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Why I Write

Growing as an individual into yourself is often such a vague concept. It's something that happens in such short spurts that when you look back, you hardly see any profound changes at all but instinctively know that you are a different person now than you were back then. You have different priorities, you are slower to speak and tend to be more open to listening then you were before. Change is something that I know very well as I come from a family of immigrants. I was born in Khartoum, Sudan, during the height of a prolonged civil war between the north and the south, a two-decade war which eventually led to the latter's separation in July 9, 2011, forming its own independent state known as the Republic of South Sudan, the world's newest nation from which I now hail.

With the help of the last of my grandfather's savings, my family was able to relocate to our now adopted country, The United States of America. Being a young child then, I was oblivious to the damage this separation caused. Growing up as a first generation South Sudanese-American child, I tumbled between ambiguous states of nationality.

Trying to find an identity that did not feel like two halves of a fragment, one that felt like home, was never easy to me. I grew distant from my own culture as I realized I could not acclimate to the norms and traditions of my African heritage. I recall moments of awkwardness during community celebrations as the Sudanese speakers spoke eloquently on stage in our native Dinka language or Arabic while I felt deserted and could only feel the accentuated taste of English on my tongue. I looked with apprehension to moments when I would have to reply to the elders, "I'm sorry, I don't know what you're saying," and even more so to the times before I could even respond, their blank look of disbelief, showed that they already knew I was not their typical Sudanese child, I was an American kid. I was lulled out of my disillusioned sense of a neatly stitched identity. My voice, the difference between thought and action, the origin of strength and support from which I drew courage, essentially became suppressed within me.

My voice, for most of my life has generally been very calm and well-mannered as I found this to be the most efficient way of being accepted by all of my peers and associates. I can remember the days in elementary school and middle school where I could go an entire day without speaking and still get through the day. I would communicate via smiles and facial gestures and occasionally shrug my shoulders when asked why I was so quiet. Generally, this behavior stemmed from a lack of confidence in my words and also my voice. Now, this behavior changed fundamentally when I had a pen to paper. When writing, I had the voice that I always wanted. I could write clearly and loudly and say anything that I wanted or needed to say. With writing, I am able to take myself on a journey anywhere I want and also am able to experience new ideas and viewpoints. This ability which stemmed from writing, could only be described as empowering and gave me greater purpose as I had input in which others wanted to hear.

Analytical Course Reflection:

Through the course of this semester, my writing has progressed in term of voice and clarity. Prior to this semester, I would prioritize my getting my point across first and would put less emphasis on narrative and connecting with the reader. My state of mind was basically that it was solely the reader’s responsibility to understand what I was saying and not my responsibility if they couldn't relate or understand. Through the numerous different course goals and project, I was able to understand the importance of connecting with the reader as well as anticipating and incorporating their viewpoints. I learned from the reading presentation for Tent City by George Saunders that I need to put greater focus on planning and understanding the underlying themes and points of the reading. I learned that my process for reading an article is to first scan it for purpose and definition and then later read for facts and information. With this process, I often overlooked the true meaning of the author and why they chose to write about that topic. During our presentation, I was aware of my mistakes as the class, although answered our questions, did not really understand the purpose of my presentation or what I was trying to accomplish. In my written response, I wrote “It was a bit difficult to develop these questions because it called for us to have really understood the essay and the way the writer intended for the essay to be read as there are many different ways to interpret the intent of the author. An excellent understanding/analysis of the essay was a must, and as a group, we felt we had an efficient grasp of the text but have had moments where we might have missed key themes in the reading due to the fiction-like writing.” Here, I did not have much experience with non-fiction writing and was confused as to the true purpose of Saunders writing as I did not really take the time to empathize with the homeless community of Fresno and look at the story as a lesson. Once I looked closer, I now understand that there were themes of community, love, loss, and overall effort to empathize with the homeless community and see them in the same light that we see ourselves as they are complicated and complex just as we are.

My writing style has changed throughout my time in WRI 100 as I have changed my mentality towards writing from simply an assignment, to a form of expression. Take this writing sample that I wrote for our first craft assignment, “For any writing assignment, I think of it as a responsibility that I must complete and do not necessarily wait for inspiration or enlightenment to begin the writing process. That being said, I do have tendencies to delay my writing and begin later as I believe the pressure makes me work much harder and usually write out the entire paper in one sitting.” Here, with this mentality, I would be very blunt in my writing and not very creative with how I word my essays. After my time in WRI 100, and my new experience with my creative non-fiction essay, I learned the importance of CNF writing techniques as they draw in the reader and allow for a more descriptive story telling experience. Here is a sample from my CNF essay which exhibits the techniques that I have learned. From this excerpt “ Envision yourself in a large cramped room filled with hundreds of people. The air reeks of tenacity and slight discomfort. Previously, you were reluctant to take the day off of work to be there and had doubts about just how much of an impact you could possibly make. Normally, you would never subject yourself to the hours of waiting, fatigued body, and a scrawled signature to simply provide yourself with peace of mind— but now— you’ve done your part”, it is evident that I have learned how to utilize narrative techniques in order to make my writing flow more clearly and also how to present an idea in a creative way.

I learned to adapt to planning ahead of time as I had moments where I had written an essay, but had no idea what my goal was or what I had hoped to achieve with it. This was realized to me when I had my meeting with my professor to review my literature review essay and I had a very difficult time reiterating my main point and what should be the main takeaway. For my literature review, I had multiple idea changes from teaching machine learning in schools to machine learning and its advancements all the way to how we interpret and define consciousness in artificial intelligence. Now, although it is only natural for ideas to change in the writing process, I should have had a more clear idea of what I wanted to achieve before I began writing. This idea forming was accomplished via the annotated bibliography and synthesis grid as it forced me to evaluate my positions and create meaningful connections. Towards the end of the class, with my CNF essay, I had learned how to efficiently express and plan my ideas ahead of time and also relay that in a creative and compelling way. With this excerpt, “Now, although firm commitment and strength is invaluable, Vermin has shown us how this idealistic bravado may actually be silly and harmful. When presented with the core idea of a republic, we should strive to elect politicians who are able to prioritize understanding their constituents and be able to change their views through reasonable discussion”, I am able to quickly recognize this as my main point and use this to guide the rest of my essay to completion.