

Four Years Later: A Personal Progression of Writing Skills from First Year to Senior

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Abstract

For this portfolio, I created a timeline as told through the lens of my past four years as an English major. This timeline depicts a diverse collection of writing samples from my freshman to senior year. I've selected four differing pieces – one from each year – to analyze my strengths, weaknesses, and lessons from each term paper. This presentation emphasizes the importance of self-reflection and self-analysis as a tool for learning and processing growth. Through my reflection depicted in these papers and timeline, I recognized the quality of education I have received and the tools I am now equipped with to become a successful, educated professional.

There's a common question that English major ears are familiar with when an adult inquires about what you are studying in college. Usually we are victims to blank faces and hesitant "...well, what can you do with that? That's a lot of student debt for a degree you can't do anything with" My usual response is an equally snarky reply, except I sprinkle it with elevated vocabulary for a touch of passivity. For this portfolio, I have carefully selected a variety of pieces that show my creative, argumentative, and analytical skills that I developed as an English major starting from my freshman to senior year. My aim is that these pieces will emphasize the usefulness of an English degree, writing, and the contribution these aspects combined contribute to the professional world. The progression of these

samples shows the development of my creative and analytical abilities.

Throughout college, I received a diverse education that helped me develop my craft of writing combined with critical literacy skills. As my craft strengthened and my critical thinking expanded, I started centralizing my papers around areas of strong interest to me. This included studies within sociology, gender theories, and racial conflicts from a creative, argumentative, and analytical standpoint.

The analytical aspect of this progression began my freshman year with an online course-- Old English Language and Literature with Dr. Leah Hamilton. The main text we analyzed in this course was *Beowulf* in the original language. For the final paper, I argued Grendel as a human, not a monster.

My rough draft of the paper was, indeed, rough. I had little understanding of developing a clear thesis statement and the importance of transition sentences. I learned that a well-developed thesis statement lists the arguments and just how you are going to defend those points while the transition sentences act as road signs to keep the reader informed on the direction of the argument. The papers expected length was seven to eight pages. At that time, it sounded wildly intimidating. Dr. Hamilton's instruction catalyzed my success as an English student. Her feedback on structure and development is reflected in my papers throughout sophomore and junior year.

Arguing a text in another language was uncharted territory to me – but at least I had the understanding that I was analyzing a text. While I was still far from mastering a craft and solidifying my specific interests, I am grateful to have taken this course and learned from this professor as I feel it laid a strong foundation for the three more years ahead of me.

Moving forward into my sophomore year, I felt confident with my growing abilities in writing and analysis of literary texts. During my sophomore year I took a required course for English majors – Introduction of Film. I begrudgingly endured this course challenging myself to expand my literary horizons. It was during this class that I started toying with different theories and writing practices, most specifically, from a sociological standpoint. As expected, with the conclusion of the semester brought a final paper. The assignment tested my understanding of a typical literary analysis. The movie to analyze was chosen for me -- the movie *First Reformed*. While the bulk of the paper focused on digesting unfamiliar terms and attempted to regurgitate them in a way that made sense for the duration of 3000 words, I incorporated research from sociological studies to center my argument of

the films meaning. Although I felt this assignment unforgiving, it was here that I started layering my previous knowledge of proper writing structure, critical literacy and adding my own voice.

As my sophomore year came to a close, I closed a chapter in my education. Originally a BSE student, I dropped the education portion to focus solely on a BA in English and added a minor in African-American studies. Now in my junior year, my craft was strong. In Fall 2018 I took my first required course for my minor, African-American literature. In Spring 2019 I spoke at The Frederick Douglass Institute conference at East Stroudsburg University discussing the bildungsroman genre in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* – the topic of my final paper for African-American literature. This was a breakthrough piece for me because it was proof of my craft, critical literacy and personal interests successfully coming to fruition.

My junior year finished strong thus preparing me, with confidence, for my senior year projects. I produced my first prose piece of my writing career during a senior seminar for both my major and my minor – Killers and Thrillers. I combined my three interests: sociology, feminist theories, and racial conflict. This text was inspired by the famous interracial murder that John Joyce and Peter Mathias in 19th century Philadelphia committed against a young white widow – Sarah Cross. My developing, diverse writing skills were progressing as I shifted towards topics that were centered around African American history and literature. With this knowledge, came liberty to expand my thinking and successfully write with layers of creativity, research, and writing. I am excited to finish my senior year with an independent study on the history of racism and gender as a color barrier for 19th and 20th Midshipman at the United States Naval Academy. My freshman year was filled with hesitation and

meekness. Now, I am proud to say, that as a graduating senior of Millersville University I am confident and excited to explore and execute a broad variety of topics from a plethora of standpoints.

After graduation, my career goal is to write and execute the training curriculum for new-hires for corporate companies. Currently, I am applying for and beginning to interview with property management companies in the Washington D.C area. I

believe with my creative writing I'll be able to develop innovative skills tactics, whereas, from an argumentative and analysis standpoint, I can predict rebuttals and offer solutions. As I reflect on my college experience through the lens of my writing assignments and assess my post-graduation plans, I recognize the quality of education I have received the tools I am equipped with to become a successful, educated professional.

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