

ENGL1102

**Student:** Courtney Purvis

**Teacher:** Sharon McCoy



Courtney Purvis's ePortfolio is memorable for its lively range of styles, from the lyrical (in her Biography) to the hard-core scientific (in "Fiend Angelical"). It is also notable for its ability to convey through these various styles the author's equally strong commitment to both science and art. The topics of Courtney's essays may strike some readers as unusual; she was a member of the Fall 2010 Life Sciences Learning Community, a class composed of both English 1101 and 1102 students that was oriented to the scientific kinds of topics the students encountered in Chemistry and in the Learning Community's First-year Seminar. Courtney's instructor writes: "Don't be fooled by the smooth and unforced structure of her essays or her portfolio: these were the product of much frustration, passion, and determination to find the keys that hold it all together beautifully."

**Writer's ethos:** From the Biography's image to the concluding poem, Courtney's portfolio gives a vivid portrait of its author. To some extent, we "know" the writer through *what* she says. Courtney is particularly good at explaining her creative process. Her Introductory Reflective Essay, for instance, describes the writing of a paragraph as a documentary: "The scene opens and a narrator introduces the topic at hand with a weighted and urgent tone. The voice (which normally sounds like Edward Norton) uncovers the research while interrogating the watcher about their knowledge of the case with deep, thought-provoking extremes." At other times, we sense the writer's ethos by *how* she says things – through style.

**Unity:** As in the case of Brittany Scott, Courtney gives unity to her ePortfolio through thematic titles that link her essays together. In this case, the titles use thematically appropriate Shakespearean quotations, helping to reinforce the juxtaposition of art and science in Courtney's work. The poem included as the Wild Card itself plays with Shakespearean diction. The Introductory Reflective Essay also helps to unify the portfolio by establishing connections

between its parts. The two revised essays, for instance, “are pieces about a helpful hormone, oxytocin, and a possibly harmful herbicide, atrazine”; parallel sentence structure and alliteration underscore economically the relationship between the two pieces.

**Style:** Courtney’s own prose style contributes importantly to her ethos. She switches frequently from a scientific to a conversational voice in a way that helps her argument rather than simply disrupt the essay’s unity. A good example can be found in “The Fortunate Unhappy,” where the author begins with a hypothetical anecdote — “Imagine being in a room surrounded by empty faces of characters speaking with monotonous voice” — to give the reader a sense of what it feels like to be schizophrenic; but by the third paragraph she recounts in a straightforward manner a scientific experiment.