menu is all you need. On a PC, you can use Windows Movie Maker, but resist the urge to edit. Simpler software is better here.