

From an Idea to a Thesis: The Evolution of the Writing Process

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Abstract

This commentary will describe my Made in Millersville presentation which covers the process I went through as a writer over the past two years of coming up with the idea for my thesis, a dystopian story entitled "Marksmen." I also explain how I went through the process of writing part of the dystopian story for my senior departmental thesis project. The process of writing my thesis will go through the stages of brainstorming, free writing, drafting, editing, and my plans to turn my thesis into a larger project by eventually making it novel length and hoping to get it published someday as a book. As each writer goes through their own writing process, I will describe how my process can help others tackle larger writing projects by breaking it down into steps while describing my own writing process.

The thought of a large paper assignment is a scary thought to anyone, even those who like to write. It can be an overwhelming moment when someone hears that they have to write a 10 or 20-page paper due in the next month or the end of the semester. I had the same overwhelming feeling when I saw as a freshman that eventually I would have to do a departmental thesis as an English major. Although it was not going to count for credit until I was in my last semester of college, the thought still terrified me as a writer with the thought of a thesis length writing assignment.

Even though I was not a senior yet, I decided to discuss what the thesis would entail with my advisor when I was a sophomore. During an advisory meeting to discuss classes for my second semester of my sophomore year, I began to ask simple

questions about the departmental thesis I would eventually have to write. My advisor explained to me the thesis was more like an independent study, a way for English majors to work on larger writing projects they might not have been able to work on in a single class or a project they started that they wanted to expand upon. She even explained to me that a thesis could be a creative work and the requirements for the thesis would be decided with their thesis advisor and with the student. After that meeting I felt better about the idea that my thesis could be creative, but I still had no idea what I would write about.

Around the same time, a new idea for a story I wanted to write in my free time was emerging in my head. After watching the 2016 elections and debates, I could not stop thinking about how the way certain

politicians spoke mattered more to the audience's reactions than what they actually said. My thoughts on the way people spoke began to develop from taking certain English classes at Millersville such as visual rhetoric. During my sophomore year, I took a new and interesting English class which was focused on rhetorically analyzing images in popular culture. In other words, the class discussed how images persuade and create social identities in society. This led me to the idea that tone influenced society's perception of language as much as words did. I began to experiment with different ideas for a story using this idea of tone influencing society.

After brainstorming different ideas for stories such as possible research papers I could write, I settled on a more creative approach which was to write a dystopian fiction story about a society centered around the idea that people would speak in complete sentences with a monotone voice while asking questions, yelling, and taking pauses in a middle of a sentence (which would be expressed in writing as containing commas) were deemed illegal acts against society. Since periods are a punctuation that expresses an end to a sentence, people can mimic the usage of commas in their speech by taking pause breaks while in the middle of a conversation. Overall, this society governs and criminalizes based on punctuation and expression of citizens. With restricting the use of speech expression and also written punctuation, "Marksmen," became a story about injustice and censorship around the world.

I chose to write a dystopian story, which is a story about a fictional state or society where there is suffering or great injustice, because I wanted to follow how other dystopian novels, such as *Vox* or *Handmaid's Tale*, use dystopian worlds to describe injustices and inequalities within our present society. I then began to do some freewriting during my sophomore year and coming up

with character and setting names. Although I was brainstorming possible ideas and characters for my story, I did not begin the drafting process until the summer before my junior year when I studied abroad in Oxford, England for three weeks in July 2018.

While I was studying in England at the University of Oxford, I got to take a three-week creative writing course with the head of the Creative Writing Department at Oxford. During this course, I began drafting my dystopian story and my professor and I decided to come up with the stylistic choice to write in the style of how my narrator speaks, who begins talking in complete sentences with a monotone voice. I then decided to have the style of story change with the narrator's journey as she slowly begins breaking the law by asking questions, yelling, taking pause breaks in sentences, and talking in run on sentences. I was able to write the first 15 pages for the first draft during the three week course and came up with the title for the story "Marksmen" because it is a society where people are marked by how they speak.

After my first draft was completed during my study abroad experience, I spent the next couple of semesters deciding that I wanted to use my dystopian story for my thesis project during my senior year. The next several drafts after my thesis was approved by the English department went from the 15-page draft to about a 40 pages of the story. Even with a 40-page draft, I still did not feel like the story was finished within the already written pages. As I was writing and editing my thesis story, I decided that I eventually wanted to turn this into a novel length story and in the future get the book version published. Although I am not finished with the story yet and am still editing my thesis project, I realized the writing process I went through over the past two years helped me develop a simple story idea into my departmental thesis. Even after I have

completed my thesis, I will continue my goal of writing a full version of the dystopian story, and hopefully publish it as a novel.

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