

Theory of Writing, a Hypothetical Diary Entry

Dear Diary,

I don't normally keep a diary of my thoughts and experiences, however I find that this is a peculiar case: write about writing, my process, or theory, of writing. After taking much thought, the one strand that binds together all of the recent writing works I have done, especially in the class that requires a theory of writing paper, is me personally caring about the topic at hand. All other elements of rhetoric, word choice or structure or genre, must flow from the key notion that I have an investment in the content of the writing. So, if all my writing is grounded in that personal connection I feel, it seems appropriate to examine that connection through the personal lens of this diary.

I think the best way to start off is with a comparison. At least from this term of college, I had two different writing classes, one about select portions of a period of World History, the other about whatever I wanted, as long as it was within the structural limits the professor imposed. Between these two, I find that the course about the section of history was a bore to me, assignments that I don't necessarily dread doing, but often felt like going through the motions, and because of this my writing in the class often became formulaic, the simple structure of intro, body and conclusion. The other writing class, however, while it wasn't like I was dying to produce papers for the professor, I found myself thinking about them a lot more in my free time, taking note of certain news stories I encountered in my day to day with the thought, "That'll go great in the paper." Furthermore, I believe it showed more with finished papers that were, compared to the former class, richer and more diverse in structure and rhetoric. Why was this?

Simple, I chose to write about issues and affairs that I normally do learn about in my free time. America's overlooked issues, mostly grounded in economics, are constantly at the forefront of my mind (especially during quarantine), so if I'm told to write about something, it became easy to do so once the theses were just being naturally produced as I read or learned about different issues. While I only had chance to speak on three different topics, for the three papers, I was always planning ahead, prepared to write futures papers, for whatever given genre, on everything from water crises, home foreclosures, security state employment, welfare reform, the decline of the coal industry, farmer debt, road infrastructure and so on. Essentially, my care for and quality of writing can only be considered if the topic being written on is one I am personally interested in, so any theory of writing of mine must start by acknowledging this.

But what about the specifics? How does that manifest in the various aspects of writing? Here I can think of at least one concrete example from my past writings. My second paper for this class, underneath the argumentative genre, dealt with the claim that decline of unions equates to decline in living standards, and I centered this claim on the midwest, which was a historic place for it's unionized workforces. Now, in my eyes, the benefits this nation has accrued by decade old labor struggles is countless. Weekends, the middle class and the 40 hour work week are just a few examples. My father, as well as my mother's two parents, are or were all in unions, even if now we really don't think of ourselves as "blue collar." So I have a lot to thank the unions for, I believe we all do. In the course of this paper, however, I learned a bit more about the former Governor of Wisconsin, Scott Walker. I don't want to get into detail, but he was probably one of the most anti-union governors to exist in 21st century America, and reading about every detail of his administration had me borderline seething with rage. From this, I came up with one of my draft opening passages, boldly proclaiming that men like Scott Walker,

as well as Walker himself, should face brutalizing jail time for the destruction he wrought upon the working class of Wisconsin, the equivalent of whatever you'd deem appropriate for war criminals. While this was a bit dramatic, and was not in my final draft of the paper, I think it helps illustrate how the personal connection I feel to writing manifests itself in the actual rhetoric. Such brazen proclamations, with word choices like "crimes against humanity," I can only feel confident using if I both know about the subject and care about the subject. Other examples of this include the use of an interview for the second portion of a project about the fusing of two different writing genres. Truly, I found it perverse to write about the conditions of a job in the gig economy when I myself had never worked in them. The only way to solve that problem, I concluded, was to use someone who directly had, and this came with its own fruitful results, as the woman in question gave me knowledge and content for the final paper that I myself could have never written, even if I'd scoured a hundred articles and accounts of the conditions at an Amazon warehouse. There are countless other examples, where the personal care I had for the topic helped inform the ways in which I write, and because of this I find that the rhetorical choices of my papers were always based in that constant fact.

What about structure, though? Here, I find the same truth, that it's honestly easier and better to write in a loose writing structure when the thing I am writing about is something I would normally want to write about. For instance, with the second assignment came a new dimension to our writing abilities: ignore the old concepts of intro, body, conclusion and instead write in a way that is fresh and unique to you. I'd been writing the old way for most of my life, and still do so in other classes. How do you go about changing that? For me, the first step came in choosing a topic that I personally cared about. While the prompt really didn't want you to do this (at least that was how I perceived it), I chose an argument that I really already knew the

answer to. Months of discourse, especially when you're stuck inside during a pandemic, allowed me to solidify a pretty obvious stance: Unions are good for society, and if there are less unions, there is less good for society. I contrast this with some of my colleagues, who in peer review or conversation I noticed did not have a precise side of the argument to work from, and thus may've struggled a bit towards the final draft. I usually didn't have this problem, and with the challenge of my position out of the way, I could easily move onto the supposed new structure of the paper. I had three central points I had to connect, that unions are declining in the midwest, that unions are broadly better for workers, and that there are specific issues in the midwest that, if you boil it all down, are because of the decline in unions. The problem was then, primarily, how to organize these sections, and I think the final product did it justice through a more unconventional structure, along with a closing paragraph that directly echoed the "hook" sentence (On a Michigan Governor's attempted kidnapping) making the entire piece close in a neat way. Now, none of this is to say that any of the pieces I wrote are flawless, they were far from it, but I think without the topic being one that I personally knew and cared a great deal about, they would be worse in quality and more boring in structure and word choice.

Overall, I think that the central thesis of my theory of writing is as true as it is corny. If I write, I intend to do it from the heart, and the more my work has a direct line to it, the more it shows in overall quality of rhetoric, structure, and every other aspect of writing.