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| **To:** | ENGL 1200 students  On the first day of class, I ask students to tell me about their past writing experiences: what do they consider their strengths, what are some areas of concern, and what they hope to achieve by the end of the semester. I then take all their responses and produce this memo, categorizing answers to help them understand context. In this way, we begin to form a writing community rather than just a classroom. |
| **From:** | Joe Campbell |
| **Date:** | 27 August 2014 |
| **Re:** | Writing Successes/Concerns |

After reading responses to your in-class writing prompt the first day of class, I have noticed the following commonalities. While your exact response may not appear in the selected quotes below, you should recognize the spirit of your response. Consider each quote carefully – then follow the instructions at the end of the memo.

# Confidence

“My confidence in writing is in my conclusion. I always seem to know how to end an essay with a cherry on top.”

“If there is one thing that I actually feel comfortable with my writing, it would have to be my ability to make a conversation with my reader even though I’m not really there.” [audience awareness]

“English is one my strongest subjects. In high school I always had the ‘winning’ paper.”

“I’m a very strong writer once I sit down and focus.”

“I have developed a better understanding of the writing process. Usually I approach a paper with the ‘SPA’ method. This method makes the writer state their point, then give proof to make their points credible. [ethos] Last, the writer has to analyze what they said by telling the reader why the text is important.”

“I feel confident with my ability to proofread and sometimes with editing it.”

“I feel confident that this class will interest me more than previous English classes due to the fieldwork and researching aspects.”

“My confidence lies in my creativity and continuity, whether it be the flow and links I’m able to express or the emotion I’m able to convey….”

# Previous Experience

“I think writing is very interesting, [but] I haven’t had the best experiences in my previous writing class (AP English 4). I had trouble understanding books’ concepts, writing about specific topics, and just writing in a way that the teacher can understand….” [critical thinking, clarity]

“What I have learned and experienced with different teachers is that each teacher has a different style of grading and in order to do good in the class you have to figure out their style before the class is over.” [Mr. Campbell’s trifecta for rhetorical effectiveness: clarity, organization, and development]

“When I got to high school, I had a teacher who was very difficult. We were required to write every day in class and we were frequently assigned homework that involved writing. Everything that we turned in was graded harshly and we got our papers back with tons of advice. As a result, I learned to write a coherent paper in just about every format.”

“The majority of my writing experience revolves around scientific writing. Outside of class I conduct research for the department of biology and have spent a lot of time writing presentations, abstracts, proposals, and research papers.”

“…last fall semester I took English 1100, and while I thought my papers were good, I consistently got average grades and no constructive criticism or advice….”

“My high school teacher was a very tough grader and I became a better writer thanks to her.”

“As a writer in the past, I’ve come to learn that patience is key. Nothing is going to be perfect on the first try. It takes time, effort, and patience to get your piece of writing where you want it to be.” [yes, yes, and more yes: writing as process]

# Getting Started

“The introduction has always been a problem for me. It’s either too weak, too long or I just can’t seem to think of anything.”

“I do struggle a lot of the time on starting papers; the whole introduction thing is difficult for me.”

“I always begin with a rough, rough draft of thought hastily written on paper, scratched out words, replaced sentences and so on until I reach a point that I feel I may be able to type a rough draft that is workable. I have found that it is extremely helpful to write the work and walk away from it to come back to at a later date with a renewed eye and changed thought.” [yes!! writing as process!]

“…figuring out how to start and end a piece of writing is the trickiest part for me.”

# Development/Organization

“My hardest two parts when writing [are] coming up with a topic sentence and restating a thesis without rewriting the same sentence exactly.”

“I feel as if I will have most trouble with refining and organizing my ideas into concrete and understandable guidelines.”

“It is an absolute joy to do research and learn new things, but when it comes to putting those concepts into writing, I have a hard time making the bulk/page requirement.” [thick description

& analysis]

“I feel like I always have trouble elaborating on what I’m trying to say. I feel like I say what I have to say in too few words, and when I am left trying to explain it more and I feel like I’m rambling on.”

“I also sometimes struggle with staying on topic.”

# Research/MLA Citation

“I do not feel comfortable with research as I get frustrated very easily if I can’t find what I’m looking for.”

“My weakness would have to be researching my topics, and then citing my works correctly and smoothly to make a cohesive research paper.”

“I currently struggle with researching sources and correctly using citations.”

“…I have a challenging time converting my research into my own words. I also struggle with documents such as a Works Cited page.”

“I’m…scared about the possibility of plagiarism. It’s easy to do and I hope to avoid it altogether.”

# Getting Feedback

“At my previous community college to gain success, I would go the tutoring center to get my paper reviewed for a better grade. That helped me a lot!”

“My last English professor wasn’t really there to help us. She gave us a due date for our paper and after she put her notes on it, gave us one day to revise it.”

“At first, I was too shy to visit my professor during office hours. Once I bit the bullet and showed up one day, I was surprised at how willing she was to help me at any stage of the process.”

# Procastination

“Another ideal I am hoping to appreciate after leaving this class is the full strategy of the writing process; as a horrible procrastinator I tend to write papers very close to their due dates and I’m hoping that having due dates for each step of the process will allow me to better understand and edit my work.”

“I can BS papers the day they’re due because I’m a horrible procrastinator.”

“The thing I’m not so good at is doing my work early on so I won’t have to cram near the deadline.”

“As of right now I am a little overwhelmed at the amount of work. I tend to procrastinate.”

# Grammar/Mechanics

“My biggest struggle with writing is the grammar. When it comes to grammar I am definitely clueless. I really got a grasp of it and it is a big weakness of mine.”

“My grammar is terrible and I’m still working on that.”

“I have a little problem with comma splices.”

“I’m not very good at using proper punctuation. That is probably my biggest struggle.”

# Aspirations

“I hope to…challenge myself and my way of thinking.”

“Writer’s block is a concern of mine. I would like to become better at conveying my thoughts on paper.”

“I hope to grow in my writing so that one day I can get my writing published, as is one of dreams, and be able to write in a more professional manner as well.”

“I am still looking forward to [the challenge of exploring cultures] as well as being forced out of my comfort zone both as a student and as a writer.”

“My biggest hope is to get as much as possible out of this class. I think I can absorb as much as I can [to] become more confident in my writing.”

“One thing I hope to improve on is how to better structure sentences.” [style]

“Overall, I hope to become a better writer to help me with both my academic career and with life in general.”

“I hope to improve on the writing process in this class by learning to critically examine my work and the work of my peers….”

“I am a firm believer there is always room for improvement. Thus, I would like to continue improving myself.”

# Impressions (1st Day)

“I appreciate the fact that I will have control over the research topic, which will decrease the stress of writing.”

“You seem like a great instructor and I know you will help me reach my goal.”

“You seem pretty straight-forward and pretty cool already so I think I will enjoy your way of teaching.”

“I believe I will strive in this class simply because of the way you do things.”

# Assignment

In your first day of class, you identified your perception of your current writing skills in an informal writing assignment. Within this document, you probably recognize others. As a more formal assignment, you will write a memo in response to this memo. As you compose, ask yourself the following questions (feel free to model your headings as signposts to these prompts):

* What do I recognize within this list that is common to my own experience? How does that recognition inform my current (or future) identity as a writer? In other words, you either have identified your current writing skills and/or recognize others within this document – now what?

* How have I addressed these self-identified concerns in the past? Did I consult style manuals (such as *LB Brief* )? Did I seek guidance from a counselor (e.g., with time management skills)? Did I visit my instructor during office hours or arrange to meet with him/her for additional guidance? Did I ask for help from a tutor or classmate?

If you have done these things, what did you accomplish? How did you improve? If you haven’t, why not – and how might you imagine these habits would benefit you?

* Contextualize your understanding of the data in a final paragraph. In other words, sum-up your understanding of these findings and how they may influence your growth this semester.

Objective: to gain a metacognitive awareness of your own process and skills – the first step toward a successful final exam

Format: standard business-style memo (template on Moodle)

Length: 1 ½ -2 single-spaced pages