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The Development of my Literacy Skills

In the course English 150, I have learned more about writing than I learned all throughout high school. In this class, we went into depth discussing a variety of important topics in order to create university writings. We talked about how to properly cite primary and secondary sources, how to avoid plagiarism, the meaning of exigence, how to analyze our essays and much more. Learning about all of these topics has strengthened my writing. My writing is not perfect, I still struggle with many of the topics we discussed in class such as grammar and past/present tense. I will continue to work on my weak areas and try to strengthen them. In this essay, I will discuss how my writing has improved in the course’s five main outcomes.

The first outcome I learned about this year was the differences between audience, context and purpose, and how they are essential in writing. Audience focuses on whom the writer is speaking to. This is important to remember because the language the writer uses will depend on the audience. For example, I would use more simplistic language if I were writing to a group of 5 year olds than I would if I were writing to one of my college professors. Knowing the audience is also important when thinking about the purpose of the essay. I think that a clear and definite purpose is the most important factor when completing an essay for any class. This something I struggle with at times. I have difficulty staying focused on one main topic. I think that as the semester continued and I focused on having a clear purpose, my writings improved. In my first essay, “My Journey to Literacy”, there were sections in the essay where I would go into detail about an idea that did not directly relate to my purpose. I went into detail explaining the purpose behind why I went to kindergarten at a younger age and why my parents made that decision (*My Journey to Literacy* 1). This section was unrelated to the purpose of my essay. Looking at my most recent essay, “Importance of Writing in Speech Therapy”, there were still points when I would go off topic but these instances were limited. The context of the essay is another area I struggled. I have difficulty with sentence structure and when to use a comma or semi colon, and ensuring that my paragraphs flow. I am still continuing to work on the context of my essays. I learned that these three topics are crucial when completing an effective academic paper.

The next two outcomes I learned throughout this past semester are how to effectively use primary and secondary sources and how to properly cite sources to avoid plagiarism. When I was in high school, my English teachers taught my classes about plagiarism and how to cite sources. We learned about MLA and APA formatting but we never went into detail about making sure my sources were reliable and all the different forms of plagiarism. I knew of one database I could use to find reliable sources. I now know that there are multiple databases available on Longwood library website that Longwood students are able to use to find reliable sources. I also learned the different ways to use the information I learned from my sources: paraphrasing, summarizing and quotations. For example, I took what my professor said in my one essay and created a summary in my own words; “Dr. Cralidis, CSDS professor at Longwood University, explained that SLP’s have a variety of writings to complete in order to receive their diploma” (*Importance of Writing in Speech Therapy* 2). I then had to properly cite my source to avoid plagiarism. These two outcomes are extremely important when writing papers in and out of the classroom.

The next outcome is the most important outcome in my opinion. It discusses the importance of planning, drafting, revising, editing and proofreading. During the beginning of the semester, I would just write one draft of my essay and then read over it once and turn it in. But after we read “Shitty First Drafts” in class, I reconsidered the way I was writing my essays. Now, whenever I start writing, I begin by writing down random ideas. They do not always make sense, but I want to get all my ideas down on paper. I then read over what I have written and delete any ideas that are nonsense or irrelevant. My next step is starting a rough draft; this is when my ideas start to look like an essay. In my essay “My Journey to Literacy”, my rough draft was still missing my conclusion and I had only started my introduction, but I was only just starting to put my ideas into an essay format. Next, I finish all the sections in my essay and read over it two or three more times to check to grammatical errors and to check if my essay makes logical sense. I then make my final changes and then I have my final draft. I feel that my writing has improved because of all the extra steps I take proofreading and editing my essays.

The final outcome I learned was how to effectively use language feature and genre conventions in academic writing. This is one outcome that I still struggle with but I think that I am improving. I learned about the importance to tell the audience the main point of my paragraph early. In my most recent essay, I started the majority of my paragraphs with a topic sentence that would be the main point for the rest of that paragraph. For example, I started one paragraph by saying “Along with writing research papers, a speech pathologist will also write a variety of papers focused on their patient” (*Importance of Writing in Speech Therapy* 2). By doing this, the audience clearly understands that my paragraph is going to be about the different papers that speech therapists have to write that relate to their patient. I keep the audience in mind whenever I write. I want to make sure that my essay makes logical sense so the reader understands the message I am trying to convey.

This class, overall, has helped me become a better writer. The material I learned in this class will help with writings I have to complete for other college courses as well as papers I have to write in my future profession. The ideas and main concepts I learned in this class, regarding writing conventions, will help with my professional writing. I continue to grow as a writer. I know that I need to work on my writing skills, but this class has helped me improve drastically. This course, English 150, has helped me develop in my literacy skills and become an enhanced writer.