

Maddie Howard

Professor Garcia

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Writing Battles

My relationship with writing is complicated. The path to get to where I am today in my writing journey is filled with drastic twists and turns. In elementary and middle school, I hated writing for the technicalities. Spelling and grammar never seemed to click into place in my head, which led to roadblocks in writing drafts. I would get to a word I couldn't spell or comma I couldn't place and then all my motivation and momentum for writing would come screeching to a halt. My perfectionism would take complete control of my mind as I stared at my paper in disgust and tried to fix my mistake. Minutes would go by as I struggled to get back on track. I had numerous teachers tell me to just relax, write whatever came to mind and not worry about the technicalities. They probably thought they were giving the best advice to little old me, but I found that advice to be as helpful as a toddler in the kitchen. I instead pushed through my assignments, telling myself that I was not made for writing and just needed to get the task done. It was draining for me to finish one paragraph and I started to resent writing. I procrastinated on all my English tasks to save myself from the stress and frustration.

As I grew up and hit puberty, I found the writing rules slowly started to connect in my brain. I figured I had finally overcome my writing struggles with spelling and grammar, but in high school I soon faced a completely different problem in writing. In becoming older and more mature, my mind became a hurricane of thoughts and emotions. My brain is a mixer in a kitchen,

taking in all of the ingredients of knowledge and blending them into a mess of fun facts, song lyrics, and school topics. I loved learning new things in school, but all the information would go into the bottomless pit, never to be seen again. I had to take detailed notes and write everything down to have any chance of remembering enough to complete assignments. I had post-it notes littering my planner, to do lists in every notebook, and binders full of pages of notes. Though when it came to writing it was impossible to put my jumble of thoughts into a concise and understandable manner. Run-on sentences became my best friend, as my fingers ran marathons on the keyboard in a desperate attempt to try to make sense of the mess of words in my head. My rough drafts would become a string of verbs, adjectives and nouns seemingly randomly placed along the page in a manner only I could understand.

Often times, I would know what I wanted to write but it would only be a picture in my head, one that words were never enough to explain. It was like going to watch a movie of your favorite book but realizing that the scene was nothing like you had imagined. I knew what I wanted to get across, but I couldn't put the thought into a comprehensive sentence. Writing became a monumentally frustrating activity as my perfectionism screamed at me to have the best thing written down right away, trying in vain to sort through the chaos whirlwind in my head. This constant internal fight with myself became tiring fast, and I soon dreaded completing writing assignments. I didn't want anyone to read my writing because it was always all over the place. Peer reviews were my enemy as my classmates tried to understand the clutter of words on the page. They would often give me feedback that I needed to simplify my ideas or cut down my sentences. But what do I cut if everything makes sense to me? What do I cut if I need everything there to explain what I am thinking inside?

Surprisingly, my lightbulb moment wasn't with an English teacher, or any teacher at all, it was with my therapist, Sam. I sat on her blue couch, surrounded by comfort and security, staring out the window as I poured my heart about my struggles with writing in school through all my other thoughts and emotions. After I stopped to take a breath, she said, "Maddie, I think you just need to write more". I looked at her like she was crazy. I hoped for her to share some forbidden secret that would magically grant me the ability to write without wanting to pull out my hair or throw my computer at the wall. I had just told her how much I hated writing, and her excellent advice was to write more. She could probably sense my distaste within my stunned silence, so she continued, "I mean, you need to write in a setting where no one else will see it. That way you can be as messy or confusing as you like because it would only be for you. You can write down anything you are thinking, so when you get to school the only thing left in your mind to say is for the assignment." Even after hearing her explanation, my initial thought was, "that would never work". But because she had been with me through the ups and downs of my life, I figured I owed it to her to just try it out.

That night, I sat down on my bed with an empty notebook and took a deep breath. I reminded myself that it was just for me and no one else and got to work. I wrote about anything and everything that came to mind. I wrote about random thoughts, feelings, things I need to do, things that happened during school, and my plans for the future. Finally, with pages full of scribbles, my hand smeared in the black pencil lead and cramping from all the writing, I set down the notebook. I paused, and to my utter shock, I realized how quiet my mind was. The raging storm in my head finally calmed as the skies cleared. The next day at school I was able to write more in peace than I have ever had in my whole life.

The next time I saw Sam, I thanked her for her advice. I now feel empowered and free in my writing. I can finally write without getting stuck in my own head. Today, I have a special journal just for me full of random writings and poems to clear my head when I feel the dread of being overwhelmed starting to set in. That's not to say everything is fixed. I still struggle with writing, but I have found it to be a more enjoyable task when I can quiet my thoughts enough for my fingers to keep up. As much as it pains me to say, writing did improve my life, and Sam was my light at the end of the tunnel for my writing battles.

1. In the first week of class we took time to brainstorm different topic ideas for the narrative essay. During this brainstorm I thought I was going to write my literacy essay about joining robotics in high school and having to learn new skills in writing especially in a COVID setting. I gained a lot of valuable skills with writing in a virtual setting where tone and mood are even more significant to get your message across. As I thought about my topic more, I realized that while that was a good topic for the essay, I wanted to do something a little bit more personal to my writing journey. I sat down with my brainstorming writing again and re-read the answers to my writing feelings assignment and decided to go with more of the struggles I faced while writing. This is a direct example of EO 3, “Recognize that writing and rewriting are necessary to the discovery, clarification and development of ideas”. I used my class writing assignments and brainstormed ideas to develop a new idea for my literacy essay, which I think was a stronger topic to write about in the end.

2. With writing a personal literacy narrative, writers often use a lot of ethos and pathos in their writing. Due to the personal nature of the writing, it makes sense for the writer to add their own experiences about the topic which adds to their credibility. With pathos, by adding strong language and details, the writer can form a deeper connection with their audience. This makes the piece a more interesting and impactful read for the audience as well. With this in mind, I tried to put lots of strong emotion and personal experience in my essay to really appeal with my audience in my struggles with writing. I wanted to connect with an audience that has had experiences with writing similar to mine and to show them that I understand what they are going through. I also wanted to show my audience that there is a solution that worked for me and there is almost a “hope” for people that struggle in the same way that I do.

3. I think the strongest part of my essay is my use of figurative language and strong emotions. I wanted to use lots of metaphors and similes to give my audience a better picture of what was happening in my head. I liked to use more poetic sentences to create a better flow in the essay and add something unique to the writing to get the audience engaged. I think the weakest part of my essay is the conclusion paragraph. Towards the end of the essay, I was really running out of steam in my writing, and I didn't have a clear idea on how I wanted to end the narrative. I tried a couple of different endings, but I didn't really feel like any of them fit with the rest of the essay. I finally landed on the one above, but I still think it needs something more. Unfortunately I couldn't figure out what was missing. If I had time to revise this essay again, I would spend more time reflecting on the conclusion and hopefully finding the missing piece to truly complete the essay.