Ryan Coyne

Derek Castle

English Composition

Wednesday, May 4, 2022

I’ve always had a desire to write. In the second grade, I wrote a science fiction short story about a second moon appearing in the sky. The story itself is lost to time, but the impression it left on me is not. I can remember feeling confident about my ability after writing that story. However, as I aged, I found writing to be increasingly difficult. My expectations for what I read increased, and as a result, so did my expectations for my own writing. I no longer had the confidence of my eight-year-old self and often found myself looking back and wishing I could recover it. This class has helped me to do just that.

For years I’ve been overly critical of my writing and found it difficult to allow myself to write imperfectly. As a result, any time that I tried to write, I would freeze up, and at most put a sentence or two onto the page. Throughout this class, I’ve been able to convince myself of something that I’ve always known about writing; It is OK for the initial draft to be imperfect. I still strive for perfection in my rough drafts, but I am more willing to allow them to have mistakes to be fixed later.

This perfectionist barrier to writing has caused issues numerous times. It likely contributed to problems that I had in high school humanities classes, but it isn’t easy to separate it from everything else that was inhibiting me at the time. After graduating from high school, I was adrift. I wasn’t going to college because I had done poorly in high school and didn’t expect that to change at the time. I was working in retail and hated it, so I was always looking for a calling. I decided that I wanted to write a novel because I like reading. I knew that it would be difficult because I had a history of not completing writing assignments. Still, I had an idea for a story that I was happy with and felt passionate enough about it that I was hopeful that I would be successful. I was not successful. I didn’t even manage to write a whole paragraph before giving up after three months.

I also have a unique perspective on the world that I want to communicate to the world. I am autistic and have had very different experiences than most people. Many other autistic people have had similar experiences but struggle to communicate about them. I have the chance to bridge this gap. I want to share my experiences with autism through my writing in a way that neurotypical people will be able to understand. I also hope that other autistic people will be able to see themselves in my writing in ways that they cannot in most media.

After having taken this class, I may be able to accomplish these goals. I have new confidence in my own ability. I am also more willing to accept that I will make mistakes in my writing but that that’s OK and I can always return to and correct them. My editing has also improved because I feel less anxious about disliking my writing when I reread it to make edits.

I have also developed my research skills. I believe that I did one or two research papers in high school, but my teachers did not place much of an emphasis on the academic rigor of the sources. For this class, I wrote a paper on the conflict between Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz and Sir Isaac Newton. There have not been many non-scholarly texts written about this conflict, and in the process of searching for sources, I learned a lot about how to find scholarly sources and effective ways to read them.

In high school, I also did not feel motivated to find a way to write that worked best for me. When I wrote for school at all, I would most often use a brute force method which involved sitting in front of the page until I started to write and slowly forcing more words onto the page. For the assignments in this class, I have found that writing a list of things that I want to include in my essay in a possible order to include them helps me to organize my thoughts. Having collected my thoughts onto paper allows me to start writing and continue writing after each finished thought is on the page. I plan on doing research in physics, and even though the academic papers that I will be reading will differ from the papers I read for this class, many of the skills I’ve gained here will be helpful.

My writing itself has not changed much over the course of this term. Even though I was a good writer when the class began, I didn’t believe that I was, and the practice that I have gotten from this class has helped me to see it. This class has also helped me develop a writing process that works for me and gain skills in research that I did not gain in high school.