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ENGL 150-07

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Final Exam

English 150 has been a course that explores the proper way to write an argumentative paper that is less formal and more like a conversation at a dinner party, as described in *They Say, I Say*, the assigned book for this course. This course has also pushed the boundaries of the conventional and generic five-paragraph essay to promote a more authentic way of arguing a thesis without limitations. Learning to write in the “They Say, I Say” format proved to be a very challenging, yet rewarding experience for me. Writing in this way helped to reaffirm my belief in my writing abilities while learning a new way to express my voice and the voice from my researched sources. At the beginning of the semester, I wrote two goals that I hoped to achieve throughout the semester: 1) To find a way to let my ideas flow smoothly throughout the paper 2) To find a balance between worrying about grammar and just writing the paper without fear of failure. The different phases of writing my final paper and how these phases helped to develop my final paper are what really allowed me to achieve the two goals that I set for myself at the beginning of the semester and to fulfill various outcomes of the class. As a writer, I feel that over the course of this semester, the skills that I have grown the most in would be my ability to add my voice to the conversation through metacommentary, letting my ideas flow through the paper in a way that reinforces my thesis, and worrying less about grammar and errors and more about content when writing my paper.

The first step in the writing process was to choose a topic that we were passionate about to be discussed throughout our Lit Review and our bigger paper. For my paper, I originally chose the topic of female representation in dystopian young adult literature. I became interested in this topic because I am a huge fan of both *The Hunger Games* and the *Divergent* series and their female protagonists, Katniss Everdeen and Tris Prior, respectively. As mentioned in my proposal, I am a young woman who “enjoys reading this genre of literature and seeing it come to life on the big screen” (Proposal). My thesis consisted of discussing both these two series and their film adaptations in order to “showcase both an ‘aggressive’ and ‘soft’ strength in its female characters” because these series’ “give young women like me a sense of confidence, strength and a growing belief that women can do anything,” and the young adult dystopian genre “needs more of these characters, especially with the ever-changing, feminist culture that we live in” (Proposal). I would attempt to translate all of these ideas into my writing for the Lit Review.

My Lit Review was a good first step toward the finish line, but the room for improvement was evident. Two of the outcomes of the course include integrating primary and secondary sources and adhering to citation guidelines. In my Lit Review, I successfully integrated primary and secondary sources, but I lacked the use of any peer-reviewed sources. Another outcome of the course is to understand the differences that audience, purpose, and context produce for researched academic writing. This outcome was also one that could have done better with in my Lit Review. It was brought to my attention that I was not being unique enough because calling a character strong has been done before. A prime example of this lack of uniqueness in my Lit Review is the sentence in which I use the phrase: “the emergence of strong female protagonists such as *The Hunger Games'* "lethal but still emotionally vulnerable Katniss" and *Divergent's* Tris Prior (Grossman, n.p.)” (Lit Review 1). This phrase not only shows the lack of uniqueness, but how bland my introduction was compared to what was written in my final paper because it set the tone for monotonous, lackluster phrasing throughout my Lit Review. Another example of this lack of uniqueness is in my third paragraph: “One major factor in Tris's qualities as a strong female protagonist is that she is bold and confident in spite of her deepest fears” (Lit Review 3). Although my original goal was to discuss the “aggressive” and “soft” qualities of these two characters, only describing them as strong female protagonists prevents me from fully achieving the goal I set in my proposal. Fortunately, my final paper proved to take a turn for the best when I changed up my approach to the paper.

As I moved onto writing my final paper, I realized that my Lit Review needed some major changes if it was going to be added to the final paper. Originally, I wanted to talk about the growth of female representation in dystopian novels, but since my ideas were not unique enough in the Lit Review, I decided to shift to a discussion of the true meaning of a “Strong Female Character” that included two seemingly different, but surprising similar female protagonists, Katniss Everdeen from *The Hunger Games* film series and Bella Swan from the *Twilight* film saga. The first major edit in my final paper was first paragraph that included a new thesis that accommodated my character change: “In this paper, I will compare and contrast two film franchises, *The Hunger Games* and *Twilight*, highlighting how eachseries gives an example of an emotionally complex female character through its protagonists, Katniss Everdeen and Bella Swan respectively” (More Than Just A Pretty, Pale Face and a Bow and Arrow, 1). It is clear that this thesis is much more detailed than the original draft: “Through the emergence of these main characters, women are better represented as the strong yet emotionally complex women that they are.”

The same concept of exploring each female character’s “aggressive” and “soft” side is still the goal, but I felt that the paper had a better outcome if Bella Swan, a female character is often perceived as weak, was compared to Katniss rather than Tris, a character who appears to be too similar to Katniss to successfully argue. Bella Swan and the *Twilight* saga made the conversation more interesting since the series and the character have often been scrutinized rather than praised by critics. My second major edit was the conclusion to this paper: “After all, Bella wants to be more than just to be a pretty, pale face in the same way that Katniss wants to be more than just “the girl on fire” who’s good with a bow and arrow. What these young women really want is to love and overcome fearlessly with their loved ones by their side. It is this quality that McDougall wants to see more of in female characters rather than the hackneyed ‘Strong Female Character.’ Although both Katniss Everdeen and Bella Swan are unconventional female characters in pop culture, female characters like these young girls who are not only strong, but also emotionally flawed and complex are what films desperately need in order to add substance and a greater interest” (More Than Just A Pretty, Pale Face and a Bow and Arrow, 16-17). This is another major shift from the conclusion in my Lit Review that was viewed by the professor as more of a note that I have left for myself rather than a proper conclusion: “Lev Grossman, Rachel Stark, Amanda Dobbins, Jen Doll, Bethany Bowser and Samantha Ellis have all contributed a great deal to the conversation on the emergence of strong female characters in dystopian young adult literature. In the paragraphs to follow, I will contribute my voice to the conversation, specifically focusing on Katniss Everdeen’s influence” (Lit Review, 5).

Although there was still a little room for improvement, my final paper proved to be a triumphant feat that saw major improvement and usage of skills that were taken from *They Say, I Say*. One major area that still needed improvement was a clearer explanation for why I chose to start by talking about the emotions of the two female characters. A good example of this lack of explanation came in my second paragraph: “The best way to analyze these two protagonists is to look at and discuss their emotional complexity because of their deeper connections with both the male and female characters in their respective series” (More Than Just A Pretty, Pale Face and a Bow and Arrow, 2). What this first sentence needed was something less typical than talking about emotions, especially since females are often discussed in terms of their emotionalism.

Although I could have been more thorough in the previously mentioned sentence, the rest of my paper shined the most with the use of metacommentary, a skill introduced in the assigned reading, *They Say, I Say*. A great example of this metacommentary is in my seventh paragraph, when I start discussing scenes from the two film franchises: “The opening scenes in both films showcase each female character’s strong connection to their female family members” (More Than Just A Pretty, Pale Face and a Bow and Arrow, 6). I believe that this is a sentence that showcases my ability to weave in and out of quotations with ease. This skill helped me achieve my goal of letting my ideas flow throughout my paper in a clear way. Another sentence that I see as a triumph in my paper would be the introduction to my fourth paragraph: “Bella Swan, the female protagonist of the *Twilight* saga, is at first glance, on the weaker side of the spectrum compared to Katniss Everdeen, but she is still significant as a female heroine” (More Than Just A Pretty, Pale Face and a Bow and Arrow, 3). This sentence is a triumph not only because it allows me to set up an argument about Bella that is often overlooked, but also it is one of the many smooth transitions into a paragraph that exists within my paper. The strength of my paper was how and when I was able to fill in the spaces between quotations and explanations in order to get my point across. Being able to make this paper flow the way that it would if this paper were a conversation at a party is something that I am proud of and also fulfills my goal of being more concerned about good content rather being grammatically correct.

The skills that I have learned and utilized in this course are skills that I hope to use in more of my General Education and English courses in the future. Because of the previously mentioned skills that I learned throughout my writing process, I believe that I will be able to better conform to the requirements of future courses. Learning how to properly give voice to the opinions from sources along with my individual opinion will allow me to properly research and translate my research into my writing. Although I probably will not being able to bring these skills directly to my field of study, computer science, I am hoping that a potential English minor will allow me to flex my writing muscles in the future. No matter where or when I will use these skills, everything that I have learned in English 150 will prove to be a benefit to me in my future coursework.