

Writer's Evolution

When considering how the notion of genre affects the choices and decisions we consciously or sub-consciously make each day, we come to realize how this term, which describes a wide range of categories and choices, molds our individual preferences, habits and personalities. Without such a plethora of literary and cultural options, our personalities and lifestyles would surely differ from their present state. Imagine walking through the bookstore and instead of taking your typical route to the stacks near the café, where your favorite genre of Romantic Comedies are shelved, you were limited to selections of Autobiographies or Thrillers because “Rom Com’s” never came into existence? In thinking about the application of writing genres to academia, students do receive exposure to a wide variety of writing forms and styles during their undergraduate classes, but they become tethered to a select few rigid forms of writing due to the expectations of traditional academic curriculums, where structured essays and in-depth research papers have become the norm. Genres allow writers to gravitate towards topics of interest and avoid those with less appeal. Wouldn't it be useful if this trend translated into academia, and students were given the opportunity to pursue writing styles that would have the greatest developmental impact on their writing skills and abilities? Since students each possess a unique writing voice and affinity towards certain writing styles rather than others, they should at least be given an opportunity to apply those tendencies and interests to their academic writing.

As my Minor in Writing program draws to a close, and I've had the opportunity to reflect upon the holistic picture of my undergraduate writing experiences, one key takeaway comes to mind: my writing is most successful when I'm able to explore the dynamics for negotiating the tone and relationship between the intended audience and myself, the writer. Such explorations have led me to use an informal and conversational tone in solidifying this reader/writer relationship. The traditional formal essays and complex research papers don't drive my creativity and passion for writing as do other forms, which enable me to have more control over the tone and style of what I'm writing. I'm fortunate enough to have taken classes that have allowed me to explore my own writing passions. Such experiences have helped me to develop this tendency and skill for an informal and conversationalist approach. Writing should ultimately be about the writer, and if that means teachers need to adjust their wants and expectations a bit to accommodate the student, then so be it. The Minor in Writing has provided me with a unique opportunity to explore and

develop the kinds of writing skills that interest me most, and that has been invaluable to my progression as a writer.

The first instance where I incorporated informality into a traditional academically structured essay was during the Gateway course for the Minor in Writing. Students were assigned a “Why I Write” essay, which encouraged us to explore the reasons and motivations for why we love writing and why we continue to do so. I focused my essay on one of my favorite books, *I Was Amelia Earhart*, where I connected how my passion to become a writer stemmed from the way Jane Mendehlson used a conversational, story-like tone to take her readers through the exhilarating adventure of Amelia Earhart. I began by providing an overview of how Mendehlson illustrated the excitement behind Earhart’s journey because I wanted to show how her descriptions created vibrant and lively feelings for me as the reader. In that moment, I knew I wanted to bring those lively feelings to my writing going forward. Mendehlson also used concise and simplistic language to illustrate Earhart’s journey, and in doing so, used an informal style, which I personally enjoyed reading because it swept me right up into the action. At the end of my essay, I picked four writing habits and interests that describe my affinity towards writing and provided a brief description of each to show how these principles guide my writing each day.

I strategically picked a less formal tone for this essay so that the writing and language on the page would reflect the language I would use as if I were physically speaking to somebody about my passions for writing. A “Why I Write” essay focuses solely on the writer, so it only made sense to write in the way that felt most natural and in a way that let my personality guide the piece. Initially, something didn’t feel quite right about this essay, and I knew it was the lack of formality. The essay strayed a bit from a traditional academic standard. Even though I was still making an academic argument, the informal tone somehow made the piece sound less “smart.” This trend reflects how tone and voice impact a particular style of writing, and students may feel discouraged to explore other writing options for the fear that those tones and styles which depart from the rigid, formal academic medium might make them less accredited writers. I began to overcome this dilemma when I discovered that the value of such informal and conversational tones comes with reader approachability and finding the confidence needed to write in the way that feels most comfortable and natural for me. It’s important for students to learn how to write strong academic pieces because those skills are necessary to educational success. Yet, there

needs to be a healthier balance between rigid academics and choice. How can students discover their true writing passions if they don't have the chance to experiment with tone, style and voice? Isn't college all about "finding yourself" and understanding your strengths and weaknesses as a writer so you can pursue and develop your passions? Isn't writing about self-expression, too? Opportunities for such exploration and experimentation should be offered so students aren't strictly confined to rigid academically structured writing that limits the ability for self-expression and discovery.

One paper that I wrote for my Political Science 326 class exemplifies my distaste for the type of structured, methodical academic writing that suppresses those chances for creativity and "outside of the box" thinking. In this course on American State Government, students were assigned a 12-15 page Policy Brief where our task was to make a specific recommendation to a state governor on a current legislative bill that we found needed improvement. I chose to analyze a portion of the S.B. 1070 legislation in the state of Arizona, which placed restrictions on illegal immigration into the state. Throughout my Policy Brief, I provided a systematic understanding of the main issues with the current legislation, but my GSI clearly noted that I "missed the mark" in terms of specificity and evidence because there was too much abstraction and too many assumptions being made without enough data to support the claims.

Though writing this Policy Brief provided an insightful exercise into data collection and analytical writing, I was unable to effectively mold my affinity for informality and creativity into this piece. I'm rather resistant to academic pieces that require such a structured and systematic process because they appear mundane, and I'm usually not proud of the end result. Students should have the chance to write in this methodical, formal manner because it's all part of the learning process and may be beneficial to their future careers. However, suppressing any means for creative expression in any kind of writing like this seems extreme. Aren't students taught to make their writing unique and original and to write in their own voice? Why can't creative expression be applied to a Policy Brief? Is there any kind of proof that creativity would make writing in this style less effective? I surely don't think so. Students will inevitably still need to write in those traditional academic structures, but allowing them to put a creative spin on their assignments can help students find value and satisfaction even in those rigid academic styles. Additionally, why are professors generally so reluctant to let students experiment with traditional

forms of writing? So, the Policy Brief turned out to be a bit of a bust—the student gave an incredible amount of effort writing something they enjoyed and took a risk. If students are willing to take risks, why won't their professors support them? Such a systematic compliance amongst faculty members in favor of stringent academic requirements and expectations has become the widespread norm, and unfortunately, straying from this notion in any variance appears too radical to a majority of faculty members.

In comparison to an argumentative essay that I wrote for my English 225 class, creativity and personal choice can in fact be applied to argumentative writing. The assignment for this essay was to write a 1300-1500 paper analyzing a food-related advertisement in terms of the rhetorical triangle, which includes ethos, pathos and logos, in order to determine how the TV commercial uses techniques of character, emotion and/or reason to sell a particular product. Students were to focus on the ad's argumentative slogan and study the language used so we could uncover the ad's overall effectiveness. It was important for us to be critical of the commercial's word choices and claims for our justification. Besides a few issues with repetition, I'm very pleased with the outcome of this paper because I was able to consistently support a strong central argument using my own thoughts, questions and analytical skills to guide myself through the argument. I understand now that an argument can still encompass a formal structure but can be more informal and conversational in terms of reader approachability. So, it's still possible to follow the logical formula and methodology for an academic argumentation while molding the voice and style to fit the writer's personality. This ability contrasts quite significantly from the Political Science Policy Brief that I wrote, which left virtually no room to even minutely stray outside the rigid structure of a policy brief or experiment with any degree of personal expression.

While writing this essay, I learned the value of persuasion. Whether for academic purposes or in daily conversations, whether done consciously or subconsciously, persuasion is a critical component of argumentation that we use often. While persuasion tends to take on a more formal structure when implemented for academic purposes, a student's persuasive thought process is generally the same whether the overall argument is a formally written document or done verbally. Shouldn't students be able to bring in a creative and personalized approach to their persuasive writing? When students are forced to abide by a strict "by-the-book" formula for such writing, it leaves less room for personal expression and experimentation, which leads to another

question: will the student's persuasive writing skills serve a purpose beyond their undergraduate courses if they are so constricted by academic requirements and structures? If students learn how to combine an academically charged persuasive formula with an individualistic approach, they may be more likely to use these skills beyond an academic environment.

In transitioning to a creative piece that I wrote for my Communication Studies 351 course on media industries, the assignment was for students to use key class concepts regarding the development and history of the magazine industry to discuss how we would create and launch our very own magazine publication on the market. Besides explicitly drawing on class terminology, the only other requirement for the essay was that it needed to be written in diary entry form, which wasn't too unusual considering the creative nature of Communication Studies. I created a hypothetical magazine called "Bling on a Budget," where the publication's objective was to provide college girls with fun and affordable fashion accessory resources, tips and information so they can still look stylish on a budget.

This assignment was one of the few academic essays that I'm both proud of and enjoyed writing. Not only was I allowed to be as creative as possible with this essay, but the piece actually required a substantial degree of creativity, which was a welcoming attribute in comparison to the rigid structure that a majority of academic pieces entail. In writing this essay, I learned a great deal about the magazine industry, which I've always been passionate about, and this paper proved invaluable to my professional development because it reassured me that I had chosen the right major. I was in a field where creativity was valued, appreciated and most importantly, necessary for success. In fact, the inspiration for my capstone project largely stemmed from the creative content of this assignment. I decided to expand upon my idea for 'Bling on a Budget' for this final project because magazine journalism and savvy spending habits are two areas of supreme interest to me. In doing so, I created a budgetary magazine targeting undergraduate females at the University of Michigan.

To capitalize on my love for creative writing, especially in the informal, conversationalist approach, as has been a guiding theme throughout this essay, I'm currently working on my own young adult novel titled, *Freshman Year Diaries*, which I hope to one day self-publish on Amazon. I was inspired to write a creative fiction piece by my older sister who has successfully

self-published 4 of her own YA novels on Amazon. Freshman Year Diaries is intended to be a lighthearted, entertaining and comedic story documenting some of the crazy and unthinkable adventures and experiences that inevitably occur during a pre-teen girls' freshman year in high school. I decided to write this story in first person, diary entry form for two reasons. First, freshman girls in high school tend to keep their own journals or diaries, so I was appealing to a common interest and second, writing in this style helped me as the author really get into the main character's personality and develop her character as best I could. By doing this, I'm hoping the audience will feel the same affinity that I do for Anastasia, the main character. Conversational writing with a hint of humor has always been a strong point for me, so I want this story to be a fun read for the intended audience of 6th-7th grade girls since it's been so much fun writing so far.

This type of creative writing doesn't necessarily fit in with an academic curriculum, besides perhaps in a creative writing class, so it's challenging for students to find the time and even motivation to write their own creative, unique pieces. If students aren't able to do so because of the nature of the class or because teachers uniformly frown upon such extreme creative thinking, how could this level of personalized writing possibly be implemented into the classroom? It's less about the academic course providing the opportunity and time for students to write personal, creative pieces and more about the teacher helping students to build a diverse writing skill set by exposing them to various types of writing. Students can then apply this diversified skill set and expansive exposure to various mediums to their overall writing on their own time. Academic curriculum and courses should be designed so that teachers can still encourage students to pursue their passions and help them build the skill sets they will need in order to do so.

I'm grateful for the diverse portfolio of writing pieces that I've produced throughout my undergraduate career at Michigan. My evolution as a writer has taught me that students should always be presented with opportunities for learning new ways of writing, but there should also be chances for individualism and customized approaches because that's how we learn and progress. Without such exposure to an array of different writing styles, formats and tones, I probably wouldn't have grown much as a writer or developed an affinity to the writing style that I'm truly passionate about. The capstone project I've completed during my Writing 400 course highlights my affinity towards that conversational relationship between the reader and writer, as has been a

major theme guiding this essay. For this project, I chose to build upon the creative magazine essay that I wrote for my Communications 351 class and to incorporate my experience with recreational magazine journalism by creating a proposal and mock-up version of my very own magazine. The magazine is all about providing college females with resources and information for how to better manage their money. I've always struggled with finances during my four years at Michigan, and it would have been nice to refer to a friendly and entertaining source targeted towards my age group and the Michigan college atmosphere. I produced a detailed written proposal for the magazine as well as a mock-up site complete with sample articles to show what the publication would look like if it were "live." Magazine journalism fascinates me because the style gives writers a freedom of expression that is difficult to find with other forms of writing. I've been an avid writer for an online magazine called Her Campus since my freshman year of college, and each time I write an article for the publication, I feel as though I'm conversing and truly connecting with the reader simply through an article of 300 words. I've found what I'm good at and passionate about, and it really boils down to magazine writing. It's energizing and invigorating being able to write in a playful yet informative mannerism and know I'm making a positive contribution to some aspect of society, even in a small way.

All of the references throughout this essay have influenced the content choices that you will see as you further explore my ePortfolio. In addition to this Writer's Evolution Essay, I have decided to include the Communication Studies 351 essay on designing my own magazine because this essay was the first real influence for my Writing 400 final project. I've also included the 'Why I Write' essay that discusses the reasons that led me to love writing and wanting to pursue it. This piece ties in nicely with the overarching theme of this Writer's Evolution Essay because I talk about the source of my enjoyment for conversational and informal writing in the 'Why I Write' essay. I'm also dedicating a section of the ePortfolio to recreational magazine journalism because these experiences, too, have greatly influenced my idea for the capstone project. The last addition to the ePortfolio is, of course, the much-anticipated capstone project.