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A Writing Portfolio Across Disciplines

Despite having taken numerous AP courses throughout my high-school years, I had not truly encountered college-level writing until my freshman year here at Carleton. Therefore, I want this portfolio to express my progress in cohesively expressing my ideas, providing proper documentation for my claims, and engaging the reader with sufficient support for my arguments no matter the subject about which I am writing.

As an example of this, take my Geology essay. For my seminar in Argument and Inquiry, I wanted to take Geology in the Field out of sheer interest for the subject. The structure of the course itself was true to its name; we took many trips into the field in order to practice making observation-based inferences about the long history of the Earth itself. These observations were based on very limited information; although we looked at many beautiful rock formations – the towering cracked basalt cliffs of the river valley, the subtle presence of ooids and stromatolites within ordinary rocks, and the thousand-year-old Gneiss on the surface of the valley – these did not provide a cohesive summary by themselves. Rather, we had to use the tools that we had to learn how the state of Minnesota – the land of one thousand lakes – was truly made.

The paper that I have provided is a striking example of an observation-based paper. It first begins with a chronological history of the state and then progresses to what we saw. The literary description of banded iron formations and brachiopods within sedimentary rock are coupled with a cohesive history explaining how they got there. I delineate how ancient waves under stormy conditions resulted in the dry stromatolites that we see today in stone. I also describe how the deposition of glacial meltwater left Minnesota with numerous glacial lakes,

most of which might be familiar to the reader. These were accentuated by my implementation of numerous graphs and visuals that were taken from reliable sources.

I have also provided a collaborative paper that was written in the statistics department; this proposes a solution to a modified version of the German Tank problem. Via thorough quantitative analysis that explicitly details the methodology that we used to solve the problem, I have provided a great description of how we extrapolated a model of a population size based off very limited data. Just as in the Geology paper, I had to determine how I was going to present the information. I included histograms, summary statistics, and the theoretical equations (done in LaTeX) that guide the reader through our intricate process of derivation. Done in R Markdown, it is a great example of understanding the context of a problem and communicating the essence of our argument.

The fourth submission for my portfolio – a proposal for a new installation of a beautiful stained-glass roundel set – is an important one as well because it shows how my perception of a work of art changed in the context of research. After going to the Minneapolis Institute of Art, I went home and learned that the artist Schäumelein wanted his work to be functional. Upon learning about the intent of the artist in creating beautiful pieces meant to provide a cohesive family life in a religious setting, I had to decide how best to represent its religious symbolism. This paper demonstrates that I can understand the objects of perception within a work of art and how they provoke emotions via a visual format. Guiding the reader (who I assume does not have much more than common knowledge) through the setting, I provoke certain emotions that exemplify the mind of the artist and the functionality that his work can perform once removed

from the museum setting. It employs accurate citations and footnotes as well as an interpretation of artwork as it was originally meant to be.

As a side note, the majority of my citations were done in Chicago style. While citations and footnotes were used extensively in my AP courses, I believe that I did not fully understand the purpose and use of footnotes until I came to Carleton. It was here that I learned that they are meant to enable the reader to effectively reconstruct my research and writing process from beginning to end. In this paper I learned to make sure of three things. I made sure that my footnotes corresponded precisely to specific elements of the original text, annotated them with short descriptions describing my intention in using them, and placed them in locations such that the reader can easily differentiate original content from paraphrasing. In essence I practiced the techniques necessary for proper documentation and quality academic writing.

I also wanted to include an essay on Aristotle's ideal form of government. I mean to show an example of a thesis-driven argument. To start, my use of the word "constructs" refers to the Aristotelian method of argument; Aristotle starts with basic premises that gently lead the reader to his conclusions. I want to differentiate his method from the dialectics of Plato by indirectly alluding to his philosophy of life, his love of moderation, and his emphasis of the happiness of the entire city that is engendered by policies promoting a successful middle class.

In this portfolio you will also find an essay on Malkiel's efficient market hypothesis. Originally intending to be an economics major, I was quite interested in presenting the arguments of economists and critically analyzing them in order to provide a common-sense interpretation of what they did and did not do correctly. For example, I use both Shostak's description of how central banks make markets inefficient as well as the professor Malkiel's own embellishments

about how good people are at evaluating companies. The progressive argument that I make is based on empirical evidence and supports a position that rejects over-exaggeration of the market's efficiency. I always make sure to refer to and thus bring the argument back to Malkiel in each paragraph.

To conclude, I believe that all of my professors at Carleton (Bruce Dalgaard in particular) have taught me through discussion and review how to effectively understand academic writing to a greater degree. I think that the discussions that we have in class are essential to my learning; coming from a high-school background wherein I wrote essays in a rigid, formulaic manner I think that it has been very enlightening and emboldening to discover different methods of discourse as I have moved forward.

I would also like to describe certain limitations and weaknesses in my writing. I believe that my biggest weaknesses are in justifying my statements (especially in statistics!), grabbing the attention of the reader in my introductions, and not “jumping around” too much in my writing. Although I have improved very much in my technical writing, I think that I should focus on improving the reproducibility aspect of my statistical reports, ensuring that I do not over-use commas, using citations that allow the reader to reconstruct my writing process, and following the prompt more directly. I have to understand what the professor wants and thus not make too many broad claims that deviate from my original purpose. Believing that rigorous peer-editing is an essential part of the writing process, I think that I should use the Writing Center more often as this would allow me to present my arguments to an understanding audience that can make critical improvements. It is almost always important to keep the audience in mind

when writing technical and non-technical papers alike, and so I need to work on writing in a simple way that is precise yet informative.

I hope that my portfolio is an accurate rendition of the evolution of my writing and would like it to serve as a reference point for me to make further improvements.