

The Gradual Improvement of My Craft

Throughout the semester, I was exposed to an array of literary pieces by writers of various ethnicities. By effectively incorporating historical content about their ethnic background into their writings, these writers provided me with insight into the lives of a diverse group of people. Although my classmates and I primarily discussed the content of the literary works, we were also introduced to various writing techniques. As I analyzed the pieces, I realized that writing is truly an artistic form that gives individuals the opportunity to express their dreams and opinions in the form of poetry or prose. Each writer also exhibited exemplary writing skills in areas such as audience awareness and the overall organization of their work. Consequently, I am gradually improving my writing skills so that I can become a more effective writer. The exhibits that are presented in this portfolio demonstrate my improvement in the development of my thesis statements and topic sentences, and in the variation of my sentence structures.

As the semester progressed, I worked meticulously to formulate thesis statements that clearly and specifically stated my argument in a concise manner. At the beginning of the semester, my instructor and peers noted that the thesis statement in my first paper, entitled “Embracing One's Roots,” was too vague and needed to be tailored into more concise language. For instance, the following excerpt from Draft One of my Revision Process illustrates these weaknesses in my thesis statement:

From an in depth analysis of both stories, one can surmise that *even though an individual may become more appreciative of his or her heritage* because of new experiences endured as time progresses, his or her understanding and appreciation of heritage will vary based on the *nature of those experiences*.

In order to improve the thesis statement presented above, I tried to elaborate on the italicized portion of my thesis statement by including the names of the characters to be discussed and expounding on the “experiences” that they encountered. The excerpt below illustrates how I learned to develop my thesis statement more effectively:

Although “The Invisible Man” and Dee become more appreciative of heritage, his or her understanding and appreciation of heritage varies because of the differences in each character's path to cultural appreciation, and the influence of different perspectives on the advancement of African Americans during each character's respective time period.

This revised thesis statement clearly states the points that will be addressed in the body of the paper and demonstrates significant improvement in the overall presentation of my argument. Although there are apparent improvements in my thesis statement, I am aware that there is room for additional improvement. For instance, my argument could be stated more concisely. As I continued writing, I improved on my areas of weakness by formulating my thesis statement before writing my paper and then reviewing it after constructing the paper to ensure that my argument has been stated clearly. I believe that this technique, in addition to the comments made by my instructor and peers, has been instrumental in the development of my thesis statements.

In addition to forming of specific thesis statements, I have also become more competent in constructing topic sentences that are specific and maintain the essay's cohesiveness. Similar to

my thesis statements at the beginning of the semester, my topic sentences tended to be very vague. The following topic sentence from Revised Essay Two, entitled “The Journey to Prosperity,” illustrates this weakness in my writing: “The persona reveals the *causes* of the women’s journey and elaborates on the *current stage* of the women’s journey.” During a conference with my instructor, she noted that the italicized portion of my topic sentence needed to “be more specific.” After reviewing the corresponding paragraph and determining its main points, I reconstructed my topic sentence so that it clearly stated the points that would be addressed in the body of the paragraph. The following example from “The Journey to Prosperity” is an accurate reflection of my improvement: “In the poem's final stanza, the speaker reveals that the women's journey is a result of their desire to eradicate poverty in their lives.” My instructor and peer reviewers also advised me to ensure that my topic sentences had direct correlation to the content of my paragraphs and my thesis statement. In order to ensure that my topic sentences and thesis statement maintained the paper's coherence, I revised my drafts and ensured that my topic sentences presented points that were directly related to my thesis. As the semester progressed, this technique helped to improve my topic sentences, thus improving my paper's coherence.

As I made improvements in the development of my thesis statement and topic sentences, I also worked on varying my sentence structure. Throughout the semester, my peers and instructor commented that I had a tendency to overuse introductory clauses to transition from one sentence to another. For instance, the following excerpt from “From Los Vendidos to Di Jamaican Dem” shows my consecutive use of introductory clauses and phrases as transitions:

Furthermore, while several groups have chosen to perform the play as it was originally scripted, some directors and producers have chosen to alter the ending of the play . . . For instance, when the play was produced by director, Jorge Huertas . . . he changed the ending from the original version . . . In fact, the original director and playwright . . . changed the ending of the play . . . In the television version, “a scientist masterminds the operation. (Revised Essay One)

Prior to English 1102M, I was oblivious to the fact that my writing was bombarded with numerous clauses. Once my peers and instructor explained that an excessive incorporation of introductory clauses made my writing monotonous, I worked assiduously throughout the semester on this particular weakness. By following the guidelines and adhering to my peers’ suggestions, I was able to develop my paragraphs using a variety of sentence structures as illustrated by the following excerpt from “The Journey to Prosperity”:

The persona primarily speaks of the length of time that the women spend on the streets of Harlem and emphasizes that prostitution lasts “through the long night until the single break of day” . . . The phrase is also a metaphorical comparison to the women's lives. To establish that prostitution lasted throughout every season, the persona uses phrases such as “snow-flake” and “earth's white breast.” (Revised Essay Two)

The excerpt demonstrates more variation in my sentence structures. Although I did not use introductory clauses or phrases, I maintained the overall flow of the paragraph, which illustrates that I do not have to rely on such devices to improve the quality of my writing.

During the semester, I made significant improvements in my writing which have made me a more proficient writer. With the continuous advice of my instructor and the constructive criticism of my peers, I was able to identify the areas in my writing that I needed to focus on

throughout the semester. I also believe that I have become a better peer reviewer because I am more aware of how to improve certain flaws in the writing process. For instance, in my Peer Review Exhibit, I focused on ensuring that my peer's thesis statement and topic sentences were specific, and I also ensured that her sentences were well-constructed. These comments were made in addition to comments on my peer's grammar usage, coherence, and organization. I believe that the combination of my peers' comments and my instructor's advice were not only beneficial to me but also to those whom I assisted.

My writing experience in English 1102M has definitely been rewarding, as I have become a more adept writer. By utilizing the advice of others and learning from my mistakes, I have continued to grow as a writer. I believe that through continuous practice and by applying the knowledge I have learned during this semester, my successive writing assignments will illustrate distinctiveness in thought and technique.