

Writing to Learn: Student Centered Feedback

By

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## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	iii
Abstract	iv
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Preface	1
Statement of Problem and Purpose of Study	1
Study Overview	2
Outline of Dissertation	3
Chapter 2: Literature Review	5
Power Dynamics in Literacy	5
Historical Context	8
Identity/Voice	12
Feedback	16
Conclusion	24
Chapter 3: Conceptual Framework	27
Theoretical Overview	27
Rosenblatt	27
Elbow	30
Moffett	34
Reader Response in Writing	36
Conclusion	38
Chapter 4: Research Design	39
Methodology	39
Case Overview and Site Selection	41
Participant Selection	42
Data Collection	43
Data Analysis	44
Conclusion	47
Chapter 5: Advanced Composition	48
Curriculum	48
Community	53
Assessment	54
Feedback	55
Reflection	58
Conclusion	58
Chapter 6: Focal Students	60

Alyssa	60
August	71
Evelyn	81
Michelle	94
Chris	105
Candice	113
Grady	126
Chapter 7: Conclusions	140
Summary of Key Findings	140
Implications	146
Future Research Directions	150
In Sum	151
References	156
Appendices	
Appendix A—Consent/Assent Forms	166
Appendix B—Recruitment Script	174
Appendix C—Semi-Structured Interview Questions	176
Appendix D—Unstructured Interview Themes	178
Appendix E—IRB	179
Appendix F—Writing Assignments from Advanced Comp	181

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## **Abstract**

This qualitative study asks how students utilize feedback they receive from teachers and fellow students. In this dissertation, I focus on the perspectives of seven focal students, using qualitative methods to elevate their experiences with feedback. The student-centered focus affords a clearer understanding of the steps students take as they revise, while looking at the outcomes to determine whether that revision was successful. Examining how students understand, take up, and implement feedback allows educators to improve their own feedback and enhances not only how they teach students to provide feedback but also how they teach students to use feedback in their revisions. My research investigates the processes that secondary students engage in during revision in order to provide a fuller picture of what practices and types of input and instruction are working for individual students, with their multiple learning styles.

Feedback shapes high school students' writing in a variety of ways, all unique to the student, teacher, and class. The factors impacting this include but are not limited to curriculum, relationships, type of feedback, and emphasis on the writing process. Each student followed their own process when implementing feedback in revision. Effective feedback looked different for each of my focal students. There is not a one size fits all approach. It takes reflection from the students and the teacher to determine what the best fit is for each student. It is also up to the teacher to continue to push students to consider themselves as writers who actively make choices, rather than students who are writing to finish.

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **Preface**

As a former secondary English teacher, I decided to continue my studies into a doctoral program because I had questions I wanted to delve into further, beyond my own classroom. Specifically, I wanted to figure out why my students were struggling to revise their writing, what they were missing, what I wasn't giving them. These questions have now been translated into more academic and research-centered language, but the underlying concepts hold strong and determined many of the choices I made during my time at UW-Madison, including my choice to study Curriculum and Instruction with a focus on Literacy and a minor in Composition and Rhetoric.

### **Statement of Problem and Purpose of Study**

As a high school English teacher for four years, and one who was incredibly invested in composition and writing, I always tried to show my students the value and importance of writing, specifically the belief that writing is never fully finished or completed, especially after only one draft. I encouraged my students to revise their writing based on feedback from both their peers and from me. More often than not, students would edit their paper for grammar/spelling rather than looking deeper into the content of their writing; they were focused on the surface level aspects and missing the larger, and in my opinion more important, parts of revising writing. We also worked in writing groups to have more student-to-student feedback, but students struggled to move past the surface level here as well. Student feedback, for many of my students, looked at whether or not the paper was "good" or "bad", not what specific aspects of the paper made it effective/ineffective. Students had trouble expanding on their feedback to each other past the

simple positive/negative. However, some of my students really worked to reevaluate and determine what changes to content would best suit their writing in its effectiveness to portray their intent, and those students were typically the ones that provided more extensive feedback to their peers.

In this dissertation my aim is to figure out what type of feedback students value by talking with them about their writing, reading their writing, observing how writing is taught in their classroom, and analyzing the choices they made when revising. Essentially, I want to look into feedback in writing and how students respond to it, in order to explore how feedback can be more successful in assisting students in revision.

Since the introduction of the “writing process” approach in the 1980s, writing teachers throughout the United States have emphasized learning to provide and use feedback. Although the process assumes that students receive constructive feedback that prompts valuable revisions, the research focused on the processes and perspectives of students is underdeveloped. Some of the existing literature focuses on the writing process in secondary English Education using a quantitative or experimental design, without a distinction between revision and editing, leading to a focus on grammar and spelling rather than the core topics for revision such as organization, clarity, audience, and strength of argument/purpose. Furthermore, existing studies rarely focus on the individual *processes* of revision for students, including how students use feedback and why; while they describe how feedback typically improved writing, they do not consider the processes students went through to revise or how feedback affected those revisions.

## **Study Overview**

This qualitative study asks how students utilize feedback they receive from teachers and fellow students. The student-centered focus affords a clearer understanding of the steps students take as they revise, while looking at the outcomes to determine whether that revision was successful. Examining how students understand, take up, and implement feedback will help educators improve their own feedback and enhance not only how they teach students to provide feedback but also how they teach students to use feedback in their revisions. My research investigates the processes that secondary students engage in during revision in order to provide a fuller picture of what practices and types of input and instruction are working for individual students, with their multiple learning styles:

Research Questions: How does feedback shape high school students' writing?

- What steps do students take in order to utilize feedback in their writing/in revision?
- How do students respond to written and verbal feedback?
- What does effective feedback look like from the perspective of students?

### **Outline of Dissertation**

In Chapter 2 I outline the current literature in writing, focusing on power dynamics, the historical context, identity/voice, and feedback. The literature review gives a backbone to support me in answering my research questions. In Chapter 3 I discuss the conceptual/theoretical framework of my research which is anchored in the work of Louise M. Rosenblatt, Peter Elbow, and James Moffett. I needed a theoretical framework to look at student writing in conjunction with the literature review. I turned to researchers that help describe my position and perspective on feedback. In Chapter 4 I walk through my choice of site and participants, sharing what data I gathered and how I analyzed it. In Chapter 5 I give an overview of Advanced Comp, the course my fieldwork took place in, sharing the values and design of the

course. This chapter allowed me to set up my second data analysis chapter where I delve further into the students' stories. It showcases how feedback and writing were addressed in the class, allowing me to compare that to the students' experiences. In Chapter 6 I tell the stories of my seven focal students and share what I learned from and with them. These stories worked to address each of my research questions for each individual student. Their experiences are unique, but I noted areas of overlap and areas of disconnect. In Chapter 7 I summarize my work and my findings and draw my dissertation to a close.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

In this chapter, I address the literature in writing which lays the foundation for addressing my research questions I specifically focus on the power dynamics at play within writing (moving from a wider, historical lens to centering on power within the classroom), the historical context of writing research (to outline the work that has already been done in terms of feedback and the writing process), the presence of identity and voice within the research (focusing on lack of student perspective), and I look at the literature surrounding feedback and revision practices. I highlight the problematic nature of experimental studies and emphasize the importance of focusing on the processes students engage in, focusing on their experiences as writers. This literature review solidifies my research in context of the current research, noting what areas of study are lacking and what areas of study I hope to build upon.

### **Power Dynamics in Literacy**

Literacy is a place of both liberation and oppression, as they exist in a dichotomy housed within hegemony. Mass literacy education, the foundations of which still affect the current educational system, began in connection with the church as a way to spread morality to the lower classes, however there was a fear of what literacy education was capable of without a moral component, in essence there were concerns about acts of subversion through literacy (Graff, 1991). The education of slaves and the lower working class was stymied by similar fears, specifically the fear of writing and the power that came with it (Cornelius, 1991). There was a general concern that education could in turn dismantle the current social structure, plant ideas against inequality or provide the tools to push against it (Cornelius, 1991). Literacy is a tool that can provide power, specifically through the act of composing/writing. Through that act, information and beliefs can not only be documented but disseminated, furthering the capacity of

individuals to create change. Graff (1991) argued for the "literacy myth", that literacy was not a tool of liberation and that it did not make huge changes. Yet many later literacy scholars disagreed. Brandt (2001) noted that writing was perceived to have so much potential power that it was feared as those who had the capability to produce their own thoughts and ideas in a written manner would as a result step beyond their place in society and reach for something more. Delpit (2001) argued that liberation can be accomplished through the use of dominant discourses to change the structure from within, while Freire (2000) sits in opposition to her view, stating that effective action can only be taken from outside of the system. Cornelius (1991) cited literacy as integral in the formation of identity, linking it to "the freedom to become a person" (p. 2). It is through the development of identity in conjunction with literacy that the liberatory factors can develop. Even now literacy is seen as "a way to '[c]ontrol your destiny, help your family, your community, and your country'" (Vee, 2013, p. 43). And as we practice our literacies, we in turn change them through that practice (Delpit, 2001; Prior & Shipka, 2003). Cervantes-Soon's (2017) research sees these concepts embodied as the students' "...education also offered them elements of their own liberation as they experienced freedom and opportunities to engage in critical discourse, name and interrogate the oppressors in their lives, and initiate their own forms of action" (p. 180). There is a violence done *with* literacy to the system as it is a dangerous tool of revolution that seeks to reform rather than conform to the system of hegemony.

As a result, educators have the power to shape literacy's consequences for students. The systems within literacy tend to linger, even as their usefulness and relevance may diminish (Brandt, 2001, p. 167). For example, the role of religion and morality within literacy was initially an integral aspect of pedagogy. Early sponsors of literacy primarily focused on the morality and souls of potential receivers of literacy instruction. Even then the fear of writing's

power and subversive potential was present. Because of that literacy, specifically writing, had to be monitored and carefully taught in order to diminish the chance of disruption to the current social structure (Brandt, 2001; Cornelius, 1991; Graff, 1991). These concepts remain, and as a result, educators are influenced in ways that they may not fully realize. Literacy is culturally, politically, and socially defined in relation to its context. It is not simply enough to be aware of how people use literacy in varying contexts; there is also a need to consider the influence literacy has on people, what it does to them (Brandt & Clinton, 2002, p. 337). "When we use literacy, we also get used" (Brandt & Clinton, 2002, p. 350). There is an idea that education and teachers should be neutral, not pushing political agendas or religious beliefs, but the current educational system is built on those concepts. Hegemony makes it impossible for literacy to be neutral. And yet, we must still try to expand our awareness and to fully consider the immense amount of contexts that influence literacy, both in development and use. For it is when we do not try, when we ignore the systematization of education and everything that comes along with it that nothing changes, that we remain a part of that system, inculcating our students in return.

Maisha (Fisher) Winn's book *Writing in Rhythm: Spoken word poetry in urban classrooms* (Fisher, 2007) showcases the power dynamic of a spoken word class in comparison to the more "traditional" courses. The main teacher of the course, Joe, worked with his students to gain power and "ownership" over their writing, to be skilled in the art of literacy (speaking, writing, reading, and listening). Joe valued the idea of learning from and with each other, both teachers and students. He worked to dismantle the power dynamics naturally present in a school by putting poetry, storytelling, and the writer "at the forefront of literacy learning." The writing in Joe's class was "grounded in the students' lives." Joe believed in a connection between

literacy and being human. His students seem to have moved beyond the teacher/student dynamic in his class:

Students mentioned values such as having “no boundaries,” being “free,” and not being “judged” within the Power Writing seminar; however, they also talked about how the class focused on their needs and desires....” Poetry is about us. In English class the reading and curriculum is about them.” (Fisher, 2007, p.93)

Students viewed the work they did in Joe’s class as separate from that in English class. With Joe they had the choice on what to write. However, they also were able to apply what they learned to writing outside of the class, improving their writing even when they lacked the option to choose. Joe’s classroom has some similarities to the two I study in that fostering relationships with his students (building community) and allowing students choice and a voice are paramount to his work and that of my two observed teachers.

Within my study, multiple power dynamics are present. You can never get past the teacher/student power dynamic; it is too deeply rooted. There will always be grades and the assumption that feedback should be taken up, revisions made because the teacher told a student to do so, as it was required/recommended. There are power dynamics among students as well, both socially and academically. Those surface for me as well with the relationship between researcher and those being researched. Even though relationships are formed with the teachers and students there will always be the element of me watching and potentially judging them and their choices with the UW-Madison to back me up in my lofty academia tower.

### **Historical Context**

Writing is a core function in contemporary secondary education. Since the introduction of the “writing process” approach in the 1980s, writing teachers throughout the United States

have emphasized learning to provide and use feedback. In this, one must question what feedback actually is. In Emig's (1971) seminal work, *The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders*, she researched eight students who were considered to be above-average writers. During her study, Emig met with them four times, outside of typical classroom conditions wherein she considered their composition processes, looking into the differences between self-sponsored and school-sponsored writing practices. This empirical research was important within the body of writing research as it involved direct interactions with students through observation, rather than separately looking just at their writing; she worked alongside students during their actual composing processes through the use of think-aloud protocols (Fitzgerald, 1987). Flower & Hayes (1981) also employed think-aloud protocols, asking that students "verbalize everything that goes through their minds as they write, including stray notions, false starts, and incomplete or fragmentary thought" (p. 368). However, Emig's research was called into question based on the validity of having students compose aloud as that is not typical of composing processes (Voss, 1983). And while she stated that she remained outside of the process, as an observer, "Emig's method, then, involved first creating, then intervening in, the students' composing contexts" (Voss, 1983, p. 281). And yet, her work emphasized that the act of composing is not singular or universal, but rather individualistic, a fact that can be seen in later research on how students experience the cognitive nature of writing (Nelms, 1994). Similar to other studies on writing, the activity itself was manufactured by the researcher, rather than taking place organically in the classroom curriculum. This leads me to question what it takes to truly understand the processes students are engaging in when writing and revising.

Ten years later, Applebee (1981) notes "a shift away from a focus on the end product to a concern with the writing process" (p. 458) and he outlined the stages of writing as prewriting,

writing, and editing. One can note the absence of revising, something that, today, exemplifies the act of writing as a process (p. 460). It is important to note that the idea of error, at least for Applebee, was seen as an integral part of learning, one that showed growth. "A Cognitive Process Theory of Writing" (Flower & Hayes, 1981) deviated from the traditional view of writing as linear, a movement from stage to stage (p. 367-368). Flower & Hayes advocated for a more recursive system (planning, translating, and reviewing) where "each of these mental acts may occur at any time in the composing process" (p. 367-368). They stressed that those tools could be used in any order. Sommers (1980) further defended this argument, stating that the isolation of revision in the writing process creates a "parody of writing" (p. 379) rather than representing the actual experiences seen in the process of writing. And Crowley (1977) stated that it should start "with synthesis and [end] with analysis" (p. 167), noting the "dissonance" the writer attempts to find and resolve in the process of revision. I have been in and taught in classrooms where each of the above represents the view of writing taught/outlined for students. The approach of writing and turning it in for a grade has been at odds for me (even as a student) as it seems final, rather than a recursive process (which I view it as now). In truth, I lean more towards Flower and Hayes with the belief that writing happens in stages to be sure, but ones that overlap, intersect, and repeat in varying patterns that are hard to map.

The research of revision was a common theme, but there was a question of what it actually was and how to define it, whether process, product, or both (Fitzgerald, 1987): "Revision means making any changes at any point in the writing process. It involves identifying discrepancies between intended and instantiated text, deciding what could or should be changed in the text and how to make desired changes..." (p. 484). The importance of revision in writing links directly to the concept of process over product, the recreating, reimagining, and reassessing

that takes place throughout (Bridwell, 1980; Fitzgerald, 1987; Sommers, 1980). The social aspect of writing and learning to write has been continually emphasized (Christianakis, 2010), along with the influence of context on that learning. This is seen through DiPardo & Freedman's (1988) outline of the history and theory regarding the use of peer groups in writing, and even more so through James Moffett and Peter Elbow's work. Moffett called for students to write for the class (as an audience) and discuss that writing through a workshop model:

Part of what they can do is a matter of numbers; multiple responses to a piece of writing make feedback more impersonal and easier to heed. Group reactions establish a consensus about some objective aspects of the writing and identify, through disagreement, those aspects that involve individual value judgments. (Moffett, 1983, p. 194-195)

While I pull from and connect with Moffett's work greatly, I struggle at times with the translation of it into traditional secondary classrooms. I consider traditional secondary classrooms as those that require grades and standardized testing and where the power dynamic between teacher and student is not only there, but present in every piece of writing students are assigned to complete, present in every assignment teachers design, and present in every writing conference, peer review, and piece of feedback students consider.

Studies referencing feedback in writing dominate the field (Brannon & Knoblauch, 1982; Freedman, 1987; Graner, 1987; Hillocks, 1982; McManus & Kirby, 1988; Nystrand, 1984; Straub; 1996; Vardi, 2012). In varying degrees researchers have conducted experiments or quasi-experiments (Berg, 1999; Graner, 1987; Hillocks, 1982; McGroarty & Zhu, 1997) or have looked into the role of peer feedback in more naturalized settings (Beason, 1993; Early & Saidy, 2014; Tuzi, 2004; Vardi, 2012). We know that feedback is important when revising, the

question remains what is effective feedback (and who is viewing the feedback as effective) and how do we provide that for students. It is also the emphasis on the social, the construction of meaning and its influence on the writing process that researchers are still working to fully understand.

### **Identity/Voice**

Although writing research is growing, it is still overshadowed by the copious amount of research on reading (Graham, McKeown, Kihara, Harris, & Graesser, 2012, p. 892). The emphasis on writing and its value for students has continued to be further pushed through the implementation of the Common Core State Standards, which call for a better development of writing across all content areas. In response to this more recent phenomenon and in relation to other pressures on student writing, research continues to develop on the teacher perspective, typically focusing on instruction (Bardine & Fulton, 2008; Dockrell, Marshall, & Wyse, 2016; Murray, 1982; Smede, 2000). Existing studies rarely focus on the individual *processes* of revision for students, including how students use feedback and why. What is missing is the student perspective, and while the idea of process writing provides a chance for students to develop and grow as writers, rather than just creating products within the school system, most of the current research does not treat them as those individuals, but rather uses them as a means to an end. Much of the existing qualitative research focuses on the teacher's perspective on the writing process, specifically their role in giving feedback to students (Hodges, 1992; Shute, 2008; Straub, 2000; Wilson, 2007). Even Sommers (2006) notes our lack of emphasis on students and the role they play: "But in our professional literature about responding, we too often neglect the role of the student in this transaction, and the vital partnership between teacher and student, by focusing, almost exclusively, on the role of the teacher" (Sommers, 2006, p. 249).

Within this, teacher centered research on composition, the concept of power and control emerge, in varying amounts. Nystrand & Graff (2001) note the practice of a seventh-grade teacher and how her responses to students, at times, stifled student voice and chances for collaboration through group discussion. Concerning the actual teaching of writing, Brannon & Knoblauch (1982) discuss the power dynamic between the student-writer and the teacher-reader:

Oddly, therefore, in classroom writing situations, the reader assumes primary control of the choices that writers make, feeling perfectly free to 'correct' those choices at any time an apprentice deviates from the teacher-reader's conception of what the developing text 'ought' to look like or 'ought' to be doing. Hence, the teacher more often than the student determines what the writing will be about, the form it will take, and the criteria that will determine its success. (p. 158)

This showcases the amount of power students can have in their writing. In many cases, the writing is not for them; it is for school. Within that frame, not only is the prompt and genre typically chosen for students, so is the topic, leaving them little power over their own words. Even when considering the feedback teachers give students, that power is present. Rarely is the teacher capable of being just a reader—either in their practice or in the eyes of the student-writer. Their actual feedback can signal the kind of control they want to maintain; Straub (1996) notes that an increased number of comments typically indicate an increased amount of desired control over the text (especially when considering surface level issues). On the other hand, if the comments center in on the process of writing and more global issues, the control remains more with the student-writer (Straub, 1996). With that in mind, I think of the questions we ask when conferencing with students. Are they intentional? Habitual? Leading? When we look for patterns in those questions is the power skewed towards the teacher's wants/beliefs or are the

students supported in their writing process? And are the students consulted on what they would like to center on in their writing/revising?

The evaluative nature of teacher-centered writing research does not always come up, but it should. Teachers are more than a reader, they come with extra strings attached, always linking the student-writing to an assessment or evaluation. As previously mentioned, that power dynamic is strong and entrenched. Applebee, Lehr, & Auten (1981) show this to be true when discussing the percentage of writing across the high school content courses that required multiple drafts (under 30%), stating that this may be because writing "functioned as tests of subjects rather than explorations of new material" (p. 80). Wilson (2007) argued that we should not be wary of disagreement in writing evaluations, as it can be helpful and allow us to better teach students to "disagree productively" (p. 66), while moving beyond the concept of standardization. This approach leads to writing being seen as a commodity rather than a skill/art.

A concern of some teacher-centered research is their focus solely on a single type of feedback, such as teacher feedback (Sperling, 1994; Ziv, 1981). Straub's (2000) case study of teacher feedback in a first-year writing course centers in on the feedback a single student received over the course of a semester, but the focus is the teacher and their feedback, rather than the student's response to it, completely disregarding the student perspective. Hodges (1992) highlights three teachers and the type of feedback they give to the same draft but is also limited in the fact that they know nothing of this hypothetical student beyond what is written within the draft, seemingly stiling the social aspect of writing. Within those studies, there was no focus on revision or the aftermath of teacher feedback. Sperling (1994) states outright that the influence (if any) on revision was not considered, but that it is a direction that needs to be researched further, as that feedback likely directly shapes student-writers and the choices they make:

That is, when we consider the full social context of instruction, the likelihood is strong that student writers and their writing are nevertheless shaped, for better or for worse, by teachers' expectations as projected to them through many-faceted classroom social processes... (Sperling, 1994, p. 177)

Kramer-Simpson (2012) also notes the limitations of her study as she only focused on teacher feedback, rather than looking more extensively at feedback as a whole. Even student-writers seem to elevate the feedback received from teachers over that of their peers: "...some 90% of the teacher respondents' concerns in this study were addressed" (Beason, 1993, p. 413)—this again highlights the evaluative nature of writing within schools. Without addressing/considering how students use feedback, we cannot truly evaluate the feedback.

Discussions of surface level feedback compared to more global issues were highlighted by Applebee, Lehr, & Auten (1981) and Parr & Timperley (2010). In their consideration of written feedback, Patthey-Chavez, Matsumur, & Valdes (2004) both qualitatively and quantitatively analyze feedback students received from teachers and found that the majority of students, 66% did not receive "content-level feedback" and only 16% "evidenced the kind of feedback we would expect in a multidraft approach aiming for substantive improvement" (p. 473-474). As a result, student revisions "showed only the barest improvement across drafts" (p. 473-474), indicating that the teacher feedback served to help students become more fluent in written English rather than writing. The idea of a clean copy final draft is engrained into students, so much so that it sometimes overshadows the real work that could be done in writing, the process of it.

The use of peer response groups was noted by Freedman (1987), specifically the fact that they can lighten the load of papers, while still allowing students a chance to receive feedback and

expand their "sense of audience" (p. 1). In this study, she looked at the use of response groups in the classrooms of two different teachers, considering the structure of the groups, the instructions students received, and the interaction of the teacher with the groups. Her work allows us to note the importance of context, as one teacher, Ms. Glass, focused on "evaluative, critical listening" while the other, Mr. Peterson, emphasized craft (p. 11). Freedman goes so far to note the language the teachers used to discuss peer response and the implications that has on student perception and implementation of the practice. While I want to center in on the student perspective, the teachers are vital. They determine the curriculum, and they scaffold and support students as they lean into the process of writing.

Other studies, mostly written by educators, looked at struggles within their classrooms and their efforts to address those struggles. Smede (2000) implemented a "revising day" in her classroom, noting the changes she made and their results; Noskin (2000) commented on his struggle to foster community within his high school English classes, with an emphasis on the difficulty of applying the writing process, a recursive process, into a more regulated place (the classroom). Wilson (2007) discussed her resistance to rubrics, specifically regarding how ineffective they are when trying to provide quality feedback to students, as the generic wording never quite captured what was necessary or helpful. Educators lean into the problems/difficulties they are seeing in their own practice and work towards change to better support students. The studies above highlight the importance of revision time, the value of a supportive community, and benefits of freedom and flexibility in feedback.

## **Feedback**

While the perspective of students in writing research is not at the heart of the majority of the research, the preference of students is noted at points. Cho, Schunn, & Charney's (2006)

research took place at the university level, in both undergraduate and graduate courses. They note that "undergraduate peers found directive and praise comments helpful" (p. 260). Peter Johnston's (2012) "Guiding the Budding Writer" addresses the role of feedback in writer development and states that students tend to value feedback more during the actual process, rather than once the writing is "completed." In their extensive work on feedback and the role it plays in motivating and developing writers, Hattie & Timperley (2007) come to the conclusion that students will be more likely to achieve goals they set in their writing when they are committed to those goals and will, in turn, actually seek out feedback. This research comes back to the concept of giving students a voice in writing. Sommers' (2006) extensive work with Harvard undergraduate students revealed that almost 90% of them wanted "more specific comments", as well as the chance to write about what matters to them (p. 251). In another survey of college students, research found that students

...seemed equally interested in getting responses on global matters of content, purpose, and organization as on local matters of sentence structure, wording, and correctness, but were wary of negative comments about ideas they had already expressed in their text. It also found that these students favored detailed commentary with specific and elaborated comments, but they did not like comments that sought to control their writing or that failed to provide helpful criticism for improving the writing (Straub, 1997, p. 91).

It was comments steeped with advice or questions on their work that appealed most to them, as well as explanations that pointed toward how to address a specific issue. Yet, it is still unclear what comments students find useful, rather than what they simply prefer, and the reasoning behind that (Straub, 1997, p. 93). It is important to note that Straub's (1997) study did not use the actual work of the students it surveyed; it was hypothetical through a general writing sample.

He also brings up the power dynamic between student and teacher, questioning how much control students want in their writing in comparison to direction.

Quite a few of the studies in writing research are experimental; some look into what specific form of feedback or intervention worked best, utilizing control groups in an attempt to gain an objective truth about feedback and revision. This approach negates the social and human aspects of the writing process. Furthermore, some of those experimental studies defined revision in ways that composition scholars would define editing, with a focus on surface level issues such as grammar and spelling, rather than global revisions such as organization, audience, and analysis (Strijbos, Narciss, & Dünnebier, 2010). They also regulated the type of feedback students were giving and receiving (Cho & MacArthur, 2010; Duijnhouwer, Prins, & Stokking, 2012; Strijbos, Narciss, & Dünnebier, 2010; Wallace & Hayes, 1991). Strijbos, Narciss, & Dünnebier (2010) studied feedback in graduate students by using four experimental groups and one control, designating feedback between concise general or elaborated specific. However, those students didn't interact with their own writing or feedback, but rather revised errors in a generic text. Cho & MacArthur (2010) set up three different groups, providing each with a different type of feedback (expert, peer, multiple peers). They found that feedback from multiple peers resulted in more complex changes. This highlights the importance of feedback from varying sources and perspectives, centering on the social and transactional aspects of the writing process. Wallace & Hayes (1991) had students revise a generic text, one group had eight minutes of instruction on revision, while the other did not; the group with instruction produced better revisions. Duijnhouwer, Frins, & Stokking (2012) provided teachers with a list of strategies to choose from, rather than specific and personal feedback. Thus, many of these studies offer a limited and artificial view on feedback, quite unlike the feedback students actually

receive on their writing. Furthermore, in writing there is rarely a right answer, especially if you move past the surface level of composition (spelling and grammar). Studies such as these are therefore problematic. To gauge revision and feedback preferences using a text that doesn't belong to the student will lead to very limited understanding. It is the context that matters. It is vital to know how writing, revising, and peer review groups have been scaffolded for students, as well as the background and experiences of the teacher as that directly impacts the types of feedback students might receive.

The general purpose of feedback is to improve writing, but the relationship between feedback and revision is not fully understood, nor is student comprehension of that process and relationship. The relationship between feedback and revision is researched in several ways. For example, Zhang, Schunn, & Baikadi (2017) consider the role writing goals play in student revisions, combining them with peer feedback and self-reflections. Hattie & Timperley (2007) discuss the role of self-regulation strategies in writers who are effective at revisions, noting that "Less effective learners have minimal self-regulation strategies, and they depend much more on external factors (such as the teacher or the task) for feedback. They rarely seek or incorporate feedback in ways that will enhance their future learning or self-regulation strategies" (p. 94). Tuzi (2004) analyzed L2 student drafts in relation to their feedback to determine potential connections. He found that electronic feedback affected revision more than oral, with the implication that the former was more helpful. However, in relation to L1 studies, we must question the role fluency in speaking and writing plays in this distinction.

In her earlier work Sommers (1980) expands on the role of the internal reader in revision, one that reflects on the potential outside feedback and how it measures against their current writing. This measurement creates a "feeling of dissonance" (p. 385) in relation to the mismatch

of what was created compared to the initial aim, which then leads to revision. Sitko (1993) enters into a similar conversation, advocating for the use of peer review as an additional audience allows the writer to engage with actual responses to her writing, giving her the ability to check intent against reality. She states that rather than "doing peer groups TO them" we should instead work to create a community within that space where students are encouraged to discuss, challenge, and experience the work of others (p. 9). This brings about a conversation regarding the type of feedback that should be elicited through peer response: editing, revision notes, reader response/experience a la Moffett and Elbow. Editing does not create a chance for dialogue (Parr & Timperley, 2010), while simply sharing through reading limits potential extended feedback (Nystrand, 1984). Holt (1992) attempted to address some of the limits around feedback through the combination of Bruffee's peer critiques and Elbow's reader response models, allowing for both critical feedback and personal reactions. Constructive criticism is valued over praise as (Sommers, 2006) it can promote further growth, while simple praise can cause students to "stall as writers because they are never asked to do anything differently, never shown what skills they need to develop, nor are they engaged in a dialogue that challenges their own thinking" (p. 251). Trust and community are two aspects that help towards successful peer feedback/writing workshop. They both allow for a dialogue to occur around writing in a more in-depth manner.

Within research, peer feedback is seen as important, but the question still remains how to employ it effectively (Johnston, 2012). In one study, students were surveyed about the writing process: 60% reported fixing mistakes, and only 25-28% reported working with peers (Applebee & Langer, 2009). Hovan (2012) briefly analyzes the implementation of writing groups, but centers on the general reactions of the students to the writing groups, rather than an intense focus on their actual revision and feedback processes: "We stopped often to reflect on what kinds of

comments help a writer to move forward with a piece and what kinds of comments make writers feel hopeless" (p. 52). Hovan's discussion of peer response implies the creation of a community, a social space where reflection, discussion, sharing, and honesty are valued, as does Nystrand (1984). Sitko (1993) returns to the role outsiders can have in determining intention versus reality of a text through the use of peer response:

While observing reading processes, writers hear for themselves an ongoing record of their readers' attempts to orient themselves within the text. They hear readers try to make sense of the emerging point and speculate about where the text is going. They have specific information about whether the reader understands the text as intended. (p. 173)

Peer response is a time where students are able to fill the gap of what they don't comprehend at the moment in order to help them fully understand and address the gap within revision (Berg, 1999; Brannon & Knoblauch, 1982; Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Unfortunately, the feedback is not often directly connected to that gap. This may include spelling or grammar when the purpose is to develop voice within the piece. The social aspect of feedback, specifically peer response, is acted out in both a verbal and written manner. Zhang, Schunn, & Baikadi (2017) consider the role of online peer review, but they lack the second half of peer response, the verbal discussions and deliberations.

Some teachers worry about the kind of student talk produced during peer response time, questioning how much is accomplished, but in their research Gere & Abbot (1985) found that the percentage of discussion around writing was high, showing that students are capable of working in writing groups effectively. The writing groups were organized around Elbow's work and the National Writing Project, of which the teachers were a part of. This study elaborates on what peer responses/writing groups can accomplish, but it centers on group dynamic, rather than the

role feedback plays in regards to revision. Stylslinger (1998) found that students wanted more interaction with peers but craved actual in-depth feedback rather than affirmation. She highlighted the time it takes to develop trust and community with peer response, as does McManus & Kirby (1988). Christianakis (2010) elaborates further on the idea of community: "Through negotiation, children learn to create and grow a community of practice rather than be apprenticed into an existing community" (p. 451-452) and the power it can have in developing writers rather than creating them to match a mold. Her work extends research further in regard to the impact of social, race, and gender within writing groups, calling for additional research dedicated to investigating the "social identities" of students (p. 423).

In 1983 Schwartz stated that "even when writers have a repertoire of revision skills, their patterns are not predictable. We may know that in general revision is useful, but as yet we have no guidelines for individual success" (p. 549). This has continued despite research efforts to set up concrete steps or outlines. Early & Saidy (2014) outlined possible steps writers can take such as, drafting, asking questions about whether or not their work represents their intentions, and incorporating feedback from other sources, but they are unable to state definitively the steps that writers take. Revision is difficult work, one that writers must labor to complete (Harris, 2003). Sommers (1980) moved beyond the linear idea of composing to a more recursive one, noting the complexity. Faigley & Witte (1981) in the study of revision emphasize the number of variables that impact the process that need to be considered in research such as why one is writing to begin with, genre, knowledge of the subject, audience awareness, and time.

Understanding the process of revision has been considered through the use of "revision memos" where students consider the changes they made within their work, engaging in metacognitive considerations (Bardine & Fulton, 2008). It has also been looked at by analyzing

and noting the direct changes from one draft to the next. Bridwell (1980) analyzed 100 papers from seniors in an attempt to "develop an exhaustive and mutually exclusive scheme for classifying revisions" (p. 203). Those categories of classification were surface, lexical, phrase, clause, sentence, multi-sentence, text. Her research centers on the end result of the changes, numerically what kind of changes were common, rather than the process of those changes and the reasoning behind them, missing the perspective of the students. Analysis of the revisions noted that students may be "writing to find out what they had to say and how to say it" (p. 210), but the revisions analyzed were considered over a single draft and never engaged in again and students were not consulted on their reasoning behind the choices they made. For example, one writer revised 118 times, but ended up with one of the "lowest quality ratings in the sample" (p. 220), and further consultation with that particular student could have provided further insight. Flower & Hayes have used verbal protocols to engage with the reasoning behind revision. Myhill (2009) interviewed students following their revisions to gain a better perspective of their processes, questioning how they wrote as did Sommers (1980). In her work, Sommers compared the revision practices of experienced adults to inexperienced college freshmen. Main takeaways from this study showed that the students viewed writing as "translating" (p. 382) while the adults saw it as a continual process that involved not only addressed surface level issues, but also global issues. Sitko (1993) extends the actions of experienced/inexperienced writers in relation to audience:

Experienced writers apparently understand more about how their readers' constructive processes work, and, more aware of readers throughout the writing process, shape texts in ways that they expect will guide the reading processes of their audience. Inexperienced writers, however, need to learn more about how the reading process works. These writers

may be able to correct lists of individual sentences, but may not be able to make the crucial move of matching the rules to their own texts. (p. 173)

Beach (1979) also found similar notions where inexperienced writers seemed more concerned with editing than revision.

Sommers' (2006) study of Harvard undergraduates over an extended period of time brings up the view students have of themselves as writers and the role comments play on their development, and thereby their revisions:

If our comments move students forward as writers, they do so because such comments resonate with some aspect of their writing that our students are already thinking about...most comments, unfortunately, do not move students forward as writers because they underwhelm or overwhelm them, going unread and unused. As one student suggested, "Too often the comments are written to the paper, not the student." (p. 250)

Her research expands, noting the power feedback has in shaping writers and their writing, but she cautions that "useful comments" don't always correlate with growth in writing, as writing development is not always linear or clear (p. 249). Underwood & Tregidgo (2006) agree as they state that a correlation is not present between a certain type of feedback and a resulting revision. Shute (2008) states that effective and helpful feedback requires "(a) motive (the student needs it), (b) opportunity (the student receives it in time to use it), and (c) means (the student is able and willing to use it)" (p. 175). They continue by noting that while the effects of feedback have been researched there is a huge amount of variety and variability in those effects. They, in turn, call for additional research to investigate the complex relationship.

## **Conclusion**

My research takes a constructionist stance as feedback is inherently a social interaction that may or may not affect revision. My beliefs about writing live in the social world and the interactions with those around us in order to grow as writers, *creating meaning*, not finding it.

Within the writing process, there is a focus of revision and editing in order to produce a better quality composition. However, the writing process and the relationship between feedback and revision are not fully understood, nor is how students understand that process and relationship. To explore this topic, I draw upon literature in composition studies and secondary English education. Quite a few of the studies on secondary students are experimental and look into what specific form of feedback worked best, utilizing control groups in an attempt to gain an objective truth about feedback and revision. This approach negates the social and human aspects of the writing process. Furthermore, those experimental studies typically defined revision in ways that composition scholars would define editing, with a focus on surface level issues, rather than higher level revisions (Strijbos, Narciss, & Dünnebier, 2010). Some regulated the type of feedback students were given and receiving (Cho & MacArthur, 2010; Cho, MacArthur, & Graesser, 2011; Duijnhouwer, Prins, & Stokking, 2011; Gielen, Tops, Dochy, Onghena, & Smeets, 2010). Thus, these studies offer a limited and artificial view on feedback, quite unlike the feedback students actually receive on their writing. Furthermore, in writing there is rarely a right answer, especially if you move beyond the surface level. Studies that feature only one correct way to give feedback are therefore problematic. In contrast, much of the existing qualitative research focuses on the teacher's perspective on the writing process, specifically their role in giving feedback (Lee, 2009; Parr & Timperley, 2010; Wilson, 2007). Studies have generally failed to focus on actual interactions and the processes students engage in during revision. Thus, a study of how secondary students understand and use both teacher and peer

feedback will extend the literature and illuminate the processes students engage in while revising (Cavanaugh, 2013; Martindale, 2008).

### **Chapter 3: Conceptual Framework**

In this chapter I discuss the theoretical framework for my research, outlined in the introduction, which is anchored in the work of the following researchers: Louise M. Rosenblatt, Peter Elbow, and James Moffett. Reader Response theory, while developed by Rosenblatt has been taken up, in varying forms, by those who research writing, such as Elbow and Moffett. Below is an overview of their work and research, followed by an elaboration on how it applies to the current study, centered in writing research.

#### **Theoretical Overview**

This research is anchored in the work of Louise M. Rosenblatt, Peter Elbow, and James Moffett. Rosenblatt's Reader Response theory can be used within writing as well and has been by both Elbow and Moffett with a focus on the writing process. The importance of the reader has been noted in studies within writing research (Emig, 1977; Sitko, 1993; Sommers, 1980; Wilson, 2007). The transaction that occurs in reading a piece of literature can be applied to the one that occurs while reading another's writing. Both are repeated processes and impacted by context and reader/writer experiences (Rosenblatt, 1994). The transaction between reader and text (and writer) can fully develop through feedback. The social interaction after initial reactions/transaction further solidifies understanding, and students are able to negotiate meaning through active discussions (Rosenblatt, 1994; Elbow, 1973; Moffett, 1988). The transaction is expanded beyond the text and the reader to include the writer.

#### **Rosenblatt**

Louise Rosenblatt's (1995) Reader Response theory highlights the personal and individual experiences a reader has while reading. It was developed in contrast to New Criticism

which centered in on the text, rather than relying on outside sources such as historical information or personal reactions. Every single reader brings their own individual experiences to the table when they approach literature, and in turn, each will connect at varying levels, depending on who they are and what they have gone through. It is through this that the concept of Reader Response positions itself and gains ground. Rosenblatt believed that a personal connection was an integral part of the connection between the reader and the text, citing both as necessary: "When the student has been moved by a work of literature, he will be led to ponder on questions of right or wrong, of admirable or antisocial qualities, of justifiable or unjustifiable actions. The average student spontaneously tends to pass judgments on the actions of characters encountered in fiction" (1995, p. 16). The "spontaneous response" that students have to literature they encounter is necessary and incredibly useful for their overall interaction and analysis of the text (p. 102).

Rosenblatt describes the interaction between literature (the text) and the reader as a transaction, where meaning is created rather than found directly in the text. It is within that transaction that "[m]eaning lies in that shared ground where the reader and text meet" (Probst, 1986, p. 38). The individual experience itself lends so much to the eventual meaning of the text and should be viewed as valid, rather than a single meaning that should be accepted by all (Probst, 1986, p. 38). It is in literature where we find a combination of intellectual ability and emotionality that cannot always be found in other content subjects.

Rosenblatt (1995) herself focuses on what each student brings to the table and, in turn, to the text:

Teaching becomes a matter of improving the individual's capacity to evoke meaning from the text by leading him to reflect self-critically on this process. The starting point for

growth must be each individual's efforts to marshal his resources in relation to the printed page. (1995, p. 26)

Meaning, therefore, according to Reader Response theory, is directly connected to the individual and what he comes to the text with and what he therefore takes away from the text. It is not something to be learned by rote, but rather something to create. It is a two-way relationship between the text and the reader; both are affected by the other, and both are changed as a result (p. 26).

The purpose of the transaction is to further interact with the text. Reading is interacting with the text and making meaning based on it and who you are results in what you create (Probst, 1986, p. 62). Students need to feel the right to speak about a text and have ownership over their interpretation, not be forced to embrace a regurgitation of the version their teacher "taught" them (Burdan, 2004, p. 23). And yet, "[t]here is not formula for giving students the assurance to speak out" (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 67). Through the personal connection that Rosenblatt's transaction emphasizes, they will gain authority alongside the text, as they are experts on themselves and how they approach a specific text.

It is in a group setting that students are able to dissect those initial reactions and determine where to head from there: "A free exchange of ideas will lead each student to scrutinize his own sense of the literary work in the light of others' opinions" (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 104). Through the emotional response and the group work that follows, students are able to distinguish their emotions and reflect on them analytically and think rationally alongside them in order to further interact with the text. The addition of the group only enhances their ability to reflect, as the remainder of the group (including the teacher) can engage in the same process (p. 228). Rosenblatt likens group conversation to a ball being passed around, not just to students,

but to the teacher as well (p. 68-69). It is through this dynamic that students can debate the meaning of a text to hone in on what the text means for them individually, while fixing potential problems with their own reasoning (p. 114). It is the guidance of the group that "...will stimulate each of them to search for knowledge that will clarify the problems he encounters and will supply the basis for valid judgments" (p. 114). Students can provide some of the best feedback for one another when properly guided to a situation where that can occur.

To integrate Reader Response theory in the classroom it would be necessary to "[show] how the two—responding and analyzing—are dynamically dependent upon one another" (Burdan, 2004, p. 25). The combination creates the necessary academic component, as English is no longer just reading and discussing, more is required. Rosenblatt believes that critical thinking skills and abilities will arise from discussion, as well as a deeper understanding of the self (1995, p. 117). She goes on to state that the want to understand will create further and "ever-widening circles of interest", but that the student should be at the center of that circle, dictating what needs to be clarified in order to fully understand their unique insight to a text (111). It has been argued that this type of discussion will naturally lead to close reading in order to further probe the text in support or in defiance of a particular outlook (Probst, 1981, p. 46).

## **Elbow**

Peter Elbow's (1973) seminal work *Writing Without Teachers* begins with a declarative statement that writing is not a simple "two-step transaction of meaning-into-language" (p. 15), but that it is a recurring, recursive, and developmental process that evolves over time (Elbow & Belanoff, 2003):

Meaning is not what you start out with but what you end up with. Control, coherence, and knowing your mind are not what you start out with but what you end up with. Think of writing then not as a way to transmit a message but as a way to grow and cook a message. Writing is a way to end up thinking something you couldn't have started out thinking. (Elbow, 1973, p. 15)

He (Elbow, 1973) emphasizes the importance of reaching out to others when writing, comparing writing to "a string you send out to connect yourself with other consciousnesses" (p. 50), lamenting that usually there isn't anyone at the end of that string for writers to interact with. His work connects to Rosenblatt's Reader Response theory in that he asks that readers respond to a writer's work and discuss their experiences with the words, putting someone else on the other end of the string. These experiences are referred to as "movies of the mind" (p. 77) and their main purpose is to help writers improve. Those details can help show the mismatch or meeting of intention and actuality of the writing for the reader. He advocates for an extended amount of time spent with the same individuals to better improve both the transmitting and receiving of the transaction (p. 78). Within that time, relationships can build and grow, as can trust and honesty, both integral to a fully functioning response group, filled with those willing to share and discuss without fear of being wrong. Elbow & Belanoff (2003) speak to fears addressed in research on students who are afraid to assess the work of another but sidestep this common issue by reemphasizing that readers are an interested audience responding with their transaction, rather than grading the work of a peer.

His practices, as the title suggests, advocate for teacherless writing, but the practices outlined can be transferred to a class with teachers, specifically a secondary context (Elbow, 1973). While Elbow recommends at least seven people, peer response groups typically range

from three to five, yet when you consider other sources of feedback, teachers, friends, family, that number could be easily reached (Elbow, 1973). This feedback should be both written and verbal, as both provide differing, but useful knowledge for revision (Elbow & Belanoff, 2003). Verbal feedback is more social in nature, while written feedback "can be more careful and considered" (p. 364). In another collaboration, *Sharing and Responding*, Elbow and Belanoff (1989) center in on feedback, from sharing work to critical feedback. Elbow's (1981) criterion-based feedback outlines multiple sets of questions to ask regarding writing and in conjunction with reader-based feedback creates an extensive and complete set of feedback, addressing both quality and function (p. 241)—

Therefore we urge you to follow a crucial principle for feedback: Don't let anyone give you evaluation or advice unless they also give you the perceptions and reactions it is based on—that is, unless they describe *what they see* and *how they are reacting*. (Elbow & Belanoff, 2003, p. 352-353)

It is that combination that creates the ideal for secondary classrooms, as it gives voice to student experiences with the writing, while employing the critical evaluation and analysis required by standards. The two together prime the writer for revision.

Elbow & Belanoff (1989) speak to the writer searching for answers when he says he is unable to provide a "handy bag of tools for revising" (p. 176) because of the individualistic nature of writing. He and Belanoff swim in ambiguity when it comes to defining exactly what revision is, but note that it is a process of change, "whatever you do to improve a piece of writing in terms of getting closer to what you want to say to a particular reader or readers—whoever they may be..." (Elbow & Belanoff, 2003, p. 124). And with that definition they center in on the importance of the writer, giving them control over their writing and process:

Nevertheless, you as the writer get to decide what to do about any of this feedback from readers, what changes to make, if any....the writer must be in charge; yet the writer must sit quietly and do nothing. As writer, you must be in control. It's your writing. Don't be passive or helpless. You get to decide what kind of feedback, if any, you need....Don't let readers make these decisions for you. Ask for what you want and don't be afraid to stop them if they give you the wrong thing. (Elbow & Belanoff, 2003, p. 353-354)

With this, he designates the writer as the only person who can know when the piece has communicated what it intended. While he restates the importance of revising, he emphasizes that not all writing should be revised, as it should not be an attempt to achieve flawlessness.

It's Elbow's continued nod to the difficult art that is revising that makes him so relatable to both writers and teachers:

As you improve your ability to put down words on paper—to put down more and worry less—you will find yourself naturally developing the critical consciousness that leads to good revising. Not just brute negativity: the ability to detach yourself from your own words so you can throw away what's bad or inappropriate. But also an imaginative critical-mindedness: the ability to look *through* your words as they are and see which parts *could* be good and see how the good parts *could* be shaped. (1981, p. 121)

His practical stance provides an extended look on methods of revising, without pushing a certain type, and a reoccurring theme of interacting with others through your writing, getting feedback from peers and considering that during the revision process (Elbow, 1981). He notes that if sharing your writing makes you want to stop all together then you should not share, that it matters more to keep writing.

## Moffett

Sheridan Blau describes implementing James Moffett's work within the classroom as "an intellectually and professionally crucial movement for a teacher to make moving from telling about literature and writing to helping students develop as writers themselves" (Blau, 2012, p. 82). His work centers on secondary students, as did the early work of his career as a teacher. Moffett (1983) begins *Teaching the Universe of Discourse* with an emphasis on engaging in the "authentic discourses", reading and writing, moving beyond the use of textbooks (1983, p. 7). Building off of Piaget he outlines the concept of growing outward, both adapting and becoming part of the outside world. This he links to teaching and our need to center on the individual rather than subject, such as English. In terms of growth as a writer, he links that to feedback and response (1983, p. 88). Regarding feedback, he calls for peer response writing groups in order to provide an extensive amount of feedback which is necessary for growth, of both the writers and readers (1983, p. 193; 1988, p. 69). The more feedback, the easier it can be to consider, allowing for a possibility of agreement across readers. This process, over time, can also give readers an additional boost in their growth as writers through the practices of responding to one other.

As for teacher feedback, Moffett cautions the implication of power in the position, for both teacher and student:

He is at once parental substitute, civic authority, and the wielder of marks. Any one of these roles would be potent enough to distort the writer-audience relationship; all together, they cause the student to misuse the feedback in ways that severely limit his learning to write. (Moffett, 1983, p. 193)

Much depends of course on the manner of the teacher, and, curiously enough, if the teacher shifts authority to the peer group, which is where it lies anyway for adolescents, and takes on an indirect role, then his feedback carries a greater weight. (Moffett, 1983, p. 194)

He believes that the teacher should center in on working with students to become teachers themselves, aiding the learning of each other, resulting in more feedback, collaboration, and discussion than a single teacher could hope to provide (Moffett, 1983, p. 196; Moffett, 1973, p. 12).

In regard to assessment, he spoke out against standardized testing of writing, even in 1988, claiming that it didn't actually assess writing in actual writing circumstances, which still holds true today as writing is an extended process and typically can't be completed within the span of thirty minutes. Along with this he embraces the portfolio model for evaluation of writing, which allows the teacher to see "the traits and the trends by looking over all the writing and making a blanket judgment" (Moffett, 1988, p. 62). He ties the fear of writing to the standardization of it; not fear to write, but what true writing can cause, what it can disrupt: "...that real authoring would require radical changes in student role, classroom management and methods, parents' and administrators' heads, evaluation, and the whole atmosphere of teaching" (Moffett, 1988, p. 78). As it stands, writing is typically used as a means to an end within the school system (1988, p. 84); this can be seen through the formulation of five paragraph essays, a convenient form for testing. Thinking is not valued in that kind of "writing", nor is the author. He describes his curriculum as "naturalistic" (Moffett, 1973, p. 503) as it employs real discourse, rather than those only found within a classroom. It is student-centered, rather than subject/content centered.

Moffett understands and advocates for the individualistic nature of writers (1973, p. vi), coining the phrase "inner voice" to speak to the nature of writing:

When people write, they are simultaneously *drawing* letters, *transcribing* their inner voice, *plagiarizing* concepts and frameworks from their culture, *crafting* their thoughts into language forms, and *revising* the inchoate thought of their inner speech. None are wrong, but failing to include all is wrong. (Moffett, 1988, p. 77)

Writing is a reproduction of thought, but not every single thought that comes up should be represented in the physical representation that is writing. We revise our "inner voice" even before we begin writing (Moffett, 1988, p. 76). In the quote above, Moffett outlines the complex process that we engage in during writing.

### **Reader Response in Writing**

While Rosenblatt's work is typically tied to the reading of literature, as seen above, the transaction that takes place within Reader Response can be used within writing as well and has been by both Elbow and Moffett whose work is directly tied to writing and teaching the process of writing. The importance of the reader has been noted in certain studies within writing research (Emig, 1977; Sitko, 1993; Sommers, 1980; Wilson, 2007). The transaction that occurs in reading a piece of literature can be applied to the one that occurs while reading another's writing. Both are recurring processes, conditional on the context and the individual experiences of both the writer and reader(s): "Any reading—no matter how rigidly classic and 'readerly,' any text—no matter whether potentially a work of art or not—requires some degree of 'writerly' activities from a reader" (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 170-171). Within the classrooms I visited for my

fieldwork, that reading was almost always in conjunction with feedback, from both peers and teachers, impacting the writing of the students.

Rosenblatt (1994) discusses the role of literature as art, which can't necessarily be said about student writing, but the premise remains the same: "[A] text, once it leaves its author's hands, is simply paper and ink until a reader evokes from it a literary work..." (p. ix). She distinguishes between an efferent and aesthetic stance for readers. Within an efferent reading, information is gathered, while the attention of aesthetic reading is on the occurring transaction (p. 23-24). Most readings lie within the spectrum rather than on either extreme end. The same can be said for Reader Response theory of writing. If the efferent stance is fully evoked in that reading, grammar and content, the direct meaning of the written symbols is the main focus, while the aesthetic would focus on the transaction as it happens, the individual response. Student readers would usually remain between the spectrum of stances, as does most reading (p. 37), depending on where the writer is in their revision/process. Reader Response/feedback done early on might be weighted more toward the aesthetic, while those in the final stages of revision might focus on surface level issues (such as editing) and general coherence of meaning.

Her notes on collaboration within the transaction can be likened to peer feedback, where transactions are shared through both written and verbal comments and developed together to create a fuller understanding of the intent of the writing compared to the actuality of the reader's experience (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 186). It is within this realm that Elbow and Moffett apply Reader Response most frequently; as noted above in the overview of their work, the transaction between reader and text (and writer) can fully develop through peer writing groups. Even Rosenblatt's discussion of the "invisible" (1994, p. 4) nature of the reader/audience within literary theory is relevant, as writing is not fully realized until the reader considers and interacts

with the text, where intent and reality meet. The social interaction after initial reactions/transaction further solidifies understanding, and students are able to negotiate meaning through active discussions (Elbow, 1973; Elbow & Belanoff, 2003; Moffett, 1983; Moffett, 1988; Rosenblatt, 1994). Rosenblatt states that the "interchange among students must be actively promoted" (1995, p. 68-69). The exchange of views can aid in reflection and consideration of the implications of their analysis. The transaction is expanded beyond the text and the reader to include the writer. The description of reading she provides, "...reading is a constructive, selective process over time in a particular context. The relation between reader and signs on the page proceeds in a to-and-fro spiral, in which each is continually being affected by what the other has contributed" (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 26), directly speaks to the process of writing, specifically the recursive nature of it and the impact of audience response and feedback.

## **Conclusion**

This conceptual/theoretical framework provides a way for me to look at writing that appreciates the values of the classrooms I entered as a researcher, the focus on writing to learn, rather than writing for a grade. I needed a conceptual/theoretical framework that allowed me to look at student writing in a particular way. As such, I turned to Rosenblatt, Elbow, and Moffett. Their research aligns with how I want to look at feedback and the writing process, focusing on the individual experiences students have when writing, honoring those experiences and placing the writer in the center, while highlighting the social interaction that comes with reading the writing of others and providing feedback.

## Chapter 4: Research Design

In this chapter I build off of the literature that forms the basis for my research and discuss the methodology used in designing my research. I also review the case as a whole and discuss the rationale behind my choice of site and participant selection. <sup>1</sup>In terms of data collection, I note where I gathered data and why before delving into how I analyzed said data. Through each section, I share how the choices I made setting up the study directly connect to my research questions and work to address/answer them.

### Methodology

This qualitative instrumental case study involved observations, interviews of both teachers and students, audio recordings, and textual analysis of relevant documents. Teachers and students were interviewed in a semi-structured and unstructured manner with questions centering in on revision and feedback. The data gained through the interviews provided insight into the perspectives that can't fully be gained through observation or document review, as the interviews asked the students and teachers to delve into their process and beliefs about feedback and revision, with a focus their processes and perspectives. Participant observations took place during class time. Field notes focused on how students were using feedback, who they received feedback from, their writing processes, and how writing was taught in the course. Audio recordings were frequent (especially during writing conferences) in the latter half of the study. A document review of feedback, student writing, and curriculum was conducted to see how writing was influenced/affected. While copies of documents relating to all students were collected, the

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<sup>1</sup> For further details on my IRB please see Appendix E.

documents relating to focal students are vital to connecting their responses given during the interview process to the actual practices that they engage in.

The student-centered focus affords a clearer understanding of the steps students take as they revise, while looking at the outcomes to determine whether that revision was successful. Examining how students understand, take up, and implement feedback will help educators improve their own feedback and enhance not only how they teach students to provide feedback but also how they teach students to use feedback in their revisions.

In his book, *Research Methods in Language Learning*, David Nunan (1992) debates the definition of a case study, its limitations, and its usefulness. Within a case study, "one selects an instance from the class...and investigates the way this instance functions in context" (p. 75). It was the "in context" part that drew me to research within this methodology, as I wanted to see students "in context" and analyze their individual experiences. He goes on to describe the purpose of the case study: "The purpose of such observation is to probe deeply and to analyse the intensity of the multifarious phenomena that constitute the life cycle of the unit with a view to establishing generalisations about the wider population to which the unit belongs" (p. 77). That initial function of the case study allowed me to further writing research in regard to reasoning behind revisions, which may be applicable to other students. This research study is considered an instrumental case study, as "...the intent of the case study [is] to understand a specific issue, problem, or concern..." (Creswell, 2013, p. 98). Through this specific case study, I was able to facilitate my understanding of a larger issue concerning feedback and how students respond to it and the roles it plays in their writing process. Currently, I see this issue as one that permeates writing instruction. However, it best suited my research needs to be in a secondary class with a

dedicated Composition course, rather than a general course in English, as I wanted to look extensively into the feedback students receive and how that affects or influences their revisions.

### **Case Overview and Site Selection**

Research was conducted in the form of a case study (Creswell, 2013; Crotty, 1998) as I wanted to look at and study the individual experiences of students. Looking at every student in a class would provide an immense amount of data, so I centered in on two peer response groups, which typically have three to five students, and analyzed their individual writing processes. This also allowed further exploration of the role peer response plays within revision. I am defining a case study as an exploration of a bounded system or a case study over time through detailed, in-depth data generation involving multiple sources of information rich in context.

This study took place in two Advanced Composition classes during the Fall 2019 semester, composed of primarily juniors and seniors at Lakeview High School, a medium sized district in the Midwest. The classes were taught by two different teachers who worked and planned together closely, Ms. Duncan and Mr. Anderson<sup>2</sup>. I first met Ms. Duncan at a first-year writing conference where she outlined her experiences teaching, her work with the Writing Project, and how the two came together to create a course that centered on the process of writing with a focus on student growth. After the conference, I connected with Ms. Duncan and she put me in touch with Mr. Anderson, who also taught the same course as her. The three of us met and I shared my research questions and the type of research I hoped to engage in. They were both interested in participating. We determined that I would sit in on a class for each of them (based on where their schedule and mine overlapped). I specifically chose this school/course and these

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<sup>2</sup> All names are pseudonyms

teachers as their writing instruction has been developed based on the concept that writing is a continual process. This class asked students to engage in continual revision on specific pieces of writing, encouraged student choice in writing topics, and utilized writing groups to elicit feedback from peers rather than just teachers. The semester long Advanced Composition course allowed me to look extensively into the feedback students receive and how that affected or influenced their revisions.

### **Participant Selection**

I centered in on seven focal students to analyze their individual writing processes. This allowed further exploration of the role peer response plays within revision. This particular situation allowed me to look at the interactions of students at multiple levels of revision in order to see whether or not feedback impacts their revision. I was also able to see what type of feedback students were given. Focal students were chosen based on initial observations in the classes which included writing conferences between teachers and students as well as looking at their writing and the practices they were already engaged in. Focal students were determined with a few criteria in mind. They had to consent into the study and be willing for me to quote their work directly in my writing. They had to be interested in having conversations about their writing with me (through formal and informal interviews). And ideally, they would be engaged in peer review with each other. I relied on my observations the first couple of weeks to determine who might be a good fit and consulted with Duncan and Anderson before approaching the students, asking them if they would be interested in being a focal student in the study, explaining what that meant exactly. I confirmed their interest after the conclusion of our first interview, checking that they were still interested and comfortable talking with me (all confirmed that they were).

I did not specifically look for one type of writer. I wanted the students I focused on to have different perspectives, styles, and levels of revision. This included writers who were there only for the grade, writers who needed direct instruction on what to change in their writing, writers who loved to write, writers who put their all into their writing, and writers who just wanted to be done. In essence, I wanted multiple perspectives of writers, and that is exactly what Alyssa, August, Evelyn, Michelle, Chris, Candice, and Grady gave me, an insight into who they were as writers and their processes and thoughts. The relationship I had with the classrooms was that of a researcher outsider, as I was not a formal member of the classroom itself. I did develop relationships with the teachers and students, but I did not hold an official place in the classroom dynamic, besides that of a researcher.

### **Data Collection**

The primary method of data collection for this study came from semi-structured interviews with the students and the teacher of the course. I had informal conversations and interviews with the consenting students throughout the semester while they worked on their writing, specifically at times when they received feedback and revised their writing. A second method for generating data in this study was field notes as a participant-observer during the Advanced Comp classes. The focus of these classroom-based observations included interactions between students, students' interactions with/reactions to course materials, class discussions, and students' interactions with the teacher. Finally, I employed document analysis, specifically concerning course materials and student work in this English class. These artifacts included work that was in direct response to the curriculum and work that supplemented the curriculum. That is, an artifact could be work that is turned in and graded or work that is used in more

formative ways. I only collected data from those participants who consented to make their work available to me for research purposes.

### **Data Analysis**

I engaged in the recursive nature of qualitative data analysis (Graue & Walsh, 1998). When analyzing data, it is not a linear action: “Rather than proceeding in a straight line, this process seems more appropriately described as a bowl of spaghetti—tangled and holistic” (p. 159). I worked to understand how multiple data sources I gathered connected and disconnected. I analyzed and interpreted the data to better understand and share the stories of my focal students, their experiences as writers, their processes. This process is interpretive and subjective, but I was grounded in my conceptual framework and dedicated to highlighting the student perspective.

According to Graue and Walsh (1998), coding is finding themes within the data set, “signifiers for ideas—analytic categories that a researcher has identified in the data” (p. 163). I used my codes to help me center in on the student perspective and experience, framed by the following threads: Rosenblatt, Moffett, and Elbow, as well as the values of the course. The coding of my data took place consecutively over the course of the study at three points. Based on the data gathered, I inductively coded first (emic), prioritizing the experiences and words of individuals within the study. I looked for patterns in the code across each student (noting what was repeated across multiple students and what seemed to be distinct for the individual). I then deductively coded (etic) the data based on my conceptual framework, relevant research, and my background as an English teacher. Once those rounds of coding were completed, I unified the two in order to consider relationships between codes, relationships that influenced the next cycle of coding.

I utilized In Vivo coding software to organize and code my data. When coding my data I used In Vivo coding as it “is particularly useful in educational ethnographies with youth. The child and adolescent voices are often marginalized, and coding their actual words enhanced and deepens an adult’s understanding of their discourses, cultures, and world views” (Saldana, 2021, p. 138). During my emic coding, the student voice came through with codes such as “word vomit,” “sharing rationale,” and “conversation.” This allowed me to center in on the student perspective more as I was using their words and ideas. As my research centered on the student perspective, it was vital to highlight their words, and in turn, their stories. I coded internally my first round and then externally during my second round, focusing on the work of Rosenblatt, Elbow, and Moffett, relying on my own expertise in writing, and centering on my research questions. The two together gave me both the student outlook and teacher perspective wherein I was able to see where they overlapped and where they diverged during my third round of coding.

My third round of coding consisted of finding relationships between the two including “writer,” “freedom,” “power dynamics,” and “process.” Feedback was a parent code to multiple smaller codes, including “effective feedback,” “ineffective feedback,” “peer review,” “conferences,” “questioning,” “conversation,” and “confirmation.” I was able to see the multiple forms of feedback students were engaging with as well as what they viewed as effective/ineffective, following that feedback through their revision process. I paid close attention to the preferences of each focal student and the assumptions of both teachers on what effective feedback looked like.

While I was coding the interviews of each focal student, I condensed them into more manageable summaries that outlined the general takeaways from each interview. That allowed me to connect with my other data sources to see what aligned and what conflicted. When

analyzing the interviews, I listened to them again while coding. This helped me connect back to my data more and to my focal students. I was not only centering on their words and ideas, but could hear the inflections in their voice, at times their soft laughter, while analyzing the data. I referenced the other sources of data I had, considering inconsistencies between what was shared in the interview and what was recorded elsewhere.

One of my initial codes was “feedback” and everything to do with feedback was housed under this code. With the focus of my research centering in on feedback, which was too large of a code. I divided that into the following subcategories: “application of feedback,” “conferences,” “effective feedback,” “general feedback,” “ineffective feedback,” “peer review,” “praise,” “teacher feedback,” “are you saying,” “conversation,” and “questioning.” I noted the distinction between teacher, peer, other, and self-feedback. Teacher feedback was multifaceted and included: “conferences,” “general feedback,” “teacher feedback,” “are you saying,” “conversation,” and “questioning.” With the data that I collected closer to the end of my fieldwork I saw a shift with “conversation” and “questioning” as students were taking up those actions in their own revising and feedback. This was a factor of the course, but through analyzing my data I was able to see how the students interacted with the two and how it impacted their practices as writers. “Application of feedback,” “effective feedback,” and “ineffective feedback” also crossed over into both the student and teacher realm. “Application of feedback” connected with my “revision” code, and I utilized “simultaneous coding” (Saldana, 2021, p. 126) to note the overlap. I was able to see relationships between the codes through multiple stages of analysis of the data which led me to the larger conclusions and implications of my study. When coding, I took time to take analytical memos on anything that seemed salient, themes that seemed to cross different data sources, experiences/actions that were repeated, moments of

growth/change, and direct connections to my research questions. Those memos gave me a chance to ask questions, collect my thoughts, and begin to engage with the data.

In analyzing my data, I realized that I was looking at stories, stories of writers and how they engaged in their craft. I wanted to honor those stories and voices. As such, most of the data represented are direct quotes from my participants. Their voices shine through as it is their processes and experiences I share. I work to highlight who they are as writers and what that means to them.<sup>3</sup> By telling each of their stories I showcase seven different perspectives of what the writing process looks like. This allowed me to note the steps a student takes when revising, discuss their views on what makes feedback effective, and see the impact feedback had (or did not have) on their writing.

## **Conclusion**

This study develops insights into the processes of individual students in regards to feedback and revision in their writing. It will extend knowledge and understanding of individual writing processes and the effects of both peer and teacher feedback on them. The study will also provide another outlook on feedback in writing that is not focused on the practices of the teacher (unlike a good chunk of current research), but rather the experiences of the student. In terms of practice, the study will inform teachers as to what effective feedback could look like for students and how to go about setting up situations where students could engage in those experiences.

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<sup>3</sup> I have taken the liberty to remove filler words (“like”, “um,” etc..) when directly quoting students so that the students’ message and voice and come out as clearly as possible.

## Chapter 5: Advanced Composition

In this chapter I center on Advanced Comp, the course at Lakeview High School where I conducted my research. I outline the curriculum, focusing on how it was developed and why. I also walk through a unit of the course to showcase how it was taught and the values Duncan and Anderson designed the course around. I share a brief summary of each writing assignment I discuss in relation to students in Chapter 6 to provide background and context. The importance of community within their classrooms is discussed. Assessment and feedback are seen from the perspective of the teachers, highlighting their distinct differences and overlap. I share their reflections on the course and their thoughts on revising their own work, in this case, the class not writing. You will note that I have employed longer direct quotes from both teachers. Although this is a student focused study, I strived to emphasize the voice of all those who shared their stories and experiences with me.

### Curriculum

Advanced Composition, Advanced Comp for short, is different type of English class. Not to be confused with AP Lang, this course centers on the personal nature of writing, working to develop participants as writers, not just as students. The course was designed after Ms. Duncan, the course teacher, participated in the local Writing Project (Mr. Anderson, the other teacher in the study, participated later). When designing the course, Duncan wanted to focus on student learning:

I know six, five years ago, six years ago before I started doing this, the kids were learning. But they weren't reading my feedback. So if they were learning, it was because they were doing the work. And they were, incidentally, which we do when we produce

writing. We learn incidentally, I believe, when we produce in large quantities. Or even in moderate quantities. We're learning. Um, but I wasn't seeing like the growth in thinking about writing. And so, the difference between completing an assignment and thinking like a writer to me is really different, right?

She chose the system of the current course to get students to think like writers, “rewiring their brain” noting that is half the battle: “I see it one way, in this beautiful utopia. And half of the kids don't get it. It's not their fault. They live in a land of grades. I live in a land of learning. And I'm trying to get those two to meet somewhere. And it can be frustrating.” The majority of the curriculum is centered on the writer, allowing them to write pieces they are personally connected to. Both Anderson and Duncan questioned if they have the personal writing<sup>4</sup> weighted too heavily and if they are “neglecting” the more formal types of writing (more traditional). He noted that students grow as writers in this class, but that he also wanted “them to grow as writers in a way that is going to benefit them in their education beyond our class.” Writing towards a rubric “depersonalizes everything,” Anderson prefers when it is “more student centered” wanting students to have an actual purpose to write towards, a real audience.

Advanced Comp was set up in a block schedule and students had time in the class to engage in the work of writing: drafting, peer review, conferencing, and revision. At the start of each unit, a different essay was introduced. Duncan and Ames started with a relevant write in. A “write in” was a brief type of journal writing to start the class. For example, when they started

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<sup>4</sup> When I speak of “personal writing” it is writing that deviated from what is typically seen in high school English classrooms. High level thinking and structure were still present, but students were actively implementing that structure; it was not built for them. They were engaged in the work and making those choices as writers. When I speak of “structured,” “formal,” or “traditional” writing it is writing that typically get assigned in high school English classrooms (including informational, argumentative, and literary analysis essays). All of those have very clear structures that were taught to students. Structure was given rather than determined by the writer.

their Definition essay, students were asked to “define the word ‘wife’ (Just go with it).” They asked students to share out their write ins and would often share their writing as well. That led them into defining what the essay was about: “Definitions set boundaries—‘What is it?’ *and* ‘What is it not?’” For this essay, they were asking students to write an “*extended definition* [that] explores a complex, vague, controversial, or misunderstood idea in its full complexity—it draws the boundaries around the idea until its meaning is clear and precise—and may seek to inform, amuse, and to *persuade*.” They reminded students of the importance of their perspective when writing and a clear purpose (purpose was a theme for each of the essays and the feedback students received).

To highlight what a definition essay could look like, they had example texts; Judy Brady’s “I Want a Wife” was one they shared for the definition essay, which also linked directly to the write in. To center the students, they had question for them to consider while reading:

1. Why does Brady write about such a *normal* word? “Wife” isn’t a “complex, vague, controversial, or misunderstood” word, is it?
  - a. What is her PURPOSE in writing this?
2. What qualities does she assign to a “wife”?
  - a. What does she imply about *husbands*?

These questions allowed students to read with a purpose and gave them direct ties to the current writing assignment. Duncan and Anderson then connected the write in to the content of the example, asking students to compare and contrast their write ins and Brady’s piece, asking “what CAUSES these differences?” The importance of perspective and their unique perspectives was solidified. They then helped students determine what word might be a good one for them to define, engaging in the pre-writing process in class where they were able to bounce ideas off each other. Their assignment was to “brainstorm” possible words and to come back to class

ready to write and share on at least two distinct ideas (meaning they had a word and a purpose). The importance of prewriting was emphasized as well, making sure students were aware that it was an important part of the writing process.

The next class Anderson and Duncan shared some of their writing on possible definition topics for them. They built in time to discuss with the class their process and perspective and then asked students at their tables to share their words, centering in on one, asking them to answer the questions:

- “What does \_\_\_\_\_ sound like? Look like? Feel like?”
- “How has your perspective on this word changed as you have aged?”
- “What assumptions do others make about this word?”
- “Does your viewpoint differ?”
- “What or who has influenced how you feel about this word?”
- “What unique perspective do you offer on this word? What do you have to say that is worth hearing?”

Students could then use this brainstorming to start writing and were reminded to consider the structure of their writing and that they can use structure to highlight their purpose. Anderson and Duncan encouraged the students to not drift back into the “standard” format of writing. The remainder of class that day was workshop time for their writing. During this time, the students were able to take time to talk about their ideas if that would help them write. Anderson and Duncan spent their time conferencing with students on the previous essay. They were asked to come to the next class with a draft: “Yep, explore here. Draft. Follow your instincts. Chart a beginning, middle, and end. Struggle and then keep going. Find your meaning.”

In their next class, students read at least two model essays (a choice from eight), focusing on purpose, structure, and what drew them into the writing. They shared their topics

with their writing group and had time to draft. The days that followed, students had time to continue drafting and conferencing with Duncan and Anderson as needed, including revising their essays. Students also had dedicated time for peer feedback. They shared their drafts, reading them with their “teacher hat on,” talked with the writer about their “perceptions and responses” to their writing, asking questions along the way (focusing on purpose, organization, showing not telling, and word choice). Based on that feedback, students were asked to revise and plan to have a second draft finished at the end of the next class. The next day, they worked on fluency and analyzed each other’s writing for fluency, noting where it was strong and where it could be improved. As a group they talked about how to actually implement changes (combine, break up, rewrite, cut) and then had time to “analyze and improve” their own pieces for fluency. From there, they continued to conference with Anderson and Duncan and revised as needed.

This was the general flow of their units, building in different skills (fluency) in the context of their current writing, sharing model texts for inspiration, making sure there was time for students to engage with the process of writing and with each other. The expectation was that students would have multiple drafts, that it was a part of writing and that they would give and get feedback from their peers and their teachers. They also had weekly blogs, a lower stakes type of writing, where they asked students to comment on each other’s, engaging in dialogue. In Appendix F you can find the assignments in full that I discuss with students in Chapter 7, but below you will find a brief description of each:

- Snapshot: Details a single moment by narrowing focus to concentrate on a specific experience/event.
- Descriptive: Recrates for the reader a sensory experience of a place by capturing the essence of a place and describing rather than narrating a story.

- Definition: Explores a complex, vague, controversial, or misunderstood idea in its full complexity by drawing the boundaries around the idea until its meaning is clear and precise
- Belief: Explores or elaborates on a personal belief, achieving a clear purpose, creating a deliberate tone
- Argumentative/Commentary: Develops a thoughtful, persuasive argument from a nuance, arguable claim (Students were provided with a topic, vaccinations, and relevant research. Duncan allowed her students to choose another topic if desired, as long as they did the necessary research, while Anderson did not.)
- Final Portfolio: Students engaged in a reflective final portfolio where they:
  - Looked at the feedback they were given on their writing and discussed how that impact their revisions
  - Reflected on areas of growth for each essay from their first to final draft
  - Annotated at least 20 skills they learned in class and used in their writing
  - Reflected on their blogs and write ins and considered some of the following: what type of formal essay it could turn into, the impact blog at on them, what their favorite write in/blog was
  - Created a “franken-essay” that consisted of their best parts (introduction, body paragraph for idea development, body paragraph for word choice, conclusion, and best sentence)
  - Evaluated themselves as writers

## Community

When determining seating arrangements in class, Anderson considered the students he knew and worked to have a “strong” student at each table, filling in the rest to make sure that each table pod had a mix of genders. Building community within the classroom is tough. Anderson pulled from his experiences with the Writing Project to help by encouraging students to share their work in the “author’s chair” each day and within their table pods: “I feel like that just having that community established a lot more it affects the interactions that I have with the students in the individual conferences too I think because they're just feeling like they're part of something that's bigger than themselves.” He highlights the trust the students had in each other and the importance of that trust in peer feedback, specifically noting Alyssa, Evelyn, and

Michelle's table pod. This group came into the class not really knowing each other and over the semester, they became incredibly supportive, beyond grammar, focusing on the creative process of writing. Similar to Anderson, Duncan puts a lot of faith in her table pods, emphasizing the important of trust (developed by writing and sharing consistently with the same people); that trust helps take away some of the vulnerability that comes with sharing writing. Students are a critical component in the network of the class, as the teacher is only one person and can only do so much. It is the students who support each other, learning and growing together. Duncan also worked to build community by sharing her writing as it allowed her to show who she was as a person and writer (and modeled what sharing writing and being vulnerable looks like).

### **Assessment**

This course has not been graded in five years (administration is "pretty supportive"). Anderson has seen some pushback, but he focuses on the work students have produced and their growth. Duncan shared that students and parents were excited (the parents' response surprised her). He has worked to eliminate grades and rubrics from his classes as much as possible, wanting his interactions with the students to not be centered on grades. He wants to focus on their writing and their growth as a writer: "...using the relationships with students in order to help them see what they think and what they say and what they're interested in matters and becoming more motivated to be better writers and thinkers and speakers and readers." Anderson talked about how students are "conditioned" to write for the grade; he works to "divorce those concepts from each other." He talked about "redefining feedback" for students, so they don't view it as a checklist of what to fix to get points, but as a chance to write towards their purpose rather than their grade. Duncan also shared that there is a tension between writing for the grade and writing to grow:

But one of the things we fight in that room, which I know you've watched all semester, is like, are they taking the feedback to learn or to do it right? And it's still something that I'm pushing them against. Because ultimately, they want to be done. They want to earn their point, their goal. I wish I didn't have to give them any. But then, would they do it? I believe yes, for the record....You're trying to finish. And I'm trying to teach you. And we can't, like, move forward.

That constant balance between students writing for the grade and writing to learn was seen the entire semester. Duncan and Anderson both pushed back against this, but that power dynamic was hard to dismantle.

### **Feedback**

Over the semester, the feedback students receive is scaffolded, moving from the majority of feedback coming from teacher to student in writing conferences to the focus shifting to peer feedback. They work to transition students into learning how to give peer feedback by modeling the practice in their writing conferences. Later in the semester, they prompted students to consider the types of questions typically asked in a conference and how they could ask similar questions to their peers. Anderson has adjusted how he gives feedback over the years, moving towards a question-based format trying to not push his ideas onto students' writing: "Generally speaking I like to give feedback that is a little bit more vague because I think they have to think more." He wants to push students to engage him as a reader. He likes to read their work aloud to them, stopping to ask questions and clarifying along the way.

And it's kind of like we've taken the time that we used to spend alone writing comments and we have shifted that time to take place within the writing conferences. And it seems

like such a more valuable way of like if you're giving feedback and you're just talking to the person, that seems obviously more useful and meaningful than you know, commenting in isolation. Well, it has drawbacks too in that they have to be listening.

Conferencing is the most “rewarding” for Anderson as he gets to see their growth over time and talk to them about it. For it to be successful there has to be that freedom for students to write the piece how they imagined, even if it is in conflict with the “institutional pressures.” Similar to Anderson, Duncan also works to not put her opinion on students’ writing:

Sometimes, from my viewpoint, effective feedback is not feedback at all. I always felt like the best conferences were when I said very little and when I was asking questions. And then all of a sudden, they're like, oh, oh. And it was just like a series of questions that led them to an answer. And then we would talk about why and move on. Because I think they're so accustomed to being told what to do that having wonderings and have them, you know, feel ownership in that decision, it's their writing....I think the best feedback is mutual discovery and usually born of questions. Even when it's from them. Sometimes you can hear them in their peer conferences, and they're like, oh my gosh, they're asking questions about purpose, and I'm just like so proud of them, because they're understanding that that's what helps them through that.

She adjusts her approach to each student, some come wanting answers and she has to get them engaged in the process, while others don't want to be there at all, and she works to “engage [them] as a human first” before delving into the writing. Duncan notes that when they got rid of grades, how they gave feedback also changed:

The grading is different because we changed it five years ago. So, then the structure of feedback is different. Like, we used to do first, second, third draft, but I would just walk around the room and check off the first draft and never read them. I didn't read anything until the final draft, which is pointless to only read the final draft because it's over. And I put a grade on it, and I didn't read the feedback, and I was confused. I was like, oh, wait. When you put a grade on, it's done. Got it. So that, you know, once I really understood that I was like, oh, I've got to get to it before I put a grade on. Then I was like, I don't need to put a grade on. Grades are stupid. What do they mean anyways?

Duncan likes that now students will all learn something, and she will be able to see that growth in their conversations during conferences. When I asked her about revisions students made in their writing, she admitted that “a lot of what they did was prompted by what we asked” though she wishes that was not the case.

That's why I look forward to these essays to see what they actually got out of that. I do feel like they leave understanding writing as a process and understanding revision as essential, the majority. I do think I see them leave more receptive to feedback, which I think is really important. I see it more in advanced, confident, and creative....As always, I am looking for a better balance between when I can become less present and making them understand that my goal is their relevance. And I don't know that I talk about that enough. You don't need me as much as you think you do. And not selfishly, but just because I want them to do that. As always, I want to ask better questions. I'm still always striving to improve that and figure out how I can do a better job. I'm asking better questions to shut up more. I talk too much in conferences.

For Duncan, Advanced Comp is where she sees the most growth, surmising that the personal nature of the writing is to thank for that. She is continuing to reflect on the type of feedback she gives and how to improve that for her students, by developing better questions and listening more.

### **Reflection**

They both continue to reflect on the course, considering changes to make. Anderson wants to better “systematize” sharing examples of real student writing processes, showing revision over time. They pull previous students’ work to showcase as examples but have lost the revision history once the student graduated. Anderson also is thinking about peer review and how to make that more explicit and further highlighting the value they, as teachers, place on that type of feedback. With peer review it is the battle of providing students the freedom to give peer feedback they find relevant and determining how much to dictate/instruct them on.

### **Conclusion**

Advanced Comp was a course designed to teach the writer, not the student. It created space for students to be actively engaged in the writing process. Duncan and Anderson built in time for multiple drafts and engaged with them each step of the way through conferences, in class lessons, and peer feedback. Developing community within the classroom, and with that relationships with students, was vital to building trust. However, there still remains tension for both teachers as they balance giving feedback to help students grow as writers, as some students still “live in a land of grades” while Duncan and Anderson “live in a land of learning.” The power dynamic remained, despite their attempts. Conferences were the main form of feedback and a place where Duncan and Anderson centered in on questions to keep the student in the seat

of power as much as possible, adjusting their approaches based on their knowledge of the student.

## Chapter 6: Focal Students

In this chapter I highlight the different experiences each of my seven focal students had in the second half of the course, focusing on their four final pieces of writing: Definition, Belief, Argumentative, and their Final Portfolio. I share their perspectives of themselves as writers, note the distinctions of their processes (including revision), discuss their preferences and use of feedback, see their writing in action for four assignments, and summarize their growth and what I learned through their stories. I start and end with their perceptions of themselves as writers (through direct quotes, seen in italics) to showcase the change, or lack of change, in how they view themselves as writers. I did this to create bookends to their stories. As I am centered on the student perspective, I heavily quote each student, pulling from interviews, their writing, conferences with their teachers, peer reviews, fieldnotes, and general class conversations. I chose to have their voice as present as possible, in their own words, rather than reiterating what they shared.

### Alyssa

*First—I like to write generally. I kind of hate writing first drafts. Every time I write a first draft, I hate the first draft a lot. I think the reason I end up liking my final drafts is because I've put in work to change them. And I've gone through a process that I felt like I didn't really feel like I was necessarily going to do with that. And it's just kind of rewarding to go through and be like, I tried this new exciting thing. And to see that and have it work sometimes.*

Alyssa is a driven student in everything she works towards; her focus is paramount, and she puts her whole self into whatever she is doing. Alyssa is an athlete and an excellent student. She is a senior in Advanced Comp with Anderson and is open and willing to share her

processes and experiences. She goes into great detail about her writing, some might say too much detail, but I'd call her passionate and invested in connecting. When asked if she would consider herself a writer she stated:

I mean, it'd be a little. I don't know. I definitely write in this class, and I feel like I work through the process of writing. And therefore, that makes me a writer. But it's definitely not the first thing I would categorize myself as. So, I really like math and science. I want to be a chemical engineer. So, it's not that I don't like writing. It's just that it's kind of not my first choice.

Alyssa was invested and active in each class, working closely with her peers, engaging in conferences with Anderson, and chatting with me about writing and life, sharing her ambitions and where she wanted to go to college.

### ***Process***

When describing her writing process, she talks about it as a “web in [her] head...It’s so alive. And it’s so like, it’s chaotic, but I think it’s really beautiful. And I really like it.” She writes and tries to represent the “web” in her head, getting as close as possible but never quite there as it is difficult to translate the thoughts in her head to the “linear” nature of writing. When Alyssa starts writing, she comes up with a list of ideas and goes with the one that “clicks” for her. She spends quite a bit of time thinking and staying in the web of her thoughts. Once she finds one, she considers how to write about it and if she is unable to articulate how she would write about it, she scraps it and moves onto another idea. When asked about starting a draft, she notes, “I’m sitting there like, I don't know what I want to say. And my cursor is just blinking at

me. Like, you don't know what you want to say.” She leaves several pages open on her document and drafts multiple beginnings, each on its own page.

For Alyssa, she must start at the beginning, she focuses on the flow of the writing, wanting to make sure that each idea builds off the next. To accomplish that she insists on writing and rewriting the beginning until she likes it. She describes her writing process as continual first drafts, meaning that she writes the first draft, continuing to revise, until it says exactly what she wants it to say. In that way, she is a perfectionist, and her writing process is unique; Alyssa writes until it represents the “web” in her head as closely as possible. She spends so much time on that initial draft, it is not a typical first draft as she edits and revises along the way:

It's a lot of writing it, deleting it, writing it again, kind of thing. And then just sitting there and working it in my head, which doesn't necessarily always require me to put it on document but working what I want to say in my head and being like, okay, well that's where this train of thought would go. And that's not quite where I want the essay to go. And then I don't waste the time writing it. When I get stuck, I generally just start at the top of my essay, read it out loud up to the point where I am and kind of get some momentum going for the train of thought there.

The Snapshot essay was her least favorite. It was early on, and she was still new at descriptive writing: “And so I was kind of sitting there like, I’m good at arguing, like, I don’t know what to do with this.” Her first draft was a literal “still photo,” it lacked the senses: sound, taste, smell. It was visual and emotions, so most of her revision was focused on bringing in those senses. She deleted half of it and that was hard.

She plays with formatting, employing single sentence paragraphs, interesting fonts, and footnotes, allowing her to build in her own commentary about her writing that otherwise wouldn't quite fit in (she used footnotes in her writing to accomplish this and to better represent the "web" of thoughts in her head). She had found hacks that work well for her, allowing her to see what she has and continue to work with it to make it what she wants: "I did like my plan on like the one side and I made it a browser that was little on the side and then I made my other one where it's enough that I can see the entire document....and then I can figure out what I want to play with." Alyssa hates her first drafts; she likes her final drafts better as she has "put in the work to change them...it's just kind of rewarding to go through and be like, I tried this new exciting thing." The investment she puts in matters to her.

### ***Feedback***

With so much time spent on her continual first drafts, when conferencing the conversations she had with Anderson were very valuable to her, but she did note that she appreciated written feedback the most as it was easier to remember and implement later in her revisions. However, in our interviews, it was the conversations she had, where she was able to talk through her rationale and choices that seemed to affirm who she was as a writer and encourage her to maintain control over the purpose of her writing. Her Descriptive essay was her favorite. It originally "didn't do justice to the web" inside her head. She had a conversation with Anderson "about ways to potentially develop" it and decided on footnotes which allowed her to "go on tangents....I managed to put a strong sense of purpose and weave it throughout." She liked it as it best represented the web inside her head. It let her get closer to the non-linear structure of the web inside her head. She likes the "back and forth" conversation

she has with Anderson during conferences where she can share her rationale. She appreciates that he is open to her not making a change he suggests based on her rationale/writer choice.

The source of feedback matters to her: “I’d like to think that it’s because [Anderson] just gives better suggestions and better feedback...either in the form of a question...or phrasing.” Feedback from Anderson tends to come in the form of a question, reading it aloud, giving suggestions, new writing techniques. She valued the feedback from Anderson more. When questioned on this she shared that it wasn’t a power dynamic in that she was worried about her grade and wanted to make sure that what she wrote was what he wanted:

There's definitely some credibility....with Mr. Anderson, I for sure knew if I had a reason that I had something the way it was, I could leave it that way. So, it wasn't because he was grading me and that if I didn't fix it, then he could just take points off. It wasn't necessarily that I was tailoring my writing to him. But I also know he's got how many years of experience writing, and he just knows some things that I don't have the experience for. So, there is some respect there.

It was the respect she had for him and his years of experience writing and giving feedback that she valued the most. For her the source of the feedback truly mattered. When I explicitly asked her about what effective feedback looked like for her, she highlighted the conversations she had about her writing: “Well, I like to talk with somebody about my writing if I can, because with the descriptive essay, it let me brainstorm the idea of notes. It lets me develop in a way that [is] satisfactory to me. I like it.” That back-and-forth conversation and questioning allowed her to reflect on her work and consider potential changes. She did note that those conversations, at times, “would be...a lot of justifying what [she] had versus actually changing something.” Alyssa is strong willed and not willing to step back from the explicit writer choices

she has made in her attempt to represent the “web” in her head on the page: “A lot of people are like, oh, I really just don't want to write this. I just need to write something. And I'm sitting there and I'm thinking, well, I have something I want to say. And so, because I have something I want to say, I need to make sure I say it in a way that conveys what I want to say.”

For peer feedback “it definitely matters who is giving the feedback,” noting that she “considers” what they say, but her own opinion holds more weight for her. She had some feedback for those peers who gave responses to her work:

So the feedback that's being given is less about trying to grow what I'm doing and more trying to put a little bit of what they're doing into it, and I find that even if I have a reason, they're kind of like, yeah, but I would still kind of go with this, and I was like, yeah, but I have a reason that I'm going with something else.

Alyssa felt that peers were pushing what they thought her writing should be rather than listening to the writer choices she was making and what she was working towards even when she shared her rationale with them. She appreciates the “fresh eyes” on her work though. Alyssa also noted that peers tend to give positive feedback which boosts confidence. She became close to her writing group, especially Evelyn, even though she typically did not spend time with them outside of class, that strong relationship was a foundation for her (and for them). When talking about peer feedback she shared that it was an area she could continue to grow in. Discussing peer feedback with her in our interviews did not showcase the experiences I saw her have both in her table group and during her work with Evelyn. Relationships are vital to Alyssa. She cares deeply about her friends and family, and people in general, noting “I think it's actually generally pretty helpful to be engaged in the world and actually care about things.” I saw this during class

and her interactions with her peers and during our talks. She is programmed to care deeply about most things, her writing and those around her.

### *Writing*

She came up with the idea for her Definition essay based on an experience with a friend who was upset; it made her want to dig into the idea of what makes a good friend. She wrote it with her friend in mind and shared it with her. She started it at the beginning, as she does the majority of the time and tried out “a bunch of different beginnings” to see what the right fit was for her. For the structure, she modeled it after a textbook, including an actual definition of “bestfriend” not “best friend,” an extended learning section, and tables to mimic an actual textbook. She intended to bind the piece together and share it with the friend who was having difficulties. A major revision for her in this piece was moving the transition to the top as it helped clarify a point and linked the otherwise disjointed halves together. Most of her major changes were related to formatting, as she wanted it to be like a textbook chapter:

I put it in two columns, and I inserted Google drawings into this, and I just literally took out my textbook. So, I added the connect to your life and the reflect part and check for understanding, which made it more like a textbook, and I added, like, a glossary.

This highlights the creativity Alyssa valued in her writing and her playing with structure/format. She took inspiration from her life and experiences and channeled that into her writing.

Her Belief essay was about the word “sonder” though she didn’t come to find that word until after she wrote the piece, but felt it summed up what she hoped to communicate to the reader:

It's the idea that everybody is living a life, like everybody, even past five people you don't know, is living a life as complex and vivid as your own. And just having understanding for those people and understanding that you don't know what's going on in their lives, and just kind of holding back on choosing to judge them for that.

She started off writing this piece by “writing all the things [she] believe[s],” and from that list she determined what she would be comfortable writing about and sharing. She thought through scenarios where similar situations played out in her life. She connected her final idea to her experiences on the swim team, a huge part of her life. Very little changed from her first draft to her final noting that “because it was a real feeling...[she] just put it on paper.” She changed the wording for a section to create a parallel structure and make it clearer. Similar to her other writings she “still scrapped the very first thing.” Her process was a bit brutal, the first two hours of work she put into it she ended up with nothing to show. She started it over again three different times until she had a beginning that she was satisfied with. From there she worked to “develop an arc,” to find that thread that held the piece together. For peer feedback for this essay, she liked it as it made her think about her essay more, questioning if she agreed with their thoughts, questioning herself on the purpose of her writing. Many times, the feedback was on things she already thought through and had a rationale for the choice she ended up making. Even if she did not take up those recommendations the conversation was still helpful.

When writing her Argumentative essay, she did not have as much of the chaos present as she typically does in her head, her “web.” This happened as it was a different type of writing. Alyssa did not originally like the argumentative as she connected it to her ability to argue, something she’s been told she is good at (which she didn’t like). She has a bit of a complex about being good at arguing—thinks it is not a great skill to have. The purpose is

incredibly different for argumentative writing compared to writing that is more personal: “I’m trying to prove a point...that’s what I focused on rather than trying to convey an experience, an emotion which requires so much more detail.” Her essay has an “arc” in it, tying the sections together. When I asked what Alyssa meant by “arc” she said, “It kind of builds an argument rather than just saying, and here’s more evidence...this evidence works because it’s walking you through the logical steps.” She did not revert to the typical five paragraph structure of writing and directly stating her argument. Alyssa did get peer feedback on this piece from Evelyn. There was a point in her essay that Evelyn recommended moving into the third paragraph, Alyssa noted that it might have been a good fit as it would be “a solid point to have in there.” She did not end up making that change as she “liked the way it transitioned to the next part...it’s drawing an analogy parallel to the rest of [her] argument that they might have already had preconceived notions on.” Her beliefs on peer review and feedback seem to change and develop over the course of the semester. She still does not always take up that feedback, but she does consider it during revision rather than putting it to the side. During our final interview, Alyssa noted that she liked her Argumentative essay better now that she had written it, but there are not the stylistic choices in it that she has used in the past (she was not as creative in her formatting). She talked on this piece for thirty minutes and when I asked if she now cares about this (she didn’t previously) she said, “I tend to care about a lot of things” but that there were still “some things [she] would rather engage” with. Alyssa, being Alyssa, became invested in the piece and wanted it to be strong and what she thought it could be.

In her Final reflective portfolio, she described her growth:

I created a more clear and consistent voice that I use throughout my writing. And while I might not use footnotes or format my essay like textbook very often in my essays, it

allowed me to experiment with different options and give me the confidence and enthusiasm to try new things in my writing rather than just writing how I already know how to write.

She started with the “image of the web,” connected to her evidence. The structure was based on the beginning of her writing process to the end. She went back into her other essays’ revision histories to find the evidence to support her reflections. This time, she did not get feedback, but a friend did read it and gave her confirmation that she was “doing good.”

Alyssa liked Advanced Comp better than other English classes as she was able to write about what she cared about: “I feel like I can generally get to something where I’m like, yeah, this says something I want it to say...it’s like I’m writing about something I care a lot less about than anything I write here” (referencing other writing for English classes). She is able to write how things are in her head, it sounds more like her: “I like the word raw a lot” (when describing her voice). She notes that she is not witty or funny in her writing as that is not her. She enjoyed playing around stylistically with new-to-her choices, including an “em dash”<sup>5</sup> and footnotes. Alyssa also shared that this was the course that she felt she learned the most from all of her classes in high school so far. For her, it was the class that valued learning and growth, rather than formulaic writing, the class where she was actually able to sound like herself in her writing:

I kind of figured out that I like the chaos and bringing as much of that as I can to my writing while still being clear and concise, which is insanely hard to do to be chaotic and clear at the same time. It's just not a thing. Also, this is the first class where we've

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<sup>5</sup> An “em dash” is a long dash (—)

specifically worked on descriptive writing. So, honing who I am as a descriptive writer and working on that, it clicked pretty fast, but it's still like that snapshot, snapshot essay. I was like, wait, what do I want to do with this kind of thing? So yeah, mostly descriptive writing and then just kind of like examining the writing process that I have and understanding that, no, this is actually how I write and being like, this is why I did what I did here rather than just writing, because a lot of the time I can just write and it's good enough to do whatever it needs to do, but it isn't necessarily at every instance, this is the word I want to use here. This is the best choice, but taking that and actually thinking about that, particularly in this class, because the focus is significantly more on learning in this class than like any other class I've taken, which is insane.

Part of that was the freedom students had and the assignments that allowed them to personally connect to what they were writing about. Her writing is not motivated by grades, she writes to prove her point. She creates a new paragraph “because it feels like [she’s] transitioning to something else” rather than to meet the requirements of a rubric. She writes for herself.

### ***Takeaway***

Alyssa creates a continual first draft, striving for perfection, for it to represent exactly how she sees the “web” in her head. Her voice is strong and present; she has something to say and has strong feelings about how to say it exactly. She evolved over the course of the semester and became more open to feedback from others, specifically her peers, noting that she appreciated the multiple perspectives, but she would still make the choice on using the feedback based solely on if it supported her purpose and the vision she had for the piece. This view on peer feedback aligned more with what I observed in the classroom, specifically the dynamic between Alyssa and Evelyn (another focal student). The relationships Alyssa formed with her

table group and Anderson were important to her, both as a person and a writer. With Anderson, Alyssa found the most value in the conversations, though she liked written feedback as she was able to refer back to it when revising. The conversations with Anderson allowed her to share her rationale, affirm the explicit choices she made as a writer, and (early in the process) helped with idea generation. She leaned more towards engaging with Anderson's feedback as he was the expert, and she respected his opinions. When revising, she routinely deleted large chunks of text that no longer served the piece, played with chunks of writing (moving them around like a puzzle), experimented with structure/format, and read her work aloud to determine if it sounded right. The personal connections she had with her writing in Advanced Comp mattered greatly to her. It provided her with the chance to learn and develop as a writer rather than just writing. She was able to develop her voice, make explicit stylistic choices, and take chances in her writing. The freedom to write what she knew and present it in unique ways made her even more invested in her writing and in her growth as a writer.

*Last—Like I said before, I kind of like the chaos in the writing....I use a lot of conjunctions and I start sentences with the conjunctions and I have things that are definitely run on sentences, but I mean to have them be run on sentences and sentence fragments and stuff like that, where it's like things I didn't use before because you got points off for using like sentence fragments and stuff like that, where it's part of what I like about this class is it's like, you know, you can actually write like you're trying to write and get your point across, but I just kind of like bringing that perspective and just kind of like the wonder at like the little things and just it's kind of how I see the world and just trying to put that on paper for whoever's reading it.*

**August**

*First—I know I have the ability to write, and I know I can write well, but I wouldn't consider myself to be a writer because I don't do it very often and I'm normally really writing for a class.*

August is hard working, organized, and detail oriented. He is a senior and tends to keep to himself. He always volunteers to share his writing in class. August always has a unique take or phrase within his writing that makes me smile. He shares that he is capable of writing and writing well but does not consider himself a writer as he does not engage in writing often outside of class. As a writer, August enjoys writing when it is concrete and descriptive, less “philosophical.” He needs and enjoys structure; he likes to have a prompt when writing. The class also involved short writing in the form of blogs and August noted, “I do a lot more rambling for some of the blogs, which I really like. I also don't like the blogs because it kind of makes me feel like a Facebook mom.” For him, writing in class was “kind of better” than writing alone as there are “standards” that must be met. Writing alone does not have a set direction and can be unfocused. He liked having something to work towards. He wants to be told where to go, he needs direction.

### ***Process***

For his writing process, he starts at the beginning and works his way through, though he does note that he tends to forget about conclusions. He is very detail oriented, and those details lead him to a purpose (he finds themes within them). When it comes to purpose, that is something he is still working on. For example, in his Belief essay he had a purpose, but it was impersonal, so he had to “scrap it” and work on a new one. He thinks he struggles with finding his purpose as he starts with many ideas and does not know where to go with it. Starting with a lot of ideas, he centers in on one and then elaborates from there. August likes to get his ideas onto the page first and then revises later. When asked about his process, he shared that he takes

breaks as they “serve as a checkpoint...and give me time to think about what I’ve written about, and just have some ideas at the back of my head,” taking that time to settle and reflect. He typically wrote down the majority of what he wanted to say and then added in the little details. Most of his writing is done in his room at his desk and he listens to music, typically random playlists. His preference is to get his ideas on the page and then go back to revise later. He does not read his work aloud, though he likes it when Anderson does that.

### ***Feedback***

At the beginning of the semester, August conferenced with Anderson quite a bit, but ended up “relying” on in-class conferencing as he wanted freedom during his contact time. He forgot that scheduling additional conferences outside of class time was an option. When Anderson reads aloud August likes that as it “allows [him] to see any errors” compared to if Anderson read in his head and then gave comments. In conferencing he finds the most value in the conversation, compared to written feedback. He needs feedback and direction and wants to please his teachers and audience. Conversations are important to him with feedback, to be able to hear people explain it and get a better sense of what they are trying to say. However, he does like written notes as they serve as a reminder when he is revising, but those alone don’t allow him to “get the vibe or intent” of what they’re saying. When conferencing with Anderson, August notes that he “make[s] big changes to [his] essay” as he does what is recommended, following the teacher’s guidance. This is not as much of a writerly choice. Good feedback for August is knowing if his “word choice is right”, notes on formatting, and a cohesive match between his purpose and ideas making sure he is focused. This is consistent for him across all his writing.

In our final interview when I asked him about effective feedback, he had more direction. He took ownership of his writing, noting that he'd like to come to conferences "focusing on things that I might think are off." In this way, he would be leading the conversation, rather than being led. From there, he would like to have someone tell him what he should do with the part he is struggling with. "I feel that if the feedback is highly detailed and kind of expands on some of the ideas I was trying to make, it's pretty effective." Within this he wanted to see different options on how to approach writing and then make the choice himself, rather than be dictated to. He is okay with coming into a conference with an idea of what he wants to discuss but also would like someone to read through his whole piece to ensure he "hasn't missed anything."

August had not had much experience with peer review in Advanced Comp by our first interview but noted that in past experiences it was short and not very detailed. The feedback he did get were things he could have gotten from Anderson, but the added perspective was "nice." The overlaps on feedback included detail, parallel structure, grammar, mostly surface-level things. When he talked with Anderson he got "more in-depth stuff." While it is nice to have the "touch-up" on his writing he prefers deeper feedback. He would conference with Anderson first if given the choice and then with a peer. When he conferences with Anderson, he "make[s] big changes to [his] essay." August highlighted that this format is what Anderson also recommends for students. He did have peer conferences for his reflective, definition, and argumentative essays. During our second interview, August stated again that having a "another set of eyes" was helpful, but that peer review is "annoying." It was the scheduling part that bothered him. Anderson has a system in place for his conferences, but scheduling with a peer is more difficult. He likes having a conversation with a peer: "I feel like having written and verbal

is nice, because I can get their opinions when they talk to me, and then I can read the notes that they've made later on and just kind of keep them as a reminder." He liked having conversations about his work with both his peers and Anderson as it allowed him time to ask questions and get clarification, as well as trouble shoot areas where he was stuck.

### ***Writing***

When he starts revising, he "focuses a lot on the details and kind of makes a purpose from those." He starts with the details and pulls a purpose from there, elaborating. He "instantly fixes any comments...because those are the stuff that's highlighted and...more noticeable." He almost always fixes what Anderson notes as Anderson has the "authority" and "higher knowledge" and "therefore has a more valid and experienced opinion." As of our first interview he did not have a disconnect between his style and the feedback he was given by Anderson. When revising a more structured piece he finds it easier to jump back and forth between different parts as it is "more formulated." The majority of the focus is on the content of the body paragraphs, the introduction and conclusion are of lesser importance. He feels neutral about revising, he knows it helps him grow as a writer and that he can apply what he learns in one essay to another. For example, Anderson asked him to go into more detail in his Snapshot essay, zooming in, and he also used that in his Descriptive essay (car ride vs. raindrop on a railing). When the semester first started August did more revisions than he did later in the semester. He did revise more before conferences and ended up using conferences as a "last minute check." He feels capable of revising on his own but says it "wouldn't be as effective as having someone else be there" to catch the "little details" like grammar and wordiness. In our third interview when asked about revising on his own August notes that he is typically good at keeping his writing focused and centered on his purpose.

For his Definition essay he got feedback from Anderson that his intro and conclusion did not “match” the body of his essay. To fix this, he “tweaked” his purpose. When he started writing, it was something that was just depressing and sad, not something with a purpose, Anderson helped him sharpen that to “what’s the worst that could happen in a certain scenario.” They worked to “modify” the intro, sharpening the focus and the connection to the other paragraphs. Anderson offered suggestions on what could be changed/added and walked August through possible options. August took the feedback and turned his introduction into an “extended metaphor” about climbing a mountain and meeting obstacles along the way. Before this revision, his introduction was focused on happiness and how you can find it in the world while his body paragraphs went into all of the terrible things that can happen. He liked that he was able to go into so much detail about one single emotion. He was able to do this because the definition was more “philosophical” than the belief. His definition essay was his favorite and he was the most passionate about it. It was the personal connection that made it the most meaningful for him. He had the most to say about it in actually writing it, but also in sharing about his process with me during our interviews. It was related to knowing when to speak and what the right thing to say was in the moment, about listening. He considers himself a listener, noting that he probably listens more than he should, not always sharing his thoughts. This essay was centered on relationships and the ebbs and flows between people. He noted that listening was a theme for the most of his essays.

His Belief essay was on “waiting for the right time to speak.” He “elaborated on conversation etiquette and waiting for the right moment to speak and just kind of sitting and listening.” August wrote about the “rhythm” of a conversation, pausing, listening, repeating and the impact of listening and conversations in his life, both at home and at school. He elaborated

on why he likes to listen, talking about how it helps others, centering in on relationships, he “passively” takes it in. When he started writing his Belief he had a few points that he wanted to have in there, so he wrote them down, added detail, and then transitions. His process was as follows: He figured out what major points he wanted, fleshed those out and then thought about how they connect together and how to make it flow. He notes that if that doesn’t happen, he starts writing and then makes sure to hit the points he has in his “head.” He had to revise his purpose (“age is based on experience” to “waiting for the right time to speak”). He was missing the personal connection and because of that he could not expand. The central point he ended up with after revision was more “relatable.” He made the change of purpose after a conference with Anderson because he realized he didn’t have a connection to it, and it wasn’t going to work out. With that change he was able to put in more examples and expand. He conferenced with Anderson for a second time (he did not have a peer conference) where it was recommended that he add in dialogue, but he chose to not add in dialogue everywhere. He had a monologue of his thoughts but additional dialogue outside of that did not fit into the topics of his paragraphs. He added in dialogue to his second paragraph that focused on “speaking patterns in a conversation.” He didn’t feel the need to add more because “the important parts about waiting your turn happens in your head instead of, like, talking out loud.” When asked if he could provide an example of written feedback that was confusing for him, he noted times when Anderson asked him to “elaborate” but he didn’t know where to go with it. He tried to elaborate as much as he was able by adding detail and describing more but followed up with a conference to get clarification. He did feel that those changes made the piece stronger because “having the little details kind of puts the reader in your perspective.” The structure of this piece stayed the same until the final draft: conversation etiquette with family, friends and family, school, being

cut off, and his feelings. He did not undergo any other big revisions. This was his least favorite as he did not follow through with his structure. He wanted to have a pattern of story and then elaboration, but each part did not end up having that. He was not happy with how this piece turned out as he was not able to go into as much detail as he wanted (something he loves). August did notice that it was connected to the other writing he did during the semester: “I kind of noticed that a lot of my essays involved, um, like my voice not being heard or me just kind of sitting and listening and watching.”

When writing his Argumentative piece, he “fell back to the format of previous essays [he’s] done in [his] sophomore or freshman year.” He went from evidence to rebuttal and filled in additional details which he really liked, as details are his thing. When asked if that type of structure was something he wanted to move away from he said yes, though it is a “good default,” he wanted to do something “different.” I pushed on the “default,” and he said that was “good” because of how “standard and systematic it is.” The structure tells you exactly how to write it and what to include. He appreciated the freedom he has had in terms of learning this semester, rather than the “enforcement” of the default structure. August used one of the kernel structures shared by Anderson: overview of issue, his thoughts, question, response to question, conclusion. He started by picking a structure, a solid foundation before he started writing. He describes his claim as “awkwardly forceful” as he recommended that those who do not get vaccinated should be fined which he felt violated the 1<sup>st</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> amendment and gave “awkward dictator vibes.” It did not sound like him, more like an overlord dictator” but that was not his intention. He did like writing the piece, specifically his rebuttal as he “got to look at a website...about conspiracy theories.” He was “proud” that he was able to include those in his writing in a way that supported his purpose. August did a peer conference for this piece, both the

peer and Anderson noted that he needed to be clearer that there was not a link between Autism and vaccines. The peer also gave some grammatical feedback and “wording changes.” He also revised to provide more examples about a few things, including herd immunity. During our second interview, he shared that he was done with this piece, after adding the works cited Anderson reminded him of but at our third interview, he shared that he ended up revising his intro and conclusion to improve the flow of the piece. He did this by expanding them as they were quite short. During his last conference with Anderson, they were focused on grammar. He ended up feeling like the piece was “pretty good” but “still [had] conflicting feelings about the tone” as it was not something he would actually say. He would rather be in the middle, rather than pick a side which makes him feel “awkward” when he must choose a position.

When asked about his Final he shared that he put in the “required amount of information” so it was a lot from his previous writing. His process for the Final looked like him noting the topics he wanted to write about. He pasted in the requirements for the essay, calling them a “rubric” to make sure he had all the parts he needed, wrote a bit, took a break and came back. He spent a day writing it and then came back to it. August did not make any major revisions but added an additional paragraph on blogs. When he wrote about his experiences in the class he wrote about the blogs and write-ins (something he had mentioned to me before as he liked the structure of them). For this assignment he was not able to conference with Anderson or a peer. He understood why that was the case, but “prefer[ed] to have feedback.” He did not think through some of the questions that Anderson typically asks when writing as he wanted it done. He did have some difficulty in writing and reflecting within the Final: “It’s hard to tell a story accurately if it’s based off another story. So, I feel like it’s kind of like retelling a joke that you heard one time.” He felt awkward retelling his writing journey over the course of the

semester. The main thing he learned was “writing about writing is hard.” He was unsure what he learned about himself as a writer though, describing himself as “decent.”

### *Takeaway*

Writing August has done for Advanced Comp has been different than previous writing, more personal: “I feel that the essays I’m doing now are a lot more interesting and I enjoy doing them more.” He is able to add more details to his writing because he has “been able to explore more creative topics.” August appreciated the freedom of choice in writing, both in topic and structure, moving away from the “standard” format for most of his writing. He does like structure in writing though because it is organized and gives him something to work towards. He describes himself as an organized person and notes that there could be some overlap there. When asked why structure was important to him, specifically MLA formatting, August shared that while he still understands it and knows how to use it, he does not “want to do it as often.” With Advanced Comp there is more freedom, but August finds that to be challenging as he is “not very good at making decisions...so picking a topic can be hard.” He also struggles with not having a set goal/parameters. To combat this, he creates a “list of ideas” that he wants to include and builds off that. He tends to pick the topic he has the most to say on. He initially struggled with finding the purpose in his writing, but by the end of the semester, he felt strong in focusing and centering the piece on his clearly defined purpose.

When first starting a piece, he gets it all on the page, taking breaks to reflect, and then revises it later. I saw a change in August’s ability to engage in the freedom, moving away from writing to please his teachers. For example, in his second essay (Belief), he did not apply the feedback to his writing that Anderson recommended and went with his choice instead. This would not have happened for his first essay. He appreciated the conversations he had in

conferences and during peer feedback as they allowed him a better sense of the feedback and gave him a chance to ask questions. He went from needing specific action items for revision, to leading the conversation and discussing possible options. While peer feedback provided him with another perspective, he found that it typically focused on surface level changes rather than the deeper feedback he got with Anderson (leading him to prefer conferences with Anderson first with peer review as a touch up, though conferences also became a last-minute check in for him). In terms of growth, he noted at the end of the semester that the lessons he learned along the way impacted the revisions and choices he made in later essays. He was able to apply that feedback and knowledge across different topics and structures. August moved to revising more before conferencing and used it as a last-minute check near the end of the semester. This shows a growth in his confidence and his skill set as a writer. He has gained confidence that he can write on his own but still enjoys feedback from another as a “fail-safe.”

*Last—Decent...I feel like that I'm more confident than I was because I'm able to do more stuff on my own. But I still like to have someone to edit my stuff as a fail-safe.*

### **Evelyn**

*First—I'd say who I am as a writer is probably a creative writer. I hate writing argumentative essays like we're doing today. I hate doing research essays. But I just love to write about my thoughts and things that I'm passionate about rather than like in regular English class. This is advanced comp class, you know, and so we do a lot more creative writing. But then English class last year, we did a lot of just like argumentative and research essays, and I hated that. And I feel like I couldn't like express myself, I guess.*

Evelyn considers herself a writer and writes every single day. She is a senior with a close-knit group of friends. She writes poetry about what is on her mind and shares it with friends in a “poetry group chat,” and she journals each day: “And it was just really therapeutic. I feel like it's just a really good way to just get your thoughts out. Because sometimes it's just a big mess. And you just need to just write it out.” It is important to her to be passionate about what she is writing. She notes that it is funny as it “goes hand in hand” with writing, but she does not enjoy reading as she is slow (though she is trying to become a reader). Evelyn enjoys the freedom more in Advanced comp. She is working on using different styles/types more in her writing (different voices). People have told her she is good at being “fluent” in her writing, meaning her word choice and phrasing is good, there is flow. Creativity is a strength of hers and allows her to express herself.

### ***Process***

For her process she likes to “word vomit,” getting all of her thoughts onto the page and then work with it as it is harder to “manage” when it is only in her brain as she is a “visual person. She likes to make a plan on paper and then put it into the computer: “when I handwrite things, it just sticks in my head more.” She also wants to work on her structure in writing, to help with this she tries to write out a plan first: “it would just be better if I...just reorganize or have a plan first.” Evelyn puts everything down in “a big, jumbled mess”—trying to write a plan out and notes the “jumbled mess” is stressful. She realized this was something she struggled with during AP Lang when she started to write an essay and had “no idea” what she was doing. She throws it all on paper, works with it, continually reading it aloud, deleting and rewriting, at times starting from scratch.

Her writing for argumentative is a different process than a more creative piece. She notes that with a factual piece there is a “right or wrong answer that you have to look for” and the structure is more ridged, a list of requirements to meet, less freedom. The motivation was different. It was for the grade rather than because she genuinely enjoyed revising and working on it. She describes herself as an over-writer and notes that getting rid of unneeded information is something she is still working on. For example, she saw a pattern of having to delete the first paragraph of each essay. Evelyn works to have her voice shine in her writing but still aims to grow as a writer: “I love, I love just putting out whatever I have in my head on the paper because that's when it sounds the most real. Yeah, I like to consider myself creative, but I feel like I could be more creative.” She values writing and the writing process and wants to engage with people who also value that and put effort into it. This class has helped her become this type of reader, reflecting on, and taking meaning from their writing.

### ***Feedback***

Evelyn is very clear about what type of feedback she wants: comments on her writing that she can then talk to the person about, sharing her rationale about her choices and hearing their ideas “that’s the most helpful combination”. She wants to have a conversation about it, written comments don’t do enough (verbal lets you “get it through the person’s head”).

She likes to know all of the feedback and doesn’t get overwhelmed hearing it all and doesn’t want people worried about “hurting her feelings”. She wants good feedback and talks about using feedback and applying it to writing in the future as well. Perspectives from multiple readers is appreciated as long as they are engaging in thoughtful and useful feedback practices: “When people read your essay and try and really think about it and can connect the dots and think of the big picture. I just like when people actually like really think about it and aren't

afraid to tell me what I should fix. I love that.” That conversation and thoughtfulness matters to Evelyn, she wants the “real and raw” again not just a smiley face sticker. Evelyn cares about those who read her writing and wants in depth feedback from them, more than just surface level concerns like grammar.

She appreciates Anderson’s feedback as he goes in-depth, beyond the grammar and gives ideas but encourages students to make it their own. Unfortunately, Evelyn has not always had great experiences with feedback from other teachers who just “skim” it, unlike Anderson who “actually reads it and he wants you to understand it.” Anderson’s feedback fosters relationships with students and Evelyn can tell that he wants them to understand and grow. Evelyn shared a moment that Anderson opened her mind to subtlety in writing: “Mr. Anderson said, I don't even think you need to have your claim in here at all. I don't even think you need to say it. I think you give it off enough....I didn't even have the mindset that like I can have the reader infer the purpose. I don't need to say it.” Evelyn did share that she almost always applies the feedback she gets from Anderson in her revisions and that seemed to be rooted a bit in the teacher-student dynamic: “I think that if it’s just somebody who’s either smarter than you or just has more experience in writing. Or a teacher, like an authority figure.” She takes their opinion with the assumption that they know what they are talking about and are most likely right.

When it comes to peer review, grammar is okay, but that is better later on in the process: “I just really appreciate it when they try and find meaning.” Evelyn wants to connect to her readers, wants them to take their time, engage, and process. Alyssa and Evelyn worked together a lot. She feels she learned from Alyssa quite a bit, highlighting her style, creativity, and how meaningful her writing is, and the inspiration Evelyn took from that. She does note that it would probably be helpful to get additional perspectives as they always work together. She finds peer

feedback “really helpful,” but notes that not all students give peer feedback like Alyssa does as they do not get into the deeper meaning. In that way, peer review can be hit or miss, it really depends on who is giving her feedback and how invested they get in the process: “And they’re trying to put down like things so that they can have things for you to revise. Rather than actually reading it and thinking about it.” Conversation with a peer giving feedback matters to Evelyn. When she does not make a change based on feedback, she finds herself wanting to know why the change was recommended in the first place, because if she knew she might have made that change. Evelyn values feedback that is relational, when a reader cares about her writing and gives it consideration and genuine thought-out feedback, rather than focusing on surface level things.

Evelyn sometimes “gets lazy” as Anderson gives strong feedback, and she knows that she will get to talk with him during conferences: “He’s really good at giving ideas. And then I can make it my own.” She shared her student portfolio with me and talked a bit about her experiences in conferences. In one they focused on showing not telling, getting rid of info that is not needed (something she struggles with). She does miss conferencing with Anderson more as he “gives really good feedback” and with that she can take a bit of a backseat and not have to always think about her own writing as much as he will give her good direction. This was a change as Anderson was asking them all to write until they were stuck towards the end of the semester. She became “kind of dependent on conferences” with both Alyssa and Anderson as they helped a ton. But for her final, she looked forward to doing it on her own, as it sounded exactly like it was coming from her. In the future when she does not have access to conferences, she plans to ask herself the same questions that typically come up in them and continue to comment on her own writing, noting “it’s just answering them that I have problems

with.” Evelyn had strong relationships with both Anderson and Alyssa as friendship with Alyssa developed in the class (they were not friends before the class), and Anderson is “one of her favorite English teachers.”

### ***Writing***

Evelyn does not care for revising her work at the beginning of the process but tends to enjoy it once she gets into it. It is time consuming, but the bigger factor for her is that she already wrote it and has to write it again. She finds reading her writing aloud helpful. When asked about differences in her process for argumentative versus more creative pieces: “I don't know if there would be any differences because usually when I review or revise, I just read over it out loud. And then as I go, fix things, I then think of it as a whole when I'm done. And I feel like I would do that for this, too.” When revising her Argumentative essay, she followed a similar revision process, starting by reading it aloud. She likes to get it all on paper before working with it, reading it again and again until it sounds “perfect.” She fixes along the way, removing and rewriting as needed. At times she trashes it and starts again from scratch. For example, she started again from scratch on her argumentative paper. Structure was something she always had to revise, “really unorganized and having thoughts everywhere,” noting it would be better if she started off with a plan.

Earlier in the semester Evelyn would apply feedback when revising without really thinking about the change, just based on what Anderson recommends/comments on (typically smaller things), but it took over her writing “a little bit.” She did push back on this in her belief essay; Anderson recommended she move a section, but she didn't like that change and kept it the same, but she doesn't do that very often and tends to take the advice. She reflects in the moment when I'm talking to her and says that she doesn't always ask “why” a change is recommended

and wishes she would. She thinks that if she thought about revisions she was making more (on Anderson's recommendation) it would improve her writing, rather than just making it as he said so: "I usually just take people's advice and do it without thinking about it and trying to make it my own." It is impacted by the teacher-student dynamic or if she is getting feedback from someone with more experience or whom she believes is smarter than her. This class taught her how to revise her own work. She now comments on her own writing as she writes it, reflecting and questioning; she builds a conversation with herself in her writing. It helped her think about the big picture and move beyond smaller mistakes. This conversation is continued with Anderson in conferences. "I ask myself the same questions. I always do. I always have comments asking questions about things that I think that Anderson would also ask. But it's just answering them that I have problems with." She feels like she will be able to transfer the skills she has learned during conferences with Anderson to peer conferences. She notes that while she hasn't learned everything she has taken quite a bit from her work with Anderson and grown compared to what she was capable of last year, she gives it more thought now: "When someone asks me to read their stuff, like I actually think about it and reflect a lot."

For her Definition essay, she defined the word "weird." Alyssa helped Evelyn keep her voice the same in this piece, as it had two different elements, one being the "voice of the government talking." Alyssa suggested that Evelyn make a formatting choice to help distinguish between the two by using font. This was feedback that Evelyn truly valued:

And that was really cool. That actually made me super excited about writing the essay. And I was like, oh, that's so fun. So, I just really appreciate it when people actually read my writing. And actually think about it. Rather than just being little things that you could change.

The government's voice was blocky and traditional, while the weird side was a goofy/fun font. Anderson suggested turning it into a "dystopian essay" by adding in the government side of it, adding in contrast. Evelyn made an explicit choice to have a character woven throughout, Sarah, the repetitive mention of her name in each part. She utilized parallel structure for each side of the message, but in the different voices "stern and strict" vs. "triumphant and optimistic": "So the government would say we need to be united in a way that we're all the same. But then Sarah would say being different is what unites us as a society."

Evelyn liked her Belief essay the best as it was the most her, her voice was present, and it came from her. She was able to be the most creative and was passionate about it as "it's something I believe in you know so obviously I'm gonna be passionate about it and it's gonna be something I actually care about and want to write about so I was excited to write it and edit it every time." She described herself as "creative on her own" as she figured out the structure, formatting, and ideas on her own without suggestions from Anderson. She cut her first paragraph again (Anderson's feedback), she is still working on determining when to cut sections on her own. Cutting that paragraph allowed the piece to not be as explicit, letting the reader draw meaning from her actual writing. She pushed back on a change Anderson recommended to her (moving part of it to another paragraph). Evelyn didn't like it there, so she didn't make the change, which wasn't typical for her. Her revisions included thinking of how to best get her message across, changing the structure from one individual to three for her belief when enabled her reader to see "three different people on different levels."

Initially, she wanted to write about or show she met her best friends and as a result how they changed her life. That version was too long, she tried shortening it to a single friend, but she did not like that either. She then went to three versions of people she had met: her best

friend, an “in class friend” (Alyssa), and a stranger, looking at how each of those individuals impacted her life. It was multiple facets of what knowing a person, whether than be forever or just a moment. Having the three levels, she felt, helped her say what she wanted to say to the reader. She really liked her format, again using parallel structure (how she met them, how they changed her life, how her life would be different without them, ending with a single sentence of how they met). Her formatting was consistent, and she tried it after Anderson suggested they all try adding single sentence paragraphs into their writing. She only got feedback from Alyssa on the first draft, wherein Alyssa encouraged her to find a different structure and expanding on her friendship (which she ultimately deleted). Even after this essay was done and turned in Evelyn still reflected on what she could have revised, noting that she wished she had worked more on the “parallel structure,” but at the time she “couldn’t think of a good way to do it.” Reflection was built into the class in a way that allowed her time to discuss aspects of her writing that she did not like with Anderson and consider how to do that on the back end. When asked if she would go back and make those changes, Evelyn notes that she would as she “loves writing” but does state that “someone who didn’t love writing wouldn’t want to do that because they want to turn it in and get the grade” but that she “would love to do it for [herself] too”. She did share the first draft with the three friends she wrote about, not for feedback, but because she “just wanted them to read that.”

For the Argumentative essay, she was disappointed and said, “obviously I kind of hate it.” That was rooted in the lack of passion she had for the subject, a subject she did not get to pick. If she were able to pick the topic, she would be more “passionate” in her writing, and it would “make it better.” Evelyn was not invested in vaccines and as such her voice did not come out in her writing: “I don’t know how to make it sound like me when I just don’t care about

it.” She was struggling to find a structure that “could sound like [her].” Her lack of passion for the subject led her to not initially try to make writer choices, she initially went back to the default five paragraph essay and was not excited to try parallel structure or a one sentenced paragraph in her writing, she didn’t try either of those but said she could put it in if she tried. She planned to try adding in parallel structure and/or a one sentence paragraph as well as connecting her evidence and her argument (per Anderson’s recommendation); she was early on in writing at this point and said that she wanted to “word vomit” first to get as much as she could on the page, and then get it to sound more like her. Her next step was to research more, so hopefully she could “care more about it.” She also had not gotten any feedback yet as she wanted a solid draft before peer conferencing. Her planned structure was introduction, counter argument, rebuttal, benefits, and solution. She ended up defaulting to the “five paragraph essay” structure before her first draft and shared about how students are “programmed to write like this since middle school.” “It was my default. I wrote it and that’s what it was.”

After sharing it with Alyssa she did implement a different structure wherein she started with the controversy and discussed the negative viewpoints people can have on vaccines: “So I talk about how people think that I causes Autism and then I debunk that and then I give more evidence and then I kind of provide a solution at the end.” She liked that format better as it “felt more like [her].” Her piece ended up sounding like her because she “didn’t follow what [her] first instinct was” and this allowed her the freedom to be creative and get out of the standard structure. She enjoys experimenting with structure in her writing and with that she was able to give her take on vaccines rather than just sharing facts. When revising this piece, she did delete a whole paragraph as it was leading her towards another purpose and took focus away from her actual purpose: “sometimes they do connect together, but it’s too much for the scope of the

piece.” Anderson gave her feedback on her introduction as she originally did it in the style of a five-paragraph essay with an attention getter, claim, and then reasoning. He let her know she did not need to state her claim directly as it was coming through and to let “the reader infer the purpose.” This was a bit of a “mindset” shift for Evelyn. Her conclusion was, again, originally in the structure of a five-paragraph essay. She shortened it, highlighted why working towards a solution matters. Her motivation behind revision was very different than what she spoke about her Belief essay:

For this, I wanted to revise it so that I could get the points. And so, I could just be done. I just wanted to be done with it. And then for my other essays, I actually genuinely enjoy revising it. And I enjoy reading it over and like fixing things. And when you finally get something to flow right, you're just like yes. But for this I wasn't motivated to do it. That just kind of ruins it.

Evelyn did not end up researching more on the topic like she planned. Her final argumentative essay for this class ended up sounding like her more and she felt like she was able to do this because she “didn’t follow what [her] first instinct was to get the points. [She] just did what [she] wanted to do.” She wrote it as a commentary, not a typical research paper which led her voice to be stronger and more represented in the piece (ex: with little comments on the side, showing her take).

She was nervous and excited about writing her Final (nervous because all of the requirements). While writing, she focused on her structure a lot, making sure each part

connected to the next. She was intentional about adding in periodic sentences<sup>6</sup>. When writing her final, she did it over two nights, spending about an hour each. She wrote it on her bed, leaning against a bunch of pillows and played lo-fi chill vibes (the music playlist they always played in class) and got in the “zone.” For evidence she pulled from her journals. In reflecting on those, she noticed that she went from writing them, wanting to be sure to “do it right” to writing it the way she wanted to write it “it just felt like more coming from me.” She “word vomited” and then went back and added evidence the second time through because she didn’t want to “ruin [her] vibe.” She wrote about her love of writing as a child, how she wanted to become an author, noting that is no longer the case. Before Advanced Comp she wrote because she enjoyed it, considering herself an “amateur” without much knowledge, but Advanced Comp “taught [her] how to do it right...but it wasn’t the way that English class would teach us. It was how to do it right in the way that you want to do it right. Because I guess I didn’t really know who I was as a writer at the time. But Advanced Comp really helped me discover that.” She wrote about how the class helped her and how she plans to use that knowledge and experience in creative writing. She learned: that there is not one way to write, how to put her spin on it, show don’t tell, how to revise, how to think about and consider the big picture. When she revises her pieces now, she adds a ton of comments and notes about what she wants to come back to and work on which she then talks about with Anderson, including purpose and if she’s saying what she wants to and how she’s saying it, the connection between all of the parts and her structure. She didn’t revise her final much, it was “raw,” and she liked that: “I liked how it sounded when I just first spit it out on paper.”

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<sup>6</sup> A periodic sentence is a complex sentence that has no subordinate or trailing elements following its principal clause. For Advanced Comp these were typically used in dramatic effect as a one sentence paragraph.

### *Takeaway*

Her freshman year, she was unmotivated to write and “didn’t love writing as much” and was not as creative. The essays she was asked to write were “just so boring” and she “felt like [she] couldn’t be creative even though [she] probably could have somehow done [her] own twist.” Part of why she did not do that was because she “was afraid that the teacher would take points off for it” and she “was always focused on getting points.” She also was given topics to write on in the past, although she was allowed to choose her stance. There was one essay last year that she was able to pick a topic she was “passionate” about which she recalled enjoying. We saw this when Evelyn went to write her Argumentative essay as she reverted back to the “standard” form of writing again (feedback from Anderson and Alyssa helped her put herself in the structure and emphasize her voice/perspective). The lack of passion, once again, made her not motivated or engaged in writing, revising just for the grade. When Evelyn is able to write about something she cares about and is invested in it allows her to be more creative and engaged.

Even in her write ins for class, she transitioned from writing it in a way that would “answer the topic right” to writing how she “wanted to do it” noting that “it just felt like more coming from me.” Within these, she also moved from simply explaining to becoming “more descriptive.” She grew in her ability to revise and figuring out what needed to be changed and doing it on her own (commenting on her own work, reflecting, and questioning building her own conversation). Evelyn went from always applying the feedback she was given to considering if using that feedback was the right choice (noting that she wished she would do this more often as it would make her a better writer). She learned how and when to not explicitly state and give the reader a chance to infer and having her voice shine. She is still working on not having two

purposes in her writing and wants to get better at answering the questions she asks about her own writing.

Evelyn felt the course helped her grow “so much,” noting that her creativity grew; she specifically mentioned Alyssa as a part of that growth and Anderson. Her relationships within the class, with those who read and engaged with her writing, were very important to Evelyn. She appreciated when the feedback dug deep and appreciated the opportunities to get in the head of the commenter through conversations. Reader connection matters to her; she wants and appreciates that relational feedback.

*Last—I guess I describe myself as wanting to be raw and creative and making my pieces sound like me. I love word vomit. I love, I love just putting out whatever I have in my head on the paper because that's when it sounds the most real. Yeah, I like to consider myself creative, but I feel I could be more creative.*

## **Michelle**

*First—I would probably, I mean, like I love writing. But it has to be something that I want to write. So like I hate when you get like a prompt, and obviously it's something that you have to write about. Like for like social studies, you have to write about a certain like book...But for all these creative writing advanced classes, it's so open that you can write about really anything...I would say I'm a writer that way.*

Michelle is a senior who loves writing, but only when it is something she wants to write about. When there is freedom to write and choice she would “say [she’s] a writer that way.” She is “very good with words.” She writes outside of class, writing her “story” and connects to a future career she is interested in, being a police officer. One of her strengths as a

writer is to put her thoughts on the page and then “construct that into a story.” Personal connection to what she is writing is big for Michelle. She wants to work on her structure, moving beyond the standard and playing around with the format. She typically goes for standard paragraphs as that is what she was taught in previous classes. In our final interview she described herself as a “personal and independent” writer.

### *Process*

Her process looks different each time she writes. Sometimes she lists what she could write about, determining what she likes best. Other times, she finds herself deleting everything and starting from scratch. She reads a lot outside of school, but her writing outside of school tends to be limited to the notes she writes about the books she reads. When writing at home for her Argumentative essay, she started in her kitchen but moved to her bedroom once her parents got home as it became loud, and she likes writing in the quiet. She listens to music without any lyrics as “it makes me like either sing to it or I think about that lyric and then it distracts me.” She noted that she tends to procrastinate so when the time comes, she “hunkers down and gets it done.” Her writing process for the final was a bit different, rather than writing it all out and chunking it into paragraphs later, she was able to put it into paragraphs along the way. When asked how she knew when to break it up, she stated, “I think this is the time that I need to...I’m starting to talk about something else and starting to talk about a new topic.” When talking about writing long form and then breaking it down into paragraphs and a specific structure: “I like getting everything down on a piece of paper and not having to worry about editing or anything.” Her process writing in Advanced Comp is different as the class is designed for students to spend more time preparing “think[ing] about what we wanted to actually write

about.” Instead of being told what to write, like in other classes, there is an in-depth process and time to think and reflect which has led her to grow as a writer.

### ***Feedback***

She prefers written feedback so she can read it and see it, using it later, following each step. If she just has a conversation about it, she will not always remember what they talked about. It can be hard to fully understand a written comment, but a conference can clarify any confusion. She likes being able to both see the comment and talk through it. She prefers feedback from a teacher as she knows the feedback is always good from Anderson. Part of that is rooted in the fact that the teacher will be grading her, and that lets her know “exactly what they need me to fix and what they want to see in the writing.” She likes it when Anderson reads her writing aloud, as it allows her to notice more things than she does on her own. For the definition essay, she conferenced with Anderson four or five times, describing it as a conversation and collaborating. While she knows what questions to ask herself when writing, she still wants that conferencing with a teacher as “it really helps [to] get another perspective from someone who knows what they’re talking about,” still valuing that expertise. She likes “in-depth” feedback, walking through what to change, helping her cut out unneeded parts, as well as their thoughts as a writer, what they want to hear more of. She likes feedback as options, consider trying this. It helps her to take a step back and look at her piece as a whole. She prefers feedback that centers on the structure and grammar, cutting out repetitive parts, rather than the content, the meat of what she is writing. When I asked her what effective feedback looks like for her in our final interview, she highlighted grammar and linking the piece as a whole, finding that thread that holds it together, but also structure based questions/comments. She wants to have a conversation about her work where the person giving feedback makes a note, and then gives multiple

examples of what could be done, talking through possibilities rather than saying what is the right choice to make. However, she still has that hint of wanting to know what to do: "...knowing what to do is the best feedback."

Peer feedback can be helpful for her, but it depends. She likes grammar feedback. Effective feedback from a peer looks like sharing what they want to know more about, what she can expand on as well as smaller things like grammar and making the piece flow. Ineffective peer feedback looks like them trying to take over, especially when it is a personal story she is writing about. She most values "what they think as a writer." While she appreciates a direct step to take based on feedback, she does not want to be told what to do. She wants to have a conversation about it and make those choices, viewing them as considerations rather than dictations. In the first interview she shared that she has not had really ineffective feedback yet but has had some not great feedback. For peer feedback, she appreciates the "connection that you have with them" and hearing their perspective. While she prefers one-on-one feedback with Anderson, she does think that peer feedback is necessary for that added perspective, getting another set of eyes on the piece: "It's very helpful...if you want to know more about what you're writing it's super important for other people to see." Having a relationship with those who read her writing and give her feedback is important, she wants to know and feel comfortable with the person who gives her feedback. The personal nature of her writing makes her resistant to getting feedback from her peers, as it feels like they are "critiquing something that's...in my life." When getting peer feedback on her Snapshot essay she notes that it "was just really nice to hear what shouldn't be in there, what's not necessary and maybe what they want to know more about the story because I think as somethings who's reading it, you always question what do you want to know more about the story...what can I expand on?" As

much of the writing for this class has a personal nature, she wants to make sure that the peer giving her feedback takes that into consideration and does not try to take over with their own opinion. “It’s very helpful if you want to know more about what you’re writing it’s like super important for other people to see.” The big thing for her is making sure it is that personal piece *she* wants it to be but wants to make sure that “if they want to know more, I want them to know” when thinking about taking up feedback.

Michelle had a consistent table pod with Evelyn and Alyssa. They helped her grow as a writer:

In that group I think I get ideas...when we talked about what questions I wrote down the question and maybe I’m not going to research the questions, but it’s something that if I get stuck on them and making this and wanting to know where I’m going I can go back to those questions and research more.

She is quiet at her table, puts her headphones in and writes while the rest of her table (Evelyn and Alyssa) are chatting. Even though their dynamic was different, she did feel as though she had strong relationships in the class.

### ***Writing***

For revision, she likes focusing more on the structure and grammar, cutting paragraphs rather than the content/what “the writing is actually about.” For her definition essay she did three major revisions: confusion, structure, and grammar. She does not enjoy revising as it takes quite a bit of time, but still considers it “100 percent” necessary. She said she has learned to like revising over the semester, “it just takes forever.” When thinking about revising her own work in the future, she shared,

I think I'm kind of in that place where I know where, what I should do and how I should do it. But I think I still like maybe one or two conferences, maybe at the first draft that I write, and then the last draft I write, because it really helps like get another perspective from someone who knows what they're talking about.

She likes that connection and perspective but still guards her writing closely when it is of a personal nature.

For her Definition essay she started writing by getting it all down on the page, very rough. She then conferenced about the "major things" and structure. Anderson asked questions about what he was confused on, Michelle edited it and focused on grammar the second time around. Anderson noted that she had an expansive introduction paragraph and questioned if that was "a necessity for the story?" Based on that, she read through it a couple of times and found the majority of the content was repeated later on in the piece (except for the first sentence which she left as a periodic sentence). Michelle did push against Anderson's feedback on cutting down description/explanation around text messages as she felt it was important to her piece and a needed element. She did not want to change everything to "said" or "texted" she liked her explanations. She always finds things to fix when Anderson reads her paper aloud, even though she reads her own work aloud, this always helps her find something she missed. She then went back in for another conference (she did four conferences for this piece), and her final edit was mostly grammar. This was a similar process of revision to her other writing, but it was simpler as the piece was shorter. Three major revisions: confusion, structure, cutting what was repetitive, with grammar sprinkled in between them all. Feedback determined most of those revisions, the questions Anderson asked her in conferences.

For her Belief essay, she wrote it differently than she typically did, she built it off one of her write-ins. She dropped that into her essay and expanded from there. She used it as an anchor point, as it had the main points she wanted to make and added in evidence/explanation as needed to support. Her belief was that everyone has a purpose, touching on her own purpose and how to find your purpose. She determined her structure after she started writing. Her initial first paragraph became spread out throughout the finished piece; it turned into her structure. She was thinking about structure/format for this piece during our first interview, trying to get away from paragraph by paragraph, adding in quotes and periodic sentences. She wrote the whole essay out and then went back in to “chunk” it into paragraphs, switching parts around as needed based on the different lessons mapped out in her writing. Michelle found herself “hesitating” on some parts but referenced her other essays and ended up with a piece that she felt really “flowed.” She did not have a chance to do a peer review for this piece. Her first conference with Anderson was when she had her first small paragraph as she did not know “where to go from here.” He encouraged her to expand. Her second conference was right before she turned it in, so she had made the majority of changes on her own, noting that she “used some of the techniques that [she] used in prior essays.” She felt good about doing that on her own but was still hesitant at times, specifically when to start a new paragraph. She wrote it as one large paragraph and had difficulty separating it. She decided to separate it based on each new “lesson” she wrote about.

For her Argumentative essay, she started by writing out an outline in what she described as “essay format,” starting with a claim and then the reasons to support that claim. She paraphrased her evidence within this outline, so it was ready to input directly into her long form essay. She used an outline that Anderson shared with the class as a resource. She liked to use this kind of outline as it put all of her materials in the same place, noting that in a more creative

piece everything she needs is already there (or in her brain) as she doesn't have to bring in outside evidence. She picked this structure as it was familiar to her: "I guess it's kind of what I've always [done] in school. And so, I'm really comfortable with that one. And I feel like I can get better off that because I know more about it...I like knowing what to put in...I don't like guessing." She moved back to wanting to put the right answer in, comforted by that rigidity. It was the lack of a personal nature that also led her to picking that structure, without the freedom to choose her topic, she went back to the structures she was previously taught in order to make the grade. She did not do any additional research on vaccines for her piece as the articles they were provided with were enough to support her claim.

During our second interview she had just finished her outline and was ready to put it into a word document, noting that she wished she were already done and that they would have been able to pick what they wanted to write about. If she were able to pick, she would have chosen something around law enforcement, a topic she deeply cares about. With writing of a more personal nature, the evidence comes from within her and not an outside source. With this type of writing, she is unable to write "freely." For her argumentative she "wish[es] it was something we could pick like what we can write about." She would have preferred to write about something that is relevant to her life/interests and that she viewed as "significant." She did not do a peer review at all for this piece but did conference with Anderson three times. When moving her piece from outline form to essay form, she took out the titles of the different parts (outline, evidence, ect.) and played around with the order working with one large paragraph before splitting it into paragraphs, continuing to make edits as needed. She talked about flow with Anderson as the outline was "chunky." To combat this, she added transitions and connections. She moved around the order of her "reasons" to improve flow, having what she

considered the most important reason first. Anderson gave her feedback on her ending where she reiterated the claim and thought she needed to add more, but Anderson thought it was good as is. If she were to revise to make it sound more like her, she would have added in a “personal story” potentially about her time in Guatemala and talking about the vaccinations she had to get to go there. She did not make any explicit choices to make it sound like her when writing, she simply followed the structure of the kernel outline. The Argumentative essay was her least favorite to write this semester as she did not have the freedom to choose what to write about.

For her Final essay, I asked her about the flow of her essay and she shared it was easier to make it flow and connect together: “I think it was because I felt comfortable after writing seven different essays and I feel it just kind of like stuck with me.” When writing this it was already “chunked” for her as she was writing about her writing, which then had natural categories so starting new paragraphs was easier. She talked about the class and her thoughts on it and then went into different essays. It took her a weekend to write. She drafted it and then a few days later revisited it to make minor edits and reflect. She also added additional evidence, specifically highlighting the personal nature of her writing. She did not get feedback from anyone for the final essay and shared that she did not miss it for this one as they did not know her entire portfolio of work like she did and would not give great feedback as a result. However, Anderson wrote a note on her piece after she turned it in for grading, sharing how he will miss her in class and called her a “soulful writer and a soulful person”:

I love listening to your writings, their earnestness and sincerity. And I really valued the conversations during conferences. You wrote some astonishing stuff this semester, your reflective essay, that one chunk in your descriptive essay. And most importantly, you

brought an incredible attitude every day. I'm so happy you valued the class and that you discussed that in the strong final essay. Great work and good luck.

In a way, she liked not getting feedback from anyone for this piece as it was her reflecting on her writing and another person's feedback might not be relevant. She wrote about how she is "very, very personal" as a writer and when she writes about herself or something she is passionate about she can write more. She thinks the skills she has learned in her personal writing could transfer to more argumentative writing, noting that it would be more structured, but she could add in personal examples to illustrate her argument and explain through added details.

### *Takeaway*

Michelle likes that Advanced comp has more built-in time to think and reflect on what she is writing, preparing for it. This has helped her grow as a writer: "I've definitely expanded the way I can write...my word choice and paragraphs and even the structure." She still wants to work on making her writing flow and connect as well as word choice. In our first interview, she thought that her writing for the Argumentative essay would be stronger based on what she was learning in Advanced Comp. By writing what she was passionate about, she learned to effectively argue which made her a stronger writer: "I think knowing what we wrote like all personal stuff and being able to argue about this one thing that you really are into, I think that's going to make a stronger piece of writing for all of us." This was evident in her Argumentative essay where the lack of personal connection with the topic impacted her process and structure. She likes personal writing more as she is able to write more on it. When asked if she thinks those skills will transfer to college writing she said, "I think [it] can like examples, like personal life examples, and just explaining myself." She notes that she is drawn to traditional paragraphs

and thinks it is because of the structure she was taught before in classes, intro, body, and conclusion. It has been ingrained into her.

She grew by becoming a more independent writer, but still values the feedback from Anderson (values his expertise and knows what he wants). Michelle prefers written feedback in conjunction with conversation and questions, to be given options and ideas not dictations. For peer feedback, she appreciates the additional perspective and wants to know what they want to know more about but is worried that they will try to take over and suggest she revises her content (she is attached to telling her story in her words). Relationships with whoever is reading her writing is important to Michelle; she wants to trust them.

She also is better at revising compared to the past. “I think that I looked at revision as like, something that really did not matter, like it wasn't a big deal. But I feel this year really took it into effect as like, it's something that can change the whole essay.” The majority of her revisions were determined by feedback she received from Anderson (in the form of questions) during conferences. Michelle knows what questions to ask when revising on her own but still appreciates the additional perspective. She likes to have all of her materials in the same space when writing, getting it all onto the page so that she can move around the puzzle pieces and find the best way for them to fit. She now views revision as worth the time and effort it takes.

*Last—I'd say personal and independent. I'd say those two words. I think that like, yes, I might need that one or two conferences at the beginning and end. And I kind of like diving into the work, rather than like sitting there with someone and talking about my essay. And I kind of like to just think of it as like my own essay and not having to worry about having that extra confidence and having people like critique it, even though I don't know, I think critiques are*

*good. But then, for me, I just like sitting down and writing it, rather than sitting down with someone that maybe I don't know or don't feel so comfortable with looking over my essay.*

### **Chris**

*First—I feel like anyone can really be a writer. It's kind of like expressing your ideas and getting them down on paper, and then just figuring out how they all fit together. So, if anyone can write, I feel like anyone can be a writer.*

Chris believes that “anyone can be a writer.” He is still “trying to figure out” what his strengths are as a writer by using “different methods and how stuff fits together and just making it all come together in the end and learning how to reflect in places and just all that good stuff.” He is continuing to work on flow, connecting with the reader and making his writing “more entertaining for the reader.” He is a senior who enjoys hunting, his truck, and spending time with his family. He is not invested in writing, but still wants to do well in the course. Out of all the students that I interviewed, Chris had the shortest replies, he got straight to the point and did not wax poetic about his process or the writer choices he made.

### **Feedback**

Chris likes a mixture of written and verbal feedback:

I like the mixture of both that [Duncan] uses, but I feel like the verbal conversations that we have push me as a writer to express my ideas in different ways. And it also is a good management for me because I have to process what she says and try and process that in my mind and figure out how to put that in words on my paper.

Talking with Duncan about his writing is beneficial to him and challenges him as a writer. When taking up feedback, Chris notes it helps him to “be in a good mindset” when applying Duncan’s comments to his writing. He said that he can be good at taking that feedback but not always as it can, at times, go against what he originally wanted for the piece: “I figure it’s my piece, so it should be how I want it.” He can become attached to his writing. He reflects on the feedback and works to figure out how it could fit into his writing and if it would support his claim. When asked if he has gotten feedback that wasn’t helpful for him, he shared that hasn’t happened with Duncan as “you don’t really get too much feedback that doesn’t help. Just because she kind of gets that feedback, it starts coming from you...through questions that she asks you.” Duncan makes him think about it and decide on what’s best together. Chris finds the “feedback from [himself]” to be the most useful. He reads his writing over again and notes if the connection or flow is not working and makes changes as needed. For him, conferences and feedback from Duncan are a jumping off point. Duncan gets him “started with the idea of what [he] should be doing” and he builds off that for explicit changes to make. He liked the way Duncan worded her feedback as she “pushed you to think about it more. Instead of giving her opinion, she made sure that yours was more important first...built on your idea...instead of changing your idea, building on top of your idea and your word choice.” The questioning aspect was better than simply telling him what to do. However, he did tend to follow her lead, thinking of his grade the majority of the time.

He likes that Duncan models how the process of feedback and revision work and that he is then able to do that in peer review: “...you get to do that with your peers’ work, which kind of builds you as a writer also, not just their paper. But you can take experiences from that and put them in your own work and just, it makes a better writer as a whole.” Engaging in peer review

allows him to continue to develop his own skill of revision/feedback for himself, he is able to use that in his own writing. He thinks peer review is a good addition to feedback, but questions how much it actually helps him as a writer: “I feel if the person that you’re working with is a great writer, yes, they’ll give you great feedback...But if they’re not the best writer, which is okay, their feedback isn’t going to be as strong.” Chris prefers peer feedback on the structure of the piece and “how pieces fit together,” showing not telling, and flow. He doesn’t like it when they give feedback on grammar and gets frustrated if they notice a mistake and don’t consistently correct it.

### ***Writing***

When it comes to revision, he struggles after having a conference conversation with Duncan and not remembering what was discussed, which makes it difficult to apply the feedback and make the changes. He does note that at his last conference, he did take notes which should help. He wrote down: “So reflect on what happiness is, connection between family, getting into a truck with warm seats, and seeing it doesn't create happiness.” His revision process does not always look the same. It is modeled after conferences, it is not split into segments “it’s all kind of together and gets your mind thinking, which is nice, but also difficult at times just because it’s like a lot to change at once.” He becomes immersed in his revision, touching on points as he goes rather than approaching it systematically. For revision, he focuses on the actual act of writing, rather than hitting checkboxes along the way. Revising is a good thing as it helps “you grow as a writer” but it is not a “favorite” of his because of the amount of time it takes. He finds value in revising and in the conferencing model Duncan has put in place. When asked if he feels comfortable revising his own writing without extensive feedback in college he shared:

I feel like it's definitely going to be a change and I feel I have a good idea of what I need and what I need to look for. But I don't think it will hurt to talk with someone in my class and see if we'll peer review each other because I don't think that will hurt at all...I feel I could get by but it wouldn't be that great essay that I'd probably need.

He does not find himself asking similar questions (like Duncan) as he's "one to not really think about those processes: "I write, and I hope my purpose comes and shows up. But when you're forced to actually think about it, it helps a lot." He was resistant to implementing the feedback modeled by Duncan on his own, even though he noted multiple times how useful it was to him.

He had a hard time figuring out how to organize his Definition essay due to the nature of the piece. It had more narrative elements than he was used to working with. He wanted to cut down on the narrative to what was vital and add in some reflection to make sure his "point" was understood by the reader. Chris wanted to make those changes based on a conversation with Duncan. To help with this Duncan asked, "what [his] purpose was." His purpose was to "show and talk about what true happiness is" but that was not being shown through the narrative. They both "decided that reflecting on [his] narrative was a good way to get that through." It was a conversation about the work that led Chris to decide what to do. He took up all of the feedback he was given and incorporated it into his writing.

His Belief essay was centered on the belief "that everyone needs their space and for [him] nature creates emptiness and refreshes [him]...allows [him] to restart for the next week." His first draft was short as he did not know what Duncan "was expecting." It felt more like he was trying to tell people what they "should be doing" and he focused it on his belief more as he revised, using his own personal belief, his story, as an anchor. To do this he changed from "instructing" what they should do and how it would make them feel to talking about himself:

“This is how I felt and this is what happened and this is what I still do”. That change allowed the piece to become more personal, with him the expert to write it. It added life and detail to support the belief. However, he felt the piece was giving away the point too explicitly rather than letting the reader determine what it was saying. The process of this piece was a struggle because he could not figure out what he was missing when conferencing with Duncan and they didn’t determine what that was until the last time. In that final conference, Duncan highlighted the repetition of his claim three times (he had a peer review for the piece but did not remember it at all as it was a while ago). He is still unsure if he likes the change he made as it was how he “wanted to write it” in the first place and he may “change it back.” He originally made an explicit choice to have the repetitive nature in the piece, but he made the change based on a conference with Duncan as it was what she was looking for. When asked if he was happy with the change he shared: “I’m not sure, because I feel like it wasn’t the best time I’ll spend. I could have been working on my argumentative essay. Instead of changing my writing for someone else they want, instead of what I want.” He wrote for “whatever gets me the grade” and its “the fact of the world that we’re put in. You know we’re supposed to be getting good grades, doing this to get this.” He did end up keeping the change Duncan recommended: “I mainly kept it just to get it done with and move on, because I was running out of time at the end of the semester. And I’m not sure if it was the right change in my mind, but it definitely, either way, I don’t think it impacted the writing too much.” He did have a final conference with Duncan on it that was mostly “an approval” to get the box checked that he did it correctly. Chris is motivated by grades and adjusted his writing, accordingly, believing that it was what Duncan wanted, rather than what he wanted.

At our second interview, Chris was unsure how he was feeling about his Argumentative essay, the dynamic between the structure and inserting the “showing instead of telling...[to] make it more of a story.” The “deadline” was what kept him focused. At that time, he did not have any feedback on it, but wanted to work on the flow, adding more information about what he learned, reflecting that the major changes might revolve around the fact that he needed to “find more information.” His argumentative claim was centered in the idea of regions determining what vaccines people must have but shared that he did not think that would work as people want the freedom to make a decision for themselves “so even if it’s for the greater good, people have their choice”. He did not like the topic, but again, it was “for the grade.” Duncan did allow students the opportunity to choose a different topic, but Chris shared he wouldn’t have done that as the resources and articles about vaccines were already there.

He did not approach this essay differently than the others but reflects that it might “have been better” if he had. He actively worked to incorporate what he learned this semester into the essay: showing not telling. The first step he took in writing was to read the resources and get a handle on the information he needed to write about (looking at both sides). He used a “kernel structure” shared by Duncan for his structure. For this essay he was looking for the path of least resistance, just trying to get it done. When asked if he typically follows that path, he shared: “I think this is kind of the first because this definitely has more, like, constraints about what you need to do and how you need to do it. I feel like this is one of the first essays that I’ve kind of cut the corner a little bit.” He was in “a little bit of a time crunch” with this essay and while it “wasn’t [his] best work, it gave [him] an idea of what an argumentative essay needs, which [he] thought was good.” The process for this essay was different as he typically “get[s] an idea for, like, an intro, and then [he] just runs with it and sees where it builds. But for this, it was more

step-by-step.” He viewed this as needed with an argumentative piece, it is written knowing ahead of time what you want to say, while the other pieces were built in the moment of writing. It did not sound like him or showcase who he was as a writer because he was “checking those boxes off.” He did utilize what he learned when writing his introduction: “I didn’t build up with a typical intro like I would have [in previous English classes]. So, I just got into it right away, and it helped.” While he did not fall completely back into old patterns using “standard” writing formats, he did a bit compared to the rest of this writing this semester. Chris did end up finding additional outside sources to support this argument, but he did not make any major structural changes.

He started the Final essay the day before it was due, wrote an introduction and filled out the different parts (portfolio asked him to pull from different essays for evidence) and then he reflected on those parts. He “referred back to [his] previous portfolio” quite a bit. Not being able to conference and get feedback for this piece was “definitely more difficult because [he] just had to throw it out there and hope it was good enough after [he] reviewed it [him]self. And it really showed how someone else's opinion truly ensures that you're on the right page and that it's a good essay to pull as well.” When he reviews his work by himself and is the only feedback he gets, it is a lot more work. He had to read it with intention multiple times, looking at word choice, flow, and structure. Even without conferencing with Duncan, he was still writing for her as he knew what she expected based on the parameters of the assignment. Writing this piece was more piecing together, less creation/writing. He revised while writing, rather than waiting until the end of the first draft, which was not typical of what he usually did as he did not have anyone to share the first draft with and get feedback from. He learned that “it definitely helps to have someone’s opinion. You can do it all by yourself, but it’s hard.”

### *Takeaway*

In previous classes, Chris notes that feedback was about if you were missing certain “constraints” but in Advanced Comp “you’re able to express what you’re actually trying to say.” He liked the freedom of the class. Chris was always writing for a grade and for Duncan. The closest thing he wrote for himself was his Descriptive essay about his “family’s land”: “I feel that expressed me and what I am and who I am and what I always want to be.” He became attached to that piece of writing and wanted it to say what he wanted it to say. The rest of his writing continued to be for a grade and the application of feedback tended to be for the grade rather than for the development of his writing and him as a writer. Those changes were determined by the conversations he had with Duncan, mostly on purpose and how that was supported in his writing, and they pushed him to improve as a writer. The questions Duncan asked made him think about the choices he could make as a writer. Because of the conferences, he now knows questions to ask for a thoughtful revision; he just doesn’t tend to ask himself those questions. When revising, his process was not consistent. He approached the piece as a whole and made changes as he found them (rather than having a set plan). This was the place where Chris actually focused on the writing, rather than the checkboxes. Time was a big factor for Chris as revision is a time-consuming process, one that he was not always delighted to be engaged in. Many times, he worked to find the path of least resistance. He knew the importance of revision and the impact it could have on his writing, but he didn’t always want to put the effort into truly engaging in the process.

For Chris, conferences and feedback were a jumping off point that he then built off of to make explicit changes. Peer feedback was a place for him to get an additional perspective, but he felt its usefulness was limited by who was providing the feedback. Though he seemed to

always write for the grade, he also had feelings about what he was writing. He did not want direct action items as feedback, but wanted discussion and time to consider what the best change might be.

However, Chris did develop and grow as a writer: "...when I used to write, it was always tell, tell, tell, and now I started showing and it really improves the piece of the writing...word choice. Changing that also improves the piece and makes it stronger." He was able to reflect on how he grew as a writer and the impact it had on his writing. At the final interview he described himself as a writer who writes on an idea and "sees where it goes" and "hopes the purpose is there at the end" but notes that is something he wants to change, to be more explicit about what he is writing towards. He shared that he "learned more about word choice" and makes explicit choices about words now, showing not telling, and that he wants to be better at "writing with a purpose."

*Last—I'd say I'm a writer who comes up with an idea and then just writes, sees where it goes without thinking about anything. And I just hope the idea comes. I hope the purpose is there at the end. But that's kind of something I have to change and start writing for a purpose.*

### **Candice**

*First—Yeah, I think so. I don't know, just because it's always something I've been really passionate about. When high school started, I wasn't really sure what my thing was, but I don't know, I kind of, I really liked my English class and I kept developing it and I realized that I like to write, you know, even when I wasn't required to.*

Candice is a Senior who wants to go to college to study English or a Communications related field. When asked if she considers herself a writer she replied "Yeah, I think so." She

went on to share that writing is something that she has “always...been really passionate about,” calling it “her thing.” She enjoys English class and writing outside of it. She started a blog, which she set aside for a bit as she had a packed schedule, but has picked it up again during Advanced Comp. Candice also writes opinion pieces for the school newspaper. She views word choice, tone, and showing details as strengths of hers: “I just like making my sentences as clear and specific as possible.” Her writing style consists of “a bunch of dashes and semi-colons.” She “has issues if there’s a page limit” as she goes over the word count: “that’s always the thing.” She becomes attached to her writing and struggles to make cuts, but notes that feedback is “really helpful” for this. If she is over, she will explicitly ask the reader to note any areas that she can cut down as “they’re not as attached to it and not, like, as in their own head about it as me.” Her confidence grew over the course of the semester. At first, she was unenthusiastic about sharing her writing, but the write-ins, blogs, and peer conferences, doing those together with her peers made her feel like “we’re all on that journey together... We just want to see each other grow and we all want to improve....that made me more confident.”

### ***Process***

When starting an argumentative piece, Candice usually starts with a “question or some sort of like belief you are trying to defend.” She makes sure she is set on what direction/stance to take and then brainstorms, working to determine the content of her body paragraphs “by thinking about why I think what I do.” That typically “becomes the purpose of the piece.” When writing, she reads over her writing multiple times. She usually does not know where to start writing, so she just “starts writing” and determines which direction she likes the most. She typically starts in the beginning but will start in the middle if she is stuck on the introduction: “I’ll just write a thing that says put intro here and then start with my first body

paragraph.” She prefers to start with her introduction if she has a direction that interests her; it directs the rest of the piece.

She wants to work on organization, she gets stuck in one part of her piece, and it takes away from the rest of the writing. This typically happens with her introduction as she is unsure where to start and focuses completely on that and can “forget the rest of the essay.” She does not typically use an outline on creative writing (mostly doesn’t use one for Advanced Comp), but she will if it is an “opinion or argumentative”. Her first draft is very developed. She notes that she is “really meticulous with [her] first drafts” and if she puts the work in on the first draft, she doesn’t have as much work to do as she revises. She is actively working on time management and organization, working to not get lost in the process, spending too much time on one part. She works to get a complete first draft done without working to perfect it as she can “get bogged down trying to make [a single paragraph] perfect.” She does read the piece aloud a couple of times to make sure she likes the sound of it, and to look for repetition.

### ***Feedback***

A rubric “is kind of nice just because it gives you something to reference while you’re making the first draft to make sure it meets whatever criteria there is and that you’re really focused.” Verbal feedback is helpful for Candice as she likes to be able to ask questions in the moment and get clarification on what the reader is trying to say/share: “you can kind of understand what they meant a little bit better.” For verbal feedback, she makes sure to write it down to remember it and be able to look back at it. When thinking about applying feedback Candice likes to “try changing it and then re-do it again to see if I think it makes sense. You know, if it still accomplishes what my original purpose was.” She engages with the feedback, really reflecting on if it changes the purpose of her piece. Even with her attachment to her

writing, she appreciates “the lens through which other people are viewing it” and their perspective. Candice is open to taking feedback from those who give it to her. She says that she tries to approach it with “a pretty open mind.” She tries to input their feedback into her writing and reads it through to determine if she “thinks it makes sense and if it still seems like something that [she] would write.” It is important that her writing sounds like her and if it “isn’t as authentic or it doesn’t do what [she] wants it to do, then [she] won’t take the advice.” I love how she calls it “advice” and not a dictation. Candice also shared that a friend of her mom is a writer, and she will, at times, read Candice’s writing. This feedback can clarify, helping the piece be “more focused” and cutting down the “redundant phrases.” She shares the document with them, the friend prints it out and writes comments on it. At times she will meet them in person to go over it. Candice notes that it is helpful to have their perspective as they aren’t as attached to the piece as she is.

When asked about ineffective feedback, Candice shared a previous teacher who really focused on organization and moving away from the traditional structure of organization. She pushed back against this as she felt that organization style was better suited to certain types of writing, while what he advocated for worked better for creative writing. She likes the balance between constructive comments and praise. Feedback that is too critical does not show areas of growth or what she is doing well, but only praise limits her ability to know what she can improve it. This “givers [her] motivation.” It lets her know what she is doing well while also knowing what she can work on: “There’s still things that are good about this because, if it was only ever things that I needed to fix or things that, you know, weren’t working, then that might kind of get stressful to only be focusing on that. Like only the negative, like doing everything wrong.”

She likes that with peer review she is able to connect with people “who are in the same position as you...they’re on the same journey as you. They’re trying to grow as a writer.” Getting a “different perspective” on her writing from someone in her shoes gives “really relevant” feedback. She wished that they had more peer review as “it’s more accessible” as getting one-on-one time with Duncan can be tough with so many students wanting to conference. The peer feedback also isn’t as “formal.” Within that she feels like she can ask questions. The feedback she tends to get in peer review is “really specific”: word choice and grammar. Organization or purpose are not the type of feedback she gets in a peer review. A peer review is the place she finds herself “fine tuning” her writing, so having that happen “further along in the process” works best. When she gives feedback in a peer review, she tries to focus on “sentence fluency and word choice.” Unlike the feedback she gets, she does work to talk about purpose as it is helpful feedback she has gotten from Duncan for her own writing and she “thinks people could benefit from that.” When asked about modeling the feedback she gets from Duncan in her own peer feedback she notes that “it’s a lot of like learning from example.” When she gets feedback, she reflects on how helpful it was and then will “take what I’ve found helpful and try to bring that to other people.” She even sets up peer review for other classes with friends to share their work. For the argumentative, her feedback for her peer, Grady, was about his tone, she felt it was not a strong “definitive statement” but rather him sharing his ideas. In general, when she gives feedback she focuses on word choice, making sure there is an “emotional appeal,” and if there is a personal connection in the introduction. These showcase her values as a writer.

### ***Writing***

Candice knows that she needs to make a change when it “sticks out to [her]” when she reads through it, noting that it “doesn’t make sense”. She looks at the rest of the piece to see if the problem is anywhere else to gauge how big of a problem it is. From there, she will start making a minor change in one spot to see if that fixed the issue. If so, she will work to make similar changes in the other problem spots. She centers on one thing thematically, like transitions, works to fix that, and then moves onto other problems one at a time. This stops it from being “too overwhelming.” It also allows her to notice how her changes affect the rest of the piece and problems so that she can have “something that’s really coherent.”

When revising work outside of Advanced Comp, she is “more focused” as that type of writing is centered more on “organization,” and she already has a good structure in place with her outline. She uses her outline to “check to make sure everything connects to each other.” She typically likes revising but admits that she gets attached to her writing early on and is usually happy with her first draft: “I think it’s perfect. But by the end I’m always happier with the finished product once I’ve done it. So, it’s maybe not my favorite part of the writing process but I know it’s really necessary.” She did have a friend read through her Descriptive and focused on the end of the piece, noting that the reflection bit was good but that Candice could “kind of disperse that throughout and it might be more powerful than coming out of the setting in the moment and the end keeping it focused”. Candice did take her advice as it helped the piece stay in the setting the entire time (conclusion was no longer disjointed). When asked about her process she shared that she started with brainstorming, coming up with a couple of ways to start (and actually starting each) until she found one that she “could get a roll on with.” Candice had the story and examples and read through her initial draft “at least five times.” She knew that she had some “issues with the transitions” even before getting feedback from anyone. She tried to

utilize repetition of the definition to link the parts together, using it as a thread throughout the piece.

For her Definition essay, she focused on the word “love.” The story Candice put into her introduction was directly tied to the choice of word, so she was cautious about shortening it too much. Within that, she had quite a bit of dialogue and she “didn’t want to have to get rid of that because it might take away from the tone.” Instead, she worked to “fit the rest of her essay to that.” She got feedback from Duncan regarding her conclusion. It needed to have a thread tying it to the story in her introduction. She notes that the first draft of her conclusion did not connect back. She was “really proud” of the other parts of the piece, but the conclusion was a bit of a letdown. During her conference with Duncan, they had a conversation about her introduction, questioning how they could shorten it as it “took away from the focus.” This helped her when revising her conclusion. She connected that to working on the purpose of her essay. She did not end up condensing the story at the beginning as she “felt like it was really the reason why [she] chose to write about what [she] did.” Candice stuck with that story. Her favorite piece this semester was the Definition essay, as it was so personal: “the story at the beginning...was really relevant to my life right then. And getting to write about it was fun.”

Candice notes that while she was “really happy” with how her Belief essay turned out it was “a hard one to write.” She wrote about an experience she had but found the organization difficult as she started with the story (containing dialogue) and was unsure where to go from there. In her initial draft she notes that she “had a little bit too much of the story” and was missing the point of the piece, her belief and how it is with her in her daily life. This was a major revision she ended up doing after “talking” with Duncan. Similar to other pieces, she did not initially want to make the change but ended up liking the way it turned out. When asked why

she was reluctant to change it she shared that she “was at a loss for ideas.” She had the image of what she wanted to write in her head but did not know how to “articulate” it at first. Candice remembered that she loved to insert “really small moments and describe those” connecting them all together and utilized that when revising the piece. She relied on knowing what she likes as a writer and implementing that to fix what was a problem in her piece.

She also got additional feedback from Duncan on her last paragraph with her use of “you.” Duncan “suggested making the change” noting that it was meant to be about Candice’s belief not one put upon the reader. Candice made the change and agreed that it added focus to the piece. This changed it from the reader being told what to do to the reader learning about Candice’s experiences and making their own choice, taking from it what they wanted to. She did get feedback from Grady in peer review. And she had a chance to use “more voice techniques” that were recommended but interpreted another piece of feedback differently. Instead of expanding more on a line, she chose to come back to it at the end, noting that she “did kind of take that advice but not maybe in the way he initially intended it.” This shows the interpretation of feedback matters, this particular piece didn’t dictate a choice for her but made her aware of a line in her writing and consider when/if to revisit/expand on it. Candice did connect with other peers on her writing, but it was for earlier drafts and more about surface level things like grammar and word choice. Her process was similar to how she typically writes, though she notes that her creative writing process is very different than her argumentative writing process (“I kind of forgot how different they were until I wrote it”).

When writing her Argumentative essay, she started with a list and then moved into an outline: “I’ll start with what the paragraph is going to be, and then I’ll go into the different parts of the paragraph that I want to make sure to include” as she believes that argumentative pieces

have to be more “consistent.” Compared to her more creative pieces where she starts with a “central story” for the argumentative, she just has a “little anecdote at the beginning.” When asked why she feels like she needs a more structured start for the argumentative, she stated:

I think with argumentative you have a more defined purpose [and with personal writing] you still have a purpose with this, but it's more about, like, your thought process and your emotions and your feelings...But with argumentative, it's really structured and there's going to be someone who disagrees with you. And you want to make sure that the question you're answering and your stance on it is really clear. And you don't want to include a lot of extra things that deviate from that.

Candice enjoyed writing this piece. She had a “personal” connection to the topic of vaccines, as she has a very different opinion than her mom. She worked to find additional sources outside of the packet of sources which she was pleased with as they supported her claim and she felt that her idea “was better than some of the ones in the packet.” She still had a personal touch in this writing by starting with “another story at the beginning”. She described her tone as more “analytical,” a different tone that she typically used in her other writing. To do this she used “all of the voice techniques” they learned in Advanced Comp and that it was a challenge to do so in argumentative writing, especially the first time when you are really explicitly thinking through those things. Her voice was still present in the piece, and she compared it to the writing she does for the school newspaper and some of the work she has done for other classes, not as creative: “I feel like the sentences are all longer. And I use bigger words. I write for a really different audience.” When asked to clarify who her audience is, she says there are two sets, Duncan and those who “disagree” with her or “don't have an opinion on the issue yet.” For that she made a very explicit writer choice: “I go into what both sides think just because I think it's really

important to at least consider both perspectives otherwise it becomes, like, really biased.” This piece is not as relatable to everyone compared to her creative pieces. For those, she “feel[s] like anyone could pick it up and read it and, like, get something out of it.” She likes opinion and argumentative writing the best as she has “always been really opinionated.” Part of it is that she likes to know where she is going in writing, something to work towards and it can give her “motivation,” knowing that what she writes may “inform some more people or might like change some beliefs.” She likes to have the audience factor where she knows that someone will see it and interact with it.

Her argumentative writing is a “good reflection of [her] other writing.” She used similar aspects in both, including “periodic sentences” and explicit choices in punctuation so it has the “same feel to it.” She made those explicit choices to ensure that it was “still enjoyable to read” as some informational pieces can be a bit dry, making the reader struggle to get through it. “I wanted to make sure that the reader paid attention to my argument because, I don’t know, they liked the way it was worded. Yeah, just not zoning out and just reading through it.” As of her second interview, Candice was on her first draft of her Argumentative essay and had not gotten feedback on it yet, from either Duncan or a peer. She had discussed her claims at her table which was helpful for her and allowed her to “clarify” her thoughts and hear the perspectives of other students: “...it helped me kind of round it out so that it’s not just me inside my own head, but it’s, like, the entire scope of the issue.” That conversation with her peers, and their perspectives, helped her think how their claims connected to hers.

For her Argumentative essay, she argued that the choice to vaccinate or not should be left up to the child, but for it to work there needs to be more education on the subject. She liked being able to use quotes to support her claims, especially those from the opposition. Those

helped her threefold: evidence for her argument, confirmed her thoughts on the subject, and she gained a “more empathetic view.” She wrote in a “really respectful way” with the reader in mind, working to not immediately turn them off if they did not agree with her argument. This was an explicit choice for her as she gets upset when reading news/opinion pieces where the author “disparages” the other side in a disrespectful manner: “for there to be a productive debate, everyone has to at least want to listen to each other even if they know they’re not going to agree.” When revising this piece Candice added in some additional explanation to clarify why she included the evidence on “misinformation” and how it supported her claim based on feedback from Duncan. She also did “a whole word choice edit” and worked to cut down the essay, taking out repetitive parts. Her mom’s writer friend did not give her feedback on this piece, but her mom did. As she and her mom have different views on the topic, she wanted to share the introduction with her. While she did not win her mom over to her side, her mom did appreciate the idea of educating people on vaccinations and also encouraged her to add in ways to enact that education, “what initiatives we can take with the government on a smaller scale.” Candice was happy with her argumentative essay and felt like it sounded like her, just not the creative writing side of her. She had a peer conference with Grady. His feedback centered on word choice and noted some areas that he wanted clarification on her choices as a writer. He questioned where funding might come from for additional education on vaccinations. It was a good question, but it did not match the purpose of the essay. It made her think, but it did not work for her ultimate purpose.

She was able to use parts of her previous writing as evidence for her Final essay; she used quite a bit of her reflective essay and what we talked about in her interviews. Her process was different this time, as it was a “mix between creative and informational.” She had a similar

thought process with it as her definition, working to show who she was as a writer, not just tell. She used a typed outline to help chunk it up over a couple of days to help her remember what part she was on. She did a big “brainstorm” to figure out what she wanted to put into her introduction and inserted evidence from different essays where they fit, working with a “bulleted list.” Her first step was to sit down and really think about what she wanted it to look like and what she wanted to cover. This time, she went chunk by chunk over a couple of days so that she could wrap her mind around it. Typically, she would write it all out at once as it allowed her to be more “coherent,” but for her final she was juggling a lot and had to jump between different tasks.

This essay, there was no feedback or conferences. At first this did not bother Candice as she likes to have that freedom when first writing, but she became “nervous” as time went on. She missed the perspective of someone else, what they had to say. There was also the added aspect of assessment that added to that worry. To combat that, she “proofread it a bunch of times and was like, if I was Ms. Duncan.” Those questions revolved around word choice and purpose. She does note that a conference would have been helpful as it “can help [her] get outside of [her] own head about it.” She feels capable of asking herself similar questions she was asked in conferences by Duncan: “I think I’ve really grown a lot this semester and, like, since I’ve seen the effect it’s had on my writing, I want to keep trying to, like, keep going forward with that.” Her purpose was focused on her growth over the course of the semester, her “journey,” starting with who she was as a writer. She was procrastinating and unsure of what to write, but through this course, she learned to center on purpose while conferencing with Duncan. In total, she spent around five or six hours, thirty minutes planning, two hours for the first draft, and the rest for revisiting and revising. This was more time than a creative piece

would take her, as she needed evidence to support and a solid plan before starting: “It takes me longer, I think, with making sure my thoughts are something that the readers can understand.” The “whole goal” for those types of writing is to “cater to the readers.”

### *Takeaway*

Candice’s process changes based on what she is writing. For argumentative pieces, she starts with a statement or question which turn into her purpose, building from there. For more creative pieces she simply starts and figures out where to go as she writes, even starting in the middle if she is stuck. She ends up with very developed first drafts as once she gets it all on the page, she continually reads her writing as she goes, making adjustments, focusing on flow and voice. It matters to her that her writing sounds like her, this ends up looking a bit different depending on the type of writing (argumentative vs. creative). For feedback, Candice appreciates additional perspective and refers to it as “advice.” She gets feedback from not only Anderson and her peers but looks for sources outside of the class as well, getting not just affirmation on her writing, but actual feedback (her mom, friends, mom’s friend). Candice prefers a balance of constructive feedback and praise as it lets her know what to work on while highlighting what to continue. Verbal feedback is good as it gives her a chance to ask questions and get clarification (taking notes for reference). Conversations with Duncan impacted her writing and helped her see possibilities in her writing, while peer feedback was best served nearer to the end (as it doesn’t engage with deeper ideas). She appreciated the peer feedback, noting that it was more accessible and available (more minds to pick than just Duncan).

While she did take feedback from her peers, she didn’t always use it in the way they suggested, at times it allowed her to view the essay in a different way (she became more aware of possible changes, still engaging with the feedback). When revising, she takes all of the

“advice” she has gotten into consideration. She applies the feedback and reflects on if it makes sense and supports the purpose; if it doesn’t, she gets rid of it. As she revises, she reads the piece, noting areas that don’t flow or lack clarity, determining if it is a small problem or one throughout the whole. She starts making changes thematically (like evidence) and goes through them one at a time (lets her see how changes impact the pieces as a whole. This type of revision is for more creative pieces, with writing that is more structured, she relies heavily on outlines, both in the early stages of writing and in revising. Candice was able to give deeper feedback to her peers based on the feedback she got from Duncan (learning by example/modeling). She consistently engaged in reflective practices about her writing and made writerly choices. Candice was engaged in writing, the process of it all. As a writer (she actively wrote outside of class and sought those experiences out), Candice would have been engaged in the writing no matter what, but the personal nature of the writing did allow her to have further connections.

*Last—Well, I think maybe after advanced comp I think I'm a writer with purpose. That's always something that's in my mind and I think, what do I want to get out of writing this essay? What do I want to communicate to my readers and communicate to the world? I don't know. Usually, I'll work in, like, techniques and stuff because, I don't know, it's something that I think is going to add to the purpose. And before, I don't know, I think I just, I was a really, like, passionate writer. I really loved it and, of course, I still do. But, like, I didn't really have that much direction and I kind of got lost sometimes. But I think now I have.*

### **Grady**

*First—I didn't really enjoy writing in the beginning of this class. I didn't really enjoy it. I liked it a little more now, after I took the class, I think. Me and Duncan were talking about, I don't add enough detail in my previous essays. And now she says I add too much detail when I add it.*

*Maybe I add too much detail. Maybe I get too worried when I write my essays now. I try to add detail. So, I think maybe I just add too much.*

Grady is a senior who has “never really written anything for the enjoyment of something.” He writes because he is told to write for school. Grady is not confident in his writing; he notes that he did not like writing before the class and likes it a bit more after but is worried about the amount of detail he adds to his writing as Duncan gave him some feedback on it. He is working to find that balance of too little (where he started) and too much (where he is now) detail, questioning if he “gets too worried” when he writes. Grady seems to take Duncan’s word as law, without much initial consideration. He views “fluency” as a strength of his: “I have different sentences. Some of the sentences are really long, some of the sentences are really short.” He does feel like he grew some as a writer this semester. When asked why he would not consider himself a writer he shared that he doesn’t enjoy writing much: “I have to type out this big, long paper, and I’m like, I’m going to run out of patience.” When asked what it would take for him to consider himself a writer he said, “I’d have to do it more, and learn about things that I like to write about.”

When I asked Grady to describe himself as a writer, he struggled to answer. To help, I shared some ways I would describe myself. He then compared himself to me, noting that he was not sarcastic or witty and his writing is “pretty dry.” He ended up simply stating that, “I think I just try to explain what I’m trying to say and try to use information to back it up. So that’s probably what I could say, what I am as a writer.” Grady does not “like school in general because it’s cumbersome, but [he] gets how school benefits [him].” He and his family watch the news together quite a bit, and he likes politics. He went to Washington D.C. and was able to use that in one of his essays. Political science is a major he is interested in. When I shared that those

majors tend to have to do a lot of writing, he was surprised but said that if it was personal and he was interested he could “enjoy it that way.” He reflects that he might write for himself when he “gets a job,” write for “the enjoyment of it,” but as of right now, he does not both because of a lack of time and interest.

### ***Process***

He “blocks” in class and at times, starts writing, but does the majority of the writing at home. During workshop time he talks, blogs, and listens to music/podcasts. When he starts writing he “add[s] ideas and form[s] paragraphs” without a clear purpose. As he tends to write about “the same thing” his purpose develops along the way. He is writing differently for this class than others as the type of writing is different, and he enjoys this type of writing more. When writing a research paper, he is “more structured” as he has to have evidence from sources to back up his claims, a solid outline, with this writing he is a bit more free.

### ***Feedback***

When asked what type of feedback he likes, he started to directly talk about Duncan: “She usually does verbal and written. I like written a lot because I can just, like, she says those words, I just delete them, or she crosses that word, I just delete them. It’s pretty easy.” He likes being told what to change but does not like the constraints of rubrics. He enjoys conferencing with Duncan as “she’s fun to be around.” They have a relationship, he “knew her personally before the class started” as she went to his church. In those conferences they talked about “detail” and “be verbs” and she asks questions that he does not always have the answer to. He describes them as “vague” and notes that he does not like the questions as they make him think “really, really hard.” While he did not like the questions, they were helpful for him. He prefers

feedback that tells him exactly what to do next: “She sometimes will just cross out the sentences that I need to cross out, and I prefer that more than, what’s the purpose of your essay questions.” He is aware that those questions are “helpful” to his writing and “maybe improve [his] paper more” than when he is told what to do, he just does not always like having to make the choices himself. Grady uses most of the feedback that Duncan gives him as he feels like it helps him “improve,” both his paper and him as a writer.

His ideal feedback would be notes written on his paper, along with segments crossed out as needed, and suggestions on what changes to make. He “prefer[s] the comments more than the actual talking.” Grady is my only focal student that would rather not have a conversation about his writing (shared in his first interview). He would nix the “vague questions” in favor of direct suggestions. When asked if there was any feedback he chose to not use, from Duncan or his peers, he shared that he has applied all of the feedback “even though [he’s] not a big fan of [the student feedback].” When questioned, he shared that he feels obligated to use it (shared in his first interview): “They’re putting it on there for a reason. They’re not trying to sabotage me...It’s probably going to be somewhat helpful.” I asked him in our second interview if he felt like he was able to figure out where to make revisions in his writing or if feedback was still vital to him, he said that while he believes he could make the changes the feedback was still helpful. He is still in the pattern of waiting for the feedback instead of reflecting and making changes on his own, questioning if he is just “lazy.” He added that the class was easy for him, and he was doing really well so at times other classes come before this one. Effective feedback for Grady has changed from the beginning of the semester to the end:

When I first started the class, it would probably be like, here, just change this, this, and this, and then you would get done...I don't think it was as helpful as asking me personal

questions about it. So, maybe think about it more and maybe I revise stuff that we didn't talk about. And it probably made it better instead of just change this, this, and this.

More questioning, less explicit make these changes, ended up working best for him.

He talks with the members at his table, not just about writing but about Star Wars and other topics of note. He views peer review feedback as “the same as Ms. Duncan’s feedback.” Duncan had backed down on the detail in her feedback as she was teaching the students how to give feedback, so he equated that to the minimal feedback he got from his peers and did not “really see the point of it.” For Grady, it comes down to trust. He views Duncan’s feedback as stronger as she is the teacher and has the expertise. He does note that he trusts Candice, as she is “very smart,” but he “trusts Ms. Duncan more.” When asked if he knew how to give good feedback, he said he was similar to other students. He has grown in this: “...in the beginning the class was less detailed than the end of the class because I knew what I was talking about more.”

### ***Writing***

When revising his Definition paper, it was similar to how he typically revises: “I have comments. I talk to Ms. Duncan. She crosses out words she talked about, and I go do it again, and I send her another draft. So, I probably revise all the papers the same way.” For that piece, he conferenced six times with her, noting that his final conference was “crossing out two words.” Grady needs extensive conferences to have her check it and tell him when he is finished. When revising he reads through his writing and changes sentences that are unclear and works on his organization and grammar, all based on the feedback he receives. And he always revises after he gets feedback. He does not enjoy doing revisions but tends to like how they turn

out. It is the process, as he “run[s] out of patience and it’s cumbersome to do. But it’s easy.” In each of his papers he reads it aloud, noting that he “skips over things” otherwise, Grammarly helps fix some things, and he has his parents read it to “see if they like it” (they also make some changes). He also uses the Control F function to find be verbs. He has gotten better at revising as the semester went on as the repetition helped him improve. His revision cycle starts with asking Duncan to read it and give feedback, him making changes, and coming back to her for additional feedback. Grady does a lot of revisions. At times, later on in the semester, he made some changes on his own, in addition to the ones recommended and then went back to conference with Duncan again (this was a change from the beginning of the semester when he was not actively giving himself feedback or thinking about how to revise on his own).

For his Definition essay, he actively worked to not use the same word repetitively. He felt he used too many “be” verbs, “was, great, be.” In his final draft he worked to get rid of those and to use synonyms for “great” such as “fantastic, good, okay.” He used the “same word five times in each paragraph.” Duncan “pointed out” how repetitive it was by circling them on his paper which is helpful for him. His process for changing those involved reading each sentence and working to “make it better” which was also recommended by Duncan: “She changed the wording around, so I didn’t need to add the word in there.” He also used Google to find synonyms so he would not repeat the same word again. She also gave him the feedback that he overused the word “you,” telling him to change it to “I” as that would tie the experiences he wrote about to him as the writer. He did not recall any feedback he got from her that he did not use/was unhelpful. He also added additional descriptive words to better define his word. This was the piece where he started to add in additional detail about his “personal experiences...with [his] brother and how it’s different than a normal sibling relationship.” This was his favorite

paper this semester as Duncan said it was his “best essay” and he got to write about his brother. He said, “I thought it was like the most interesting I’d ever written.” It was the personal connection that made it his favorite, he got to write about his brother and liked doing it. It was the first piece that “really pertained to [his] life.” Duncan’s thoughts on his writing are very important to Grady as she is his teacher. Wanting to get a good grade is always on his mind as he writes. He did clarify that while it was nice that she enjoyed the paper, if she did not “it probably would still be [his] favorite paper because [he] wrote about something that [he] liked to write about.”

When he started his Belief essay, he thought it “was bad because [he] didn’t know what [he] was doing.” Duncan explained it to him. He was really lacking information and it was only a page long and took him under twenty minutes to write it. He reiterated three times that he did not know how to write it: “I just wrote words.” His belief essay was about the belief that “you choose to be a negative person.” His belief was present in the first draft but was missing additional information on his “opinions and examples.” It was too general and did not represent him, Duncan recommended he center in on himself to ground the piece. Grady was happy with his piece, but Duncan thought he “had too much detail at the end”; Grady disagreed but changed it anyway. When determining what detail to cut, he immediately cut what Duncan “crossed out on the paper” and anytime he “repeated [himself] more than once.” He revised this piece three times and conferenced with Duncan three times, similar to his Definition. This was the smallest number of times he conferenced with her by this point in the semester. He was happy to be finished with it and when asked if he liked the piece he wrote said, “it was fine.” He had a peer conference with Candice, whose feedback focused on grammar and parts that he repeated himself, similar to Duncan. He made all of the changes she recommended, just as he did for his

Definition essay: “I edited everything that she changed.” His use of the word “edit” is interesting here, as that varies greatly from revision which takes thought and reflection, while editing requires following guidelines or direction. His process for this piece was similar to what he typically does in Advanced Comp, getting ideas down on the page and refining those ideas. A recurring comment he got in conferences with Duncan was to “make it personal to you because it’s your essay.” Grady worked on centering his writing on him, but similar to his detail, he was still trying to figure out that sweet spot. It sounded like him as he used “I” more and was explicit about word choice.

Grady enjoyed writing his Argumentative paper, compared to other students who didn’t have a connection, as he shared his brother had Autism which helped the piece be “personalized” as he “has an insight that other people don’t have.” He started writing his first draft by writing his thoughts on vaccines and Autism, sharing the knowledge he has on the two. He started writing and “came up with ideas as [he] wrote.” For his second draft he built off the feedback he got from Duncan: “She said I needed to add more. My first draft was more like a research paper than an actual argumentative essay. So, I added, I needed to add more opinion to myself, I needed to cite my sources.” Rather than just relaying the information, she wanted him to actually support his argument. For organization, he determined the organization on his own as it was the “most common way to do an argumentative essay,” showing both sides of the issue before coming in with his beliefs at the end. He did not use an outline, he went straight from reading the articles in the packet, and finding additional sources on Google, taking some notes on them, and then writing his paper.

His piece centered in on the Autism factor, claiming that “there’s no scientific evidence that vaccines give kids Autism.” His essay argued that people need to stop believing vaccines

cause Autism as that is false. At the time of our second interview, he had conferenced with Duncan once and planned to meet with her again the next day. He figured she would tell him the “same thing” as the previous conference, that he needed to have more of his opinion in the piece as the argument side is not quite strong enough yet. He thought he could add in more of the argument “after the history pieces” as well as additional information and expanding the introduction and conclusion. I asked if he planned to make those changes prior to the conference, he said he could do that and has done it before and makes changes based on what he imagines she would tell him and that “most of the time [he’s] right.” He followed this up saying that Duncan repeats the same things again and again in conferences and I countered back that those may just be things he needs to continually work on. Following along like he typically does, Grady said that he would make the changes tonight and that could improve his paper, but he would still want to conference with her tomorrow.

At this moment in the process, Grady thought his paper was “fine”; he was a fan of his information, what he learned about the history of it, noting that his mom was really informed on this. He talked with his mom about his writing, asking about her opinion, but she did not give him much feedback. The feedback he got was mostly his own, her role was in connecting with him on what he was writing and their shared beliefs. He did not share any of his writing with his mom as his parents trusted him to do his homework. He shares his final grades with them at the end of each quarter. He did get feedback from Candice again about citing his research, as well as some grammar, and she encouraged him to add more of his opinion. When asked how he was approaching implementing that feedback he said that he “did it where she put the comments.” Again, there was not a lot of engagement in the revision beyond those comments. He read through Candice’s essay but felt like he didn’t have a whole lot of feedback

to give, her essay was strong. I asked if reading her essay gave him any ideas and he liked the story she started with, noting that “I could do that, probably.” I asked him where else he could add opinion into his piece:

In the beginning paragraph, I could talk about how my parents maybe felt about the issue. And how I maybe more feel [on] the issue, and how some other people that I know feel [about] the issue, that have Autism and stuff like that. Maybe I could more restate that in the end a little more, because the end is just five lines. And I could maybe relate the information to things, like the middle part to things in my life, and how it's similar. I mean, the research, how it relates to me and my brother, and stuff like that.

When asked if it sounds like him, he equated his voice to his opinion, saying that it sounds like him because he shared his opinion. When he first wrote down his information, missing his argument, his writing sounded like the sources he got his evidence from. For him, it is harder to sound like him in this type of writing as it is “more information based.”: “Probably sounds more like a research paper and less like myself instead of like the Belief essay, which sounds like a person. And the research paper, which sounds like a robot.” Both his voice and the robot voice are present, the more personal aspects he shines through, but with relaying facts the robot comes in full force.

Grady is very straightforward. He did not make any explicit choices to make it sound more like him, he “just wrote.” Grady did have another conference with Duncan: “I got 100 on the essay, so it got passed, so it's fine.” He did make changes on his own prior to the conference. He was happy how it turned out, he added more of his opinion and made changes based on Candice's feedback, noting that she is a “good writer.” His revisions strengthened his piece and helped it sound more like him, as he added in more about his brother through a

story. He felt like he ended up with the right amount of detail, noting that his first paragraph was “seven sentences.”

He wrote his Final essay in one night, spending about one and a half hours, sharing that it took a less amount of time compared to the other writing in the class: “I wrote about what I usually do as a writer. I think I said I was very logical when I was writing. I wasn't very creative...I tried sometimes to be funny because I've made Duncan laugh before in my writings, too.” He started writing without a plan and when he hit a part that needed evidence, he combed through his essays and added in a part that “made sense.” His first draft ended up being his final draft. He did make some changes in grammar, with grammar editing from his mom. When asked if he missed conferencing/feedback from Duncan and Candice, he said “it was different. I wouldn't say I really missed it. I just had to get it done.” I asked if he questioned himself, similar to Duncan, while he was writing. He shared that he did think about it a bit, but mostly just wrote and “tried [his] best.” He was happy with how it turned out as he got an A in the class, and while he did get feedback from Duncan on his final, he did not look at it because the class was finished. When asked if he felt prepared to write without additional feedback, structure, and support, he shared that he “felt [he] knew what [he] was doing. Just took the tools she gave [him]. So, yeah, I did pretty good on the final”, again bringing it back to the grade. When starting to write this piece, he referred to the requirements and made sure he was aware of them all, as it the was, according to Duncan, the “Franken-essay,” took a short break and then started writing. His intro centered on who he believes he is as a writer, along with connections to Advanced Comp. He wrote until he was stuck, calling it the “flow.” He continued to push through and wrote even when he was stuck. 9th Grade Grady would have wrote about how he did not know what to write, but he slowed down, paused, and

reflected. Grady noted that his final “probably would have been more successful” if he had conferences/feedback from Duncan.

### *Takeaway*

In previous courses, like AP Lang, he wrote about different authors, but in Advanced Comp he was allowed to “write about what [he] likes to write about” which led to him actually liking to write more. He liked Advanced Comp, noting that the class was “relaxing” for him, while he “gets worked up” walking into other classrooms, Duncan’s classroom was never that way for him. He did agree that in this class he had been able to write about things that he liked writing about, specifically noting that he liked writing the definition essay is it was related to his “personal life.” Those personal connections where he was actually able to pick the topic and really connect to it made him like it more and, in turn, made his writing better. He got lucky with the argumentative as it was about a topic he cared about, noting that if it was a topic he wasn’t interested in, he would have picked another topic and done the additional research: “I may have done better if I liked to write about something, as opposed to if I didn’t like to write about it. I would have put more effort into it.” Overall, he thinks that the writing he has done in this class is stronger, as he is “writing about stuff that [he] actually like[s] to write about, instead of writing about a topic that a teacher gives [him].” He is able to “express [himself] more...[as he is] not constrained by a rubric.” With a rubric there are “specific requirements,” without one, there is freedom (He doesn’t like rubrics because if you don’t follow each little requirement, you are “docked points”). He does note that Duncan gives feedback on what to change, but there is still freedom there in choice, writerly choice. He writes for himself: “I write about something that’s personal to me. At first, I didn’t really feel like I was writing for my brother. I felt like I was writing as an aspect of a sibling who had an Autistic sibling.” He does not feel like he is

writing for this class but does note that he is writing for Duncan as she grades him. When pressed, he did say with a grin that he thinks about this a lot when he is writing as he “wants to get a good grade,” noting with pride that he got an A+. Even at the end, the grade was important to Grady.

When writing a more creative piece, Grady starts without a purpose and develops that purpose along the way (this is different than his research focused writing which have more structure). He started off preferring written feedback as it told him the exact changes to make. Grady typically implemented each piece of feedback he was given (incorporating the “edit” of Candice) into his writing without thought. As the semester continued, he appreciated the questions Duncan asked him more, as it allowed him to consider what changes to make. Earlier he noted that he did not like those questions as they made him think rather than giving him the answer. When revising on his own he did not ask himself those questions, but he did think about possibly using them, instead he wrote to finish. He got in a pattern of waiting for feedback from Duncan (and peers) before making any changes. He did not even consider revisions until he knew what others thought. This did change a bit at the end of the semester; he gave himself feedback and revised on his own before a conference with Duncan. Still, that conference and revision cycle are what he prefers. Trust in those who give him feedback is also important. Grady trusted Duncan and Candice, their expertise, and as such would make some changes they recommended even if he didn’t agree with them. The relationships he had in the class mattered to him and made Advanced Comp a class he felt comfortable coming to.

Reflecting on what he learned in the class about himself as a writer, he centered on the fact that he “enjoys” writing more than he previously did. He has a lot to share, but the hard part for him is figuring out how to “word it,” the process of moving those ideas from his brain to the

page, and that was a place he grew this semester. To do this he slowed down and took time to think through it more, expanding on his ideas, not just “steamrolling” through it. He was thoughtful about the transition from what was in his brain to what he put on the page, thinking and considering, does this work, does this connect? He describes himself as someone who can write when it is a topic he enjoys. Choice is so important to him. He calls himself a “logical writer” so taking Creative Writing the following semester is a challenge for him, noting that “creative writing is not very logical.” He is still working on his word choice and adding in more detail.

*Last—A person who likes to write about the things they like to write about and can come up with arguments for the things they like to write about and can defend it pretty well, I think. And sometimes adds too little or too much detail in their papers.*

## **Chapter 7: Conclusions**

In this chapter I share my key findings (centered on what I learned from my focal students' experiences and stories). My focal students allowed me to see the writing process in action and their growth as writers over the course of the semester. They shared what effective feedback looked like for them and how they applied that feedback (or not) to their writing. My research elevates individual experiences and draws generalizations from there, noting that those experiences are not universal, but we can still learn from them. I also note the implications the study has for teachers, sharing key takeaways that they can implement in their own classrooms and use to reflect on their practice. I expand on possible directions for future research, and I summarize the study as a whole, focusing back in on my research questions directly. This research highlights the importance of the student perspective in research by elevating their stories and voices. I want to emphasize that anyone can honor student voice and experience, both teachers and researchers.

### **Summary of Key Findings**

My seven focal students were all different writers; their stories are unique, but there are some themes that came through where they overlap and where they are distinct. Alyssa, Evelyn, and Candice all routinely write outside of the classroom. Grady, August, and Chris do not. Even with those inconsistencies, voice still mattered to all of my focal students. They still wanted to make sure that their writing sounded like them and represented what they wanted to write (though that did contend with writing for a grade specifically with Grady and Chris). With that, Alyssa and Candice consistently made distinct writerly choices, both in early stages of writing, but more specifically in their revising. Evelyn, August, Grady, and Chris did this later on in the

semester but had to work up to it, moving beyond simply taking up feedback and using it because it was from their teachers.

### ***Process***

Writing processes varied for each student as well. Alyssa wrote a continual first draft, striving for perfection and representation of the web inside of her head. Other students also wrote and revised trying to replicate what was in their head, specifically Candice and Chris. All of the students worked toward having a specific and clear purpose in their writing, a major function of the course, finding the threads in their writing, both via feedback and on their own, working to tie it all together. August, Chris, Candice, and Grady tended to start writing and found their purposes along the way. For August and Grady that was because they were unsure how to find their purposes and make those clear. August improved and by the end of the semester felt very strongly about centering his writing on a chosen purpose (initially when he wrote, he put it down on the page, leading with the details and hoping to find a purpose). Candice and Grady simply wrote and figured out where they were going along the way, building in the moment, a process they were okay with. Evelyn, Michelle, and Candice prefer word vomit, getting it all down on the page and then working with it. Alyssa, Evelyn, and Michelle played with their writing like a puzzle, working to revise it and make the pieces fit together. The majority of their writing for this class was on the more creative and personal side and their processes varied when it came to their Argumentative piece, as it was more structured, so was their early writing (their purpose was clear before they started writing their draft and they leaned into the outline as they had to incorporate evidence).

### ***Feedback***

Duncan and Anderson's main source of feedback for students during conferences was question asking. Question asking was important to all of the students. Some developed the skill within the class (August, Grady, Evelyn, Chris, Michelle), some finetuned it (Alyssa, Candice). When writing their Final essay, Candice, Evelyn, Alyssa, and Michelle, all ask themselves similar questions. Chris, August, and Grady know the questions but didn't use them when revising, though they both noted it would have helped (they simply wanted to finish as soon as possible). As Chris revised his process looked different each time as he addressed the piece as a whole, rather than walking through a check list. He does not have a set plan; he focuses on the writing. Candice also approaches the piece as a whole, but she moves thematically (like transitions), making small changes as she goes along, paying attention to how those changes impact the whole. Students did see the value in revision, and felt it helped them grow as writers. Some just didn't love the time that it took (Grady and Chris).

All of my students appreciated the conversations they had with Duncan and Anderson, though for some, that appreciation took time. Grady did not like Duncan's questions as they pushed him to think and make choices; at the beginning of the semester, he preferred to be given the "answer." Near the end of the semester, he leaned into the questions more, taking more control of the process and his writing. Alyssa, Michelle, Candice, and Evelyn liked conferences as they allowed them to share the rationale behind writerly choices. Those conversations and collaborations allowed for clarification of feedback and gave students a chance to ask their own questions and share the choices they made. As a whole, they also liked written feedback as it was easier to refer back to when making changes (some took notes to compensate for that when verbal feedback was the majority). The conversations Duncan and Anderson had with students provided students with options to think about, rather than dictating changes to be made. They

pushed students to consider the choices they make, what is best for the piece, and see possibilities helping them grow as writers (Chris, Candice, Michelle, and August). Some still wanted to be told what to do, they craved that structure and direction (August, Grady, and even Michelle a bit).

Alyssa, August, Evelyn, Michelle, and Candice all specifically mentioned appreciating the additional perspective that peer feedback provides. Candice viewed peer feedback as more accessible as it was easier and quicker to meet with a peer than to find time with Duncan (who had many students she supported). All of the focal students engaged in peer review, a requirement of the class, but many noted that it unfortunately didn't always get beyond the surface level (August, Evelyn, Michelle, Chris, and Candice). August and Candice found the most value in saving peer feedback until the end, using it as a chance to "fine tune" their writing. They all preferred feedback from Duncan and Anderson, and most of them wished for more engaged peer feedback (Alyssa, Evelyn, Michelle, Chris, and Candice). They wanted engaged readers who were thoughtful, went into deeper aspects of writing, and were willing to engage in conversations about writing. The reader connection was very important to them; they wanted that relational feedback. Evelyn got that with Alyssa and Grady had a glimpse of that with Claire, but both Evelyn and Grady took their peers at their word (often implementing the feedback without thought) and didn't always ask the questions, discuss their own rationale, or reflect on possible choices. Candice often used peer feedback as a way to think about or approach her writing differently. There were times she interpreted the feedback in a different way which helped her become aware of possible changes, meaning she engaged with the feedback and reflected on it, rather than taking it as direction. Relationships impacted the effectiveness of peer feedback. As mentioned in Chapter 4, Students sat at table groups that

were carefully thought out. Sharing writing can be a vulnerable moment for many students, so having that consistency mattered. That was evident in the relationship that developed between Alyssa and Evelyn. In fact, Michelle, Alyssa, Evelyn, and Grady all noted the importance of trust when it came to feedback (both peer and teacher).

### ***Revision***

The repetition of reading was present for Alyssa, Evelyn, Grady, Chris, and Candice. They did it to check flow and voice, making sure their writing sounded the way they intended it to. It allowed them to find parts that didn't quite match up with their structure and little mistakes their brains skipped over when writing. Alyssa and Evelyn read aloud when revising. This was a practice Anderson also engaged in with his students, something that August and Michelle found value in. Alyssa and Evelyn were cutthroat when it came to deleting chunks of their writing. They routinely deleted whole parts of their pieces if they didn't match the purpose, tone, or structure of the essay. Candice struggled to delete large chunks as she became attached to her writing. To combat this, she would ask for feedback on areas that could be cut, from both Duncan and her peers.

How the focal students applied the feedback they were given was connected to the frequency of their writerly choices. For example, Candice would apply the feedback she was given, reflect on it, and determine if it made sense and supported the purpose. If it did not, she would get rid of that change. August, Grady, and Evelyn made changes based on the feedback from their teachers and peers without much thought or reflection at the beginning of the semester. They believed those individuals were "experts" or "smart" and decided to make the change on that. They all pushed back on this at the end of the semester. Evelyn thought this helped her become a better writer; she ended up commenting on her own work, having a

conversation with herself about her writing, reflecting and questioning. August ended up leading conversations in conferences with Anderson more, focusing on what he saw in his writing (though he still valued and respected Anderson's feedback and tended to make those changes). Grady started to make changes on his own before going into a conference with Duncan, though noted that the revision cycle of conferences and feedback were important to his revising. Chris also took up Duncan's feedback the majority of the time, unless it really went against what he saw and wanted for the piece (for him there was a tug between writing for the grade and having some investment in a few pieces he wrote this semester).

### ***Power Dynamics***

Alyssa was not concerned about her grade in the slightest. That was not the case for the rest. August started the semester wanting to please Anderson and be told exactly what to do, as did Grady. This changed a bit for August, but not Grady. Grady implemented every single piece of feedback he was given, from both Duncan and his peers, even if he did not agree with the feedback. Grady writes for the class; Alyssa writes for herself. For Evelyn, she wrote for herself mostly; however, when writing the Argumentative essay, she wrote for the grade. She was not passionate about the topic and that impacted her motivation and investment. Chris wrote for the grade the entire class, and, at times, also implemented changes he didn't agree with, following the path of least resistance, writing for Duncan and the grade.

### ***Freedom***

As a whole they had positive reactions to the course and their experiences in it, and what they learned. Alyssa liked that the course focused on learning and developing as a writer rather than just writing. Evelyn noted that the course helped her figure out who she was as a writer and

how to write for herself. Michelle appreciated the intentional time set aside to think and reflect before starting to write. Grady noted that the class made him like writing a bit more and he felt like he grew as a writer. Chris felt like he learned how to give feedback based on the modeling and gradual release of responsibility Duncan and Anderson designed and that the feedback focused on him as a writer and what he wanted to say, unlike other classes.

A huge part of the class was the personal nature of most of the writing. The students saw that and appreciated it and benefited from it. The freedom they had to write and make writerly choices was something they all found value in. This freedom of choice was present in all of their writing assignments, except for the Argumentative essay where they were given a topic (vaccinations) and asked to write on it. Without that personal connection they struggled with motivation, fell back into standard formats of writing, were limited in terms of style, and wrote for the grade. When they had the freedom and personal connection, they were able to be more creative, experiment with different styles, be more engaged, have a stronger voice, have agency, and fully engage in the writing process as a writer, rather than as a student. They were able to grow and develop as writers.

## **Implications**

Always the teacher, I now turn to the practical implications of my research, working to both address my research questions and support teachers in the practice of teaching writing. Based on this research, I have the following recommendations for teachers:

- Incorporate personal writing into your curriculum. This type of writing can also build students' skillsets as writers and help them learn to make intentional choices as writers.

This will help assist in teaching them to think like writers, rather than writing for the

grade. All of my focal students had growth over the course of the semester and were able to make intentional choices as writers. The skills they learn in personal writing will be applicable to more structured and formal writing.

- Focus on the importance of writing and revising with a purpose. At times, the assignment clearly states the purpose (this is typically the case in argumentative writing). With other writing, the purpose depends on the direction of the writer and students need instruction on how to determine and implement purpose throughout their entire piece; it is the glue that holds it together.
- Teach with community in mind, always. Fostering relationships and building opportunities for relationships to grow is vital, both relationships between teacher and student and relationships between student and student (Fisher, 2007). This can help work towards building trust (Christianakis, 2010; McManus & Kirby, 1988; Sitko, 1993). A step towards this in a writing classroom is to write and share that writing with your students. It models what that sharing can look like and how to be brave and vulnerable. The ideal is for that relationship to not be centered on grades, but that is a harder ask in most classrooms.
- Know the importance of asking questions. Questions make students think and consider their choices, rather than giving direct edits to make. When giving feedback you have to hold a balance, keeping in mind the type of feedback you give students. Duncan and Anderson moved towards questions as it put the writer in the seat of power (rather than the teacher), making choices based on what the student wanted for their writing (Straub, 1996). Some students will push back against this, wanting to know the answer and to do it “right.” You have to hold the balance for them with your feedback, pushing them to

write to learn and grow rather than writing for the grade; it will be a constant tension.

Think of conferences as conversations. As Duncan noted, “The best feedback is mutual discovery and usually born of questions.”

- It is important to treat students as writers and to talk to them as if they are writers. It creates agency. When giving feedback, help them think through options and make suggestions, do not dictate what choice they should make.
- Give students constructive feedback but also praise what they are doing well. They need to know what isn't working *and* know what to continue implementing in their writing.
- Adjust your approach to each student based on what you know about them, both for conferences and written feedback. This will be hard but know it will get easier and you will both learn along the way.
- Ask students to write multiple drafts and actually engage with those drafts. As soon as you put a grade on their writing, the majority of students will view it as finished, push against writing as an assessment (Applebee Lehr, & Auten, 1981). Elbow (1973) highlights the recursive nature of writing, both in the process of writing and in the development and growth of the writer. Engage them in the process of writing and have the expectation that revision will occur, that it is a part of writing, and they are writers.
- Teaching students how to give feedback is vital. This can be done by scaffolding and modeling it for students and providing them multiple opportunities to give feedback to each other. Peer feedback provides students with another perspective and can give you a break from reading every draft. Learning how to give feedback will also give them the

ability to give feedback to themselves, revising their writing on their own, asking the questions you typically ask them.

- Table groups matter. Relationships, trust, and honesty are vital in writing groups/feedback (Elbow, 1973). Who students sit by can have a huge impact on peer review. Having consistent seats allows trust to develop (takes away some of the vulnerability that is felt when sharing writing). It can allow students to grow from and with each other.
- Build points of reflection into your class. Give them time to talk about what they did/didn't like about their writing in conferences and peer review. Ask them about their choices, why they made a revision, why they chose a specific structure. Treat them like writers.
- Show different models of texts. They could be former students' writing or professional pieces. Have students engage with them, ask questions, take notes, and find inspiration. These models should not dictate what and how students can write.
- Students want their writing to sound like them. It matters and they are willing to revise to make their writing representative of who they are and what they had in mind for the piece.
- Freedom and choice in writing matter. Let them pick their topics, give them space to be creative and choose something they are interested in and passionate about. This will, in turn, produce students who are engaged and motivated to write more so than picking their topic for them. This can be done in more standard forms of writing too. Don't assign a

topic they have to argue, give them options or the freedom to find a topic that matters to them.

### **Future Research Directions**

While my research provides insight into what effective feedback looks like for students, illustrating how students take up that feedback in revision, there is more work to be done. The majority of research on feedback centers on the teacher's experience and perspective (Straub, 2000; Shute, 2008; Wilson, 2007; Hodges, 1992). My bounded case study elevates the experiences of seven students, but more analysis of student perspectives is needed. Future research could continue to build upon this by sharing the stories of students at different grade levels engaging in both personal and "standard" writing. I wrote about the impact personal writing had for my focal students, but I did not dig into the idea of choice. Future research could continue to question the impact choice has on students, both in writing and beyond, in relation to their engagement and motivation. My research discussed and analyzed the impact of power dynamics on what and how students wrote, but future research could center solely on power dynamics within the classroom, taking a wider scope on its impact on students.

The types of questions that Duncan and Anderson (and later in the semester the students) asked mattered. Additional analysis of my data could look at the idea of productive questioning and feedback. A question the teachers asked many times was "what is your purpose?" A big part of the class was writing for a purpose, not just writing for the class or an assignment, but writing with a goal in mind. Much of the writing done in the class was more personal, and students had to determine what to work towards. Unlike more traditional writing, where they knew what they were working towards, they had to set the purpose themselves and work towards writing in support of that. The question surrounding purpose was productive as it made them

think about the choices they were actively making as writers (or let them become aware that they weren't actively making choices). It is a question that doesn't necessarily have a right answer. That is a part of moving from student to writer, actively making those choices rather than just writing and seeing where it took them. It was a powerful question for students. Questions that were tied back to writerly choices, including: "Does this sound like you?", "Do you feel like this represents what you want it to represent?", "Did you make any explicit choices?", "Were you intentional about your structure?", "How is your structure impacting what you are trying to write?", "How is it supporting?". Those types of questions get at one major question, are you actively making a choice, if not, how can we help you make an active choice as a writer and make that decision for what you, as a writer, want it to be. If I were to dig deeper into the writing conferences, I would look at the questions being asked and the impact they had on the students' writing. That research would help us value thinking and writerly choices in writing, rather than see writing as a tool of assessment (Moffett, 1988).

### **In Sum**

While students engage in peer feedback they prefer the feedback from their teacher. This was tied, in part, to the type of feedback they were getting from their peers. Students valued in-depth feedback, beyond the surface level which emphasizes what other researchers have also found (Applebee, Lehr, & Auten, 1981; Parr & Timperly, 2010; Patthey-Chavez, Matsumur, & Valdes, 2004). My research emphasizes that peer feedback is still lacking; students want that relational feedback but, as a whole, struggle to provide it (Berg, 1999; Brannon & Knoblauch, 1982; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Stylslinger, 1998). However, peer feedback is still valuable as it provides multiple perspectives on writing which do matter (Elbow, 1973). The reader's perception of the writing and their interactions with it, their critical evaluation and analysis,

make an impact (Elbow & Belanoff, 2003; Rosenblatt, 1995). When students engage in peer feedback, engage with the writing they are asked to look at beyond the surface level, there is growth for them, both as writers and readers (Moffett, 1983). There was a transition over the course of the semester from preference of specific directed feedback (wanting a teacher to tell them what revisions they should make) to more open-ended conversation with the teacher asking questions to prompt discussion of feedback and potential changes, with an emphasis on student choice in revision. That conversation and dialogue mattered (Hovan, 2012; Nystrand, 1984; Parr & Timperly, 2010), not simply editing the writing as a “form” of feedback but engaging in the complex task of feedback and revision. The social nature of writing (Christianakis, 2010), and its impact, an emphasis for both Moffett and Elbow, can be seen in my research. There are distinct individual differences in preferences for when and how feedback is given. Each student was unique (with some overlaps) in their preference.

One shared preference came through for each of my focal students: they wanted a choice in their writing topic and tended to prefer a topic that they had a personal connection with. The personal nature of the writing mattered to all of them. By grounding writing in the lives of students (Fisher, 2007) they were more invested in their writing. In the context of this study, the format of the Advanced Comp courses, their implementations, and the beliefs of Anderson and Duncan are vital to understanding the stories of each of my focal students (and the larger implications of the student as a whole). Anderson and Duncan were concerned that there was too much of a focus on personal writing in the course and that students would not be able to grow as much in their formal writing. This fear was not echoed in student experiences. All of my focal students shared that they felt they had grown as writers overall and felt that what they learned in Advanced Comp would positively impact their more traditional writing as well as their

more creative (Fisher, 2007). In fact, I would argue that by strengthening their creative chops they will be better able to argue, support claims, and write with the reader in mind.

Both students and teachers recognized the pressures of grades and the power a teacher typically holds over a student. It impacted some more than others. Anderson and Duncan worked to dismantle the power dynamics as much as possible (Fisher, 2007). They removed grades from the equation, but it was still felt. Brannon & Knoblauch (1982) noted that teachers tend to make the choices for students in writing, even if that is not their intention. My teachers worked against this, but it still happened based on the students' perceptions and the systemic nature of the power dynamics present in classrooms. Duncan and Anderson intentionally asked vague questions to ensure the writer was in the driver's seat during conferences (Elbow & Belanoff, 2003). This had varying levels of success; however, there was growth in all of my focal students in making decisions for their writing. Those conversations and questions, while not always valued earlier in the semester, were the catalyst for successful revisions that the writers were pleased with. The community Duncan and Anderson worked to build within their classrooms was evident. Their rapport with students was strong and their classrooms were welcoming. Students did not come to conferences in fear of the red pen but came knowing that they would talk about their purpose and choices as writers. Rosenblatt (1995) highlights the importance of relationships and connection; importance of conversations and discussions (critical thinking develops from those and a deeper understanding of the self). That trust was paramount for their peer feedback as well. Although that feedback was not used as much when revising, they were still willing to share their work and grew in their ability to give thoughtful feedback to each other.

In terms of my research questions, feedback shapes high school students' writing in a variety of ways, all unique to the student, teacher, and class. The factors impacting this include but are not limited to curriculum, relationships, type of feedback, and emphasis on the writing process. Each student followed their own process when implementing feedback in revision; that recursive process happened in stages that intersected and overlapped (Flower & Hayes, 1981; Schwartz, 1983). Alyssa did a continual revision, while Grady insisted on applying each piece of feedback he received, and Candice reflected on each piece of feedback revised with it in mind considering if it matched her voice and purpose (removing it if it wasn't a good fit). Many of my focal students engaged their internal reader when revising, engaging in conversations with themselves via feedback or questioning; this finding builds on previous work from Sommers (1980). I worked to engage with students where they were at in their processes, rather than adjusting/intervening in that process (Emig, 1971). Advanced Comp valued revision as part of learning to write (Applebee, 1981) and valued the process over the product (Bridwell, 1980; Fitzgerald, 1987; Sommers, 1980). I delve into the nuances of Bridwell's (1980) earlier research, moving beyond engaging with a single draft of writing, to the recursive process of students over multiple drafts and talking with them about their revisions, not solely relying in an analysis of their writing, expanding on the work of Flower & Hayes (1981) and Myhill (2009).

As mentioned in Chapter 2, there is a lack of student perspective in research and the impact feedback had on student writing (Hodges, 1992; Kramer-Simpson, 2012; Sperling, 1994; Straub, 2000). The preference of students has been noted, but research still lacks their perspective and voice (Cho, Schunn, & Charney, 2006; Johnston, 2012; Sommers, 2006). There is also the problematic nature of experimental studies as they do not take into account the social interactions that come with writing, the humanity in it. Revision as they defined it also tended to

focus on surface level issues as a whole. They didn't always use authentic writing from students (some used a sample piece instead) (Cho & MacArthur, 2010; Duijnhouwer, Prins, & Stokking, 2012; Strijbos, Narciss, & Dünnebier, 2010; Wallace & Hayes, 1991). There is also a focus on teacher perspective in research on feedback (Bardine & Fulton, 2008; Dockrell, Marshall, & Wyse, 2016; Murray, 1982; Smede, 2000). I address this gap in the literature by delving into the student perspective through the stories of my focal students, showcasing how they used feedback and why. I worked to treat them as individuals with distinct choices and experiences. While I do come to conclusions about what I learned from and with them, I do so without generalizing or making blanket statements about all students or a single right way to provide students with feedback.

In terms of feedback, some of my focal students transitioned from being annoyed by the continual questions asked in conferences with Duncan and Anderson to appreciating the agency those questions allowed them in their writing while others liked the opportunity to clarify written feedback during conferences, more noted that a combination of written and verbal feedback was the best fit for them. Effective feedback looked different for each of my focal students. That was the difficulty. There is not a one size fits all approach (Elbow & Belanoff, 1989). It takes reflection from the students and the teacher to determine what the best fit is for each student. It is also up to the teacher to continue to push students to consider themselves as writers who actively make choices, rather than students who are writing to finish.

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## Appendix A

### Consent/Assent Forms

#### UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON Research Participant Information and Consent Form [Teacher]

**Title of the Study:** Research Participant Information and Consent Form Student Centered Focus on Feedback and Revision Study

**Principal Investigator:** Dawnene Hassett — phone: 608-263-4666 — email: ddhassett@wisc.edu

**Study Team Member:** Lauren Heap — email: heap@wisc.edu

#### **DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH**

You are invited to participate in a research study about how students utilize feedback they receive from teachers and fellow students. Examining how students understand, take up, and implement feedback will help educators improve their own feedback and also enhance not only how they teach students to provide feedback but also how they teach students to use feedback in their revisions. You have been asked to participate because you are a teacher at Lakeview High School for a course that is primarily writing based, with an inherent focus on process writing. With that in mind, you will be continually engaging in the writing process, especially feedback and revision, essential elements I intend to research through the study. The purpose of the research is to highlight the student perspective within writing research, centering in on their integral role in the transactional and recursive process of writing and revision.

This study will include students and teachers in select classrooms at Lakeview High School, and as such the research will be conducted in Lakeview High School, primarily in English classrooms.

Audio tapes will be made of your participation. However, only the researchers (and potentially audio transcribers) will hear the audio recordings. The audio recordings, notes taken during observations, and documents (writing samples) will be retained for future research, but will be deidentified to maintain confidentiality.

#### **WHAT WILL MY PARTICIPATION INVOLVE?**

If you decide to participate in this research you will be asked to consent to being observed during your English class throughout the semester, in teacher-led lessons, writing groups, and during your feedback process. You may also be asked to be interviewed about your how you teach the writing process, writing groups, and how you are providing feedback for students, referencing your actual feedback. If you are asked to be interviewed, that will take place approximately 4

times throughout the study, each interview lasting approximately 30 minutes (2 hours in total). I also intend to collect course materials and students' writing samples to analyze.

**ARE THERE ANY RISKS TO ME?**

No personal information about you will be shared with other participants. You can opt out of any part of the project or choose not to answer any question that you do not want to answer. There is always a slight possibility that the identities of research participants may become public. Several precautions will be taken to prevent this from happening. Names of people and places will be changed in transcripts and other data by the research team as the data is collected. All information will be kept in uploaded to the secure UW Box for long term storage, where it will be kept in order to reference and clarify the data.

**ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS TO ME?**

There are no direct benefits for participating in this study.

**HOW WILL MY CONFIDENTIALITY BE PROTECTED?**

While there will be publications as a result of this study, your name will not be used. If you participate in the study, we may quote you directly without using your name. If you agree to allow us to use your words in publications, please initial the statement at the bottom of this form.

**WHOM SHOULD I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?**

You may ask any questions about the research at any time. If you have questions about the research after you leave today you should contact the Principal Investigator Dawnene Hassett at 608-263-4666 or Lauren Heap at heap@wisc.edu.

If you are not satisfied with response of research team, have more questions, or want to talk with someone about your rights as a research participant, you should contact the Education and Social/Behavioral Science IRB Office at 608-263-2320.

Your participation is completely voluntary. If you decide not to participate or to withdraw from the study it will have no effect on your standing in the class.

Your signature indicates that you have read this consent form, had an opportunity to ask any questions about your participation in this research and voluntarily consent to participate. You will receive a copy of this form for your records.

Name of Participant (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_ I give my permission to be quoted directly in publications without using my name.

**UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON**  
**Research Participant Information and Consent Form [Parent]**

**Title of the Study:** Student Centered Focus on Feedback and Revision Study

**Principal Investigator:** Dawnene Hassett — phone: 608-263-4666 — email: ddhassett@wisc.edu

**Study Team Member:** Lauren Heap — email: heap@wisc.edu

**DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH**

Your child is invited to participate in a research study about how students utilize feedback they receive from teachers and fellow students. Examining how students understand, take up, and implement feedback will help educators improve their own feedback and also enhance not only how they teach students to provide feedback but also how they teach students to use feedback in their revisions. Your child has been asked to participate because they are a student at Lakeview High School in a course that is primarily writing based, with an inherent focus on process writing. With that in mind, they will be continually engaging in the writing process, especially in feedback and revision, essential elements I intend to research through the study. The purpose of the research is to highlight the student perspective within writing research, centering in on their integral role in the transactional and recursive process of writing and revision.

This study will include students and teachers in select classrooms at Lakeview High School, and as such the research will be conducted in Lakeview High School, primarily in English classrooms. Audio tapes will be made of your child's participation. However, only the researchers (and potentially audio transcribers) will hear the audio recordings. The audio recordings, notes taken during observations, and documents (writing samples) will be retained for future research, but will be de-identified to maintain confidentiality.

**WHAT WILL PARTICIPATION INVOLVE?**

If you decide to let your child participate in this research you will be asked to consent to them being observed during their English class throughout the semester, in teacher-led lessons, writing groups, and during the writing process. They may also be asked to be interviewed about their writing process, their writing group, and how they are or are not using feedback when revising their writing, referencing their actual writing. If they choose to be interviewed, that will take place approximately 4 times throughout the study, each interview lasting approximately 30 minutes (2 hours in total). I also intend to collect course materials and students' writing samples to analyze.

**ARE THERE ANY RISKS TO MY CHILD?**

No personal information about your child will be shared with other participants. You and your child can opt out of any part of the project or choose not to answer any question that you and

your child do not want to answer. There is always a slight possibility that the identities of research participants may become public. Several precautions will be taken to prevent this from happening. Names of people and places will be changed in transcripts and other data by the research team as the data is collected. All information will be kept in uploaded to the secure UW Box for long term storage, where it will be kept in order to reference and clarify the data.

**ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS TO MY CHILD?**

There are no direct benefits for participating in this study.

**HOW WILL MY CHILD'S CONFIDENTIALITY BE PROTECTED?**

While there will be publications as a result of this study, your child's name will not be used. If they participate in the study, we may quote them directly without using their name. If you and your child agree to allow us to use their words in publications, please initial the statement at the bottom of this form.

**WHOM SHOULD I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?**

You may ask any questions about the research at any time. If you have questions about the research after you leave today you should contact the Principal Investigator Dawnene Hassett at 608-263-4666 or Lauren Heap at heap@wisc.edu.

If you are not satisfied with response of research team, have more questions, or want to talk with someone about your rights as a research participant, you should contact the Education and Social/Behavioral Science IRB Office at 608-263-2320.

Your child's participation is completely voluntary. If you decide not to allow your child to participate or choose to withdraw them from the study it will have no effect on your child's standing in the class.

Your signature indicates that you have read this consent form, had an opportunity to ask any questions about your child's participation in this research and voluntarily consent to your child's participation. You will receive a copy of this form for your records.

Name of Student (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Parent/Guardian (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_ I give my permission for my child to be quoted directly in publications without using their name.

**UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON**  
**Research Participant Information and Consent Form**  
**[Students over the age of 18]**

**Title of the Study:** Student Centered Focus on Feedback and Revision Study

**Principal Investigator:** Dawnene Hassett — phone: 608-263-4666 — email: ddhassett@wisc.edu

**Study Team Member:** Lauren Heap — email: heap@wisc.edu

**DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH**

You are invited to participate in a research study about how students utilize feedback they receive from teachers and fellow students. Examining how students understand, take up, and implement feedback will help teachers improve their own feedback and also enhance not only how they teach students to provide feedback but also how they teach students to use feedback in their revisions. You have been asked to participate because you are a student at Lakeview High School in a course that is primarily writing based, with a focus on process writing. With that in mind, you will be continually engaging in the writing process, especially in feedback and revision, essential elements I intend to research through the study. The purpose of the research is to highlight the student perspective within writing research, centering in on their integral role in the transactional and recursive process of writing and revision.

This study will include students and teachers in select classrooms at Lakeview High School, and as such the research will be conducted in Lakeview High School, primarily in English classrooms. Audio tapes will be made of your participation. However, only the researchers (and potentially audio transcribers) will hear the audio recordings. The audio recordings, notes taken during observations, and documents (writing samples) will be retained for future research, but will be de-identified to maintain confidentiality.

**WHAT WILL MY PARTICIPATION INVOLVE?**

If you decide to participate in this research, you will be asked to consent to being observed during your English class throughout the semester, in teacher-led lessons, writing groups, and during your writing process. You may also be asked to be interviewed about your writing process, your writing group, and how you are or are not using feedback when revising your writing, referencing your actual writing. You may decline to be interviewed without any negative consequences. If you choose to be interviewed, that will take place approximately 4 times throughout the study, each interview lasting approximately 30 minutes (2 hours in total). I also intend to collect course materials and students' writing samples to analyze.

**ARE THERE ANY RISKS TO ME?**

No personal information about you will be shared with other participants. You can opt out of any part of the project or choose not to answer any question that you do not want to answer. There is

always a slight possibility that the identities of research participants may become public. Several precautions will be taken to prevent this from happening. Names of people and places will be changed in transcripts and other data by the research team as the data is collected. All information will be kept in uploaded to the secure UW Box for long term storage, where it will be kept in order to reference and clarify the data.

**ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS TO ME?**

There are no direct benefits for participating in this study.

**HOW WILL MY CONFIDENTIALITY BE PROTECTED?**

While there will be publications as a result of this study, your name will not be used. If you participate in the study, we may quote you directly without using your name. If you agree to allow us to use your words in publications, please initial the statement at the bottom of this form.

**WHOM SHOULD I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?**

You may ask any questions about the research at any time. If you have questions about the research after you leave today you should contact the Principal Investigator Dawnene Hassett at 608-263-4666 or Lauren Heap at heap@wisc.edu.

If you are not satisfied with response of research team, have more questions, or want to talk with someone about your rights as a research participant, you should contact the Education and Social/Behavioral Science IRB Office at 608-263-2320.

Your participation is completely voluntary. If you decide not to participate or to withdraw from the study it will have no effect on your standing in the class.

Your signature indicates that you have read this consent form, had an opportunity to ask any questions about your participation in this research and voluntarily consent to participate. You will receive a copy of this form for your records.

Name of Participant (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_ I give my permission to be quoted directly in publications without using my name.

**UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON**  
**Research Participant Information and Assent Form**  
**[Students under the age of 18]**

**Title of the Study:** Student Centered Focus on Feedback and Revision Study

**Principal Investigator:** Dawnene Hassett — phone: 608-263-4666 — email: ddhassett@wisc.edu

**Study Team Member:** Lauren Heap — email: heap@wisc.edu

**DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH**

You are invited to participate in a research study about how students utilize feedback they receive from teachers and fellow students. Examining how students understand, take up, and implement feedback will help teachers improve their own feedback and also enhance not only how they teach students to provide feedback but also how they teach students to use feedback in their revisions. You have been asked to participate because you are a student at Lakeview High School in a course that is primarily writing based, with a focus on process writing. With that in mind, you will be continually engaging in the writing process, especially in feedback and revision, essential elements I intend to research through the study. The purpose of the research is to highlight the student perspective within writing research, centering in on their integral role in the transactional and recursive process of writing and revision.

This study will include students and teachers in select classrooms at Lakeview High School, and as such the research will be conducted in Lakeview High School, primarily in English classrooms. Audio tapes will be made of your participation. However, only the researchers (and potentially audio transcribers) will hear the audio recordings. The audio recordings, notes taken during observations, and documents (writing samples) will be retained for future research, but will be de-identified to maintain confidentiality.

**WHAT WILL MY PARTICIPATION INVOLVE?**

If you decide to participate in this research, you will be asked to consent to being observed during your English class throughout the semester, in teacher-led lessons, writing groups, and during your writing process. You may also be asked to be interviewed about your writing process, your writing group, and how you are or are not using feedback when revising your writing, referencing your actual writing. You may decline to be interviewed without any negative consequences. If you choose to be interviewed, that will take place approximately 4 times throughout the study, each interview lasting approximately 30 minutes (2 hours in total). I also intend to collect course materials and students' writing samples to analyze.

**ARE THERE ANY RISKS TO ME?**

No personal information about you will be shared with other participants. You can opt out of any part of the project or choose not to answer any question that you do not want to answer. There is

always a slight possibility that the identities of research participants may become public. Several precautions will be taken to prevent this from happening. Names of people and places will be changed in transcripts and other data by the research team as the data is collected. All information will be kept in uploaded to the secure UW Box for long term storage, where it will be kept in order to reference and clarify the data.

**ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS TO ME?**

There are no direct benefits for participating in this study.

**HOW WILL MY CONFIDENTIALITY BE PROTECTED?**

While there will be publications as a result of this study, your name will not be used. If you participate in the study, we may quote you directly without using your name. If you agree to allow us to use your words in publications, please initial the statement at the bottom of this form.

**WHOM SHOULD I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?**

You may ask any questions about the research at any time. If you have questions about the research after you leave today you should contact the Principal Investigator Dawnene Hassett at 608-263-4666 or Lauren Heap at heap@wisc.edu.

If you are not satisfied with response of research team, have more questions, or want to talk with someone about your rights as a research participant, you should contact the Education and Social/Behavioral Science IRB Office at 608-263-2320.

Your participation is completely voluntary. If you decide not to participate or to withdraw from the study it will have no effect on your standing in the class.

Your signature indicates that you have read this consent form, had an opportunity to ask any questions about your participation in this research and voluntarily consent to participate. You will receive a copy of this form for your records.

Name of Participant (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_ I give my permission to be quoted directly in publications without using my name.

## Appendix B

### Recruitment Script

#### **Teacher:**

The following text/script will be used to recruit teachers of English classes at Lakeview High School. I will contact them in person by visiting during their class time.

Hello! My name is Lauren Heap and I am a PhD student at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, studying Education and am conducting research on writing. I'm interested in studying how students utilize feedback they receive from teachers and fellow students on their writing. Examining how students understand, take up, and implement feedback may help educators improve their own feedback and also enhance not only how they teach students to provide feedback but also how they teach students to use feedback in their revisions.

I'm asking you to participate because you are a teacher at Lakeview High School for a course that is primarily writing based, with an inherent focus on process writing. With that in mind, you will be continually engaging in the writing process, especially feedback and revision, essential elements I intend to research through the study. The purpose of the research is to highlight the student perspective within writing research, centering in on their integral role in the transactional and recursive process of writing and revision.

If you decide to participate in this research you will be asked to consent to being observed during your English class throughout the semester, in teacher-led lessons, writing groups, and during your feedback process. I also intend to collect course materials and students' writing samples to analyze. You may also be asked to be interviewed about your how you teach the writing process, writing groups, and how you are providing feedback for students, referencing your actual feedback. If you are asked to be interviewed, that will take place approximately 4 times throughout the study, each interview lasting approximately 30 minutes (2 hours in total).

#### **Student:**

The following text/script will be used to recruit students of English classes at Lakeview High School. I will contact them in person by visiting during their class time.

Hello! My name is Lauren Heap and I am a PhD student at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, studying Education and am conducting research on writing. You are invited to take part of a research study that focuses on how students utilize feedback they receive from teachers and fellow students. The student-centered focus affords a clearer understanding of the steps students take as they revise, while looking at the outcomes to determine whether that revision was successful. Examining how students understand, take up, and implement feedback will help educators improve their own feedback and also enhance not only how they teach students to provide feedback but also how they teach students to use feedback in their revisions. This study will include Lakeview High School students who are in English classrooms with an emphasis on process writing, and hopefully you will be willing to be a part of that group.

This project will involve observations during your English class throughout the semester, in teacher-led lessons, writing groups, and during your writing process. You may also be asked to be interviewed about your writing process, your writing group, and how you are or are not using feedback when revising your writing, referencing your actual writing. The interviews would be one-on-one with me and would last approximately 30 minutes. If you are not interested in being interviewed, simply tell me no, and there will be no negative consequences whatsoever. I also intend to collect course materials and students' writing samples to analyze. For those who are interested in participating, your parents must have signed a consent form agreeing to allow you to participate, and you will need to sign an assent form, also agreeing. I have those forms for individuals interested in participating and am available to answer questions. As always, you are welcome to decline participation in this project at any time with no negative consequences.

## Appendix C

### Semi-Structured Interview Questions

#### Semi-Structured Interview Questions: Teacher

I'm interested in how feedback shapes the writing of high school students, specifically what they view as effective feedback, how they respond to feedback, and what steps they take when using feedback in revision.

- 1) Can you tell me a bit about who you are as a teacher? As a writer?
- 2) When you give feedback, do you primarily give verbal, written or rubric feedback? Why?
- 3) Can you describe a time when you feel like you gave effective feedback? When you feel like your feedback was not as effective?
- 4) What do you view as effective feedback? Why is it effective?
- 5) What does effective feedback look like from the perspective of students? (What kind of feedback do they like to receive?)
- 6) How do you approach revision and feedback with students? (What goes into teaching these concepts to students? What do you want them to know?)
- 7) What do you like about peer review/writing workshop model? What do you dislike?
- 8) What do you typically see in student revisions? (What do students typically focus on? Organization, grammar, content, transitions, spelling, evidence, analysis?)
- 9) What do you typically see in student to student feedback? (What do students typically focus on? Organization, grammar, content, transitions, spelling, evidence, analysis?)
- 10) In general, how do you feel about feedback and revision in your classroom? Explain. (Are there any changes you would make to the process?)

#### Semi-Structured Interview Questions: Student

I'm interested in how feedback shapes the writing of high school students, specifically what you view as effective feedback, how you respond to feedback, and what steps you take when using feedback in revision.

- 1) Can you tell me a bit about who you are as a writer? (Would you consider yourself a writer? What are your strengths/weaknesses in writing?)
- 2) Do you prefer written, verbal, or rubric feedback? Why?
- 3) Can you describe a time when you feel like you received helpful/effective feedback? When you received not helpful/effective feedback?
- 4) What does effective feedback look like for you? Why is it effective?
- 5) What do you like about peer review/writing workshop? What do you dislike?
- 6) Can you describe what you do when you revise/when you revised this paper? (Where do you start? Why there?)
- 7) What do you focus on when you revise? (Organization, grammar, content, transitions, spelling, evidence, analysis?)

- 8) Do you change how you revise based on the kind of writing you are working on? Explain.
- 9) In general, how do you feel about revising your writing? Explain.

## **Appendix D**

### **Unstructured Interview Themes**

#### **Unstructured Interview Themes: Teacher**

- 1) Starting point
- 2) Organization of feedback process
- 3) Major focus (surface level vs. larger aspects)
- 4) Individual, unique practices (pens vs. computer, rubrics, questioning)
- 5) Addressing everything
- 6) Effective feedback views
- 7) Type of feedback (verbal, written, rubric)

#### **Unstructured Interview Themes: Student**

- 1) Starting point
- 2) Organization of revision process
- 3) Major focus (surface level vs. larger aspects)
- 4) Individual, unique practices (reading aloud, music, environment)
- 5) Response to feedback (when do they use it/ignore it)
- 6) Effective feedback views

## Appendix E

### IRB Information

**Potential benefits/insights:** The potential benefits of this study include: a deeper understanding of how students are incorporating feedback in their writing revision; the possibility of changing current teaching practices for the benefit of students; changing the way that students' voices are valued in educational and writing research.

**Describe how all risks will be minimized:** A breach of confidentiality will be minimized because all written consent forms will be locked in a filing cabinet in an office on the UW campus. Also, any identifiable information will be recorded using pseudonyms. To mitigate the personal, sensitive, or identifiable information that participants may reveal, all data will be recorded using pseudonyms and the electronic material will be uploaded to UW Box for security. Names of people and places will be changed in transcripts and other data by the research team as the data is collected. If someone reveals personal information that is not related to the research, it will be stricken from the record. Participants always have the option to not respond to any question that make them uncomfortable. No personal information about participants will be shared with other participants. They can opt out of any part of the project or choose not to answer any question that they do not want to answer. All information will be kept in uploaded to the secure UW Box for long term storage, where it will be kept in order to reference and clarify the data.

**Inclusion/Exclusion criteria:** To be included, students must be enrolled in the classes that I am observing, and staff must be part of teaching the courses that I am observing. Students who are not enrolled in the courses and staff who are not teaching the classes I am observing will be excluded.

**Justification for inclusion of vulnerable subjects:** The goal of the project is to gain a greater understanding of high school students' perspectives and processes of writing and revision. Since this study focuses on high school students, some will be minors, although some may be over the age of 18. No student will be required to participate in any part of the study. No information about the students will be released to anyone in the school. All interviews will take place inside the school building away from other teachers or students. Students can choose to not answer any or all interview questions. I will employ member checking so that students have the opportunity to make sure they are represented fully and honestly. Students' choice to participate or not will have no impact on their participation or outcome in the course.

**Recruitment Plan:** English teachers at Lakeside High School will be recruited in person. I will contact these teachers once using the attached teacher recruitment script to determine their interest in participating in this study. Students will be recruited only from the classrooms of the English teachers who have consented to participate. All student recruitment for this study will be done in person in the context of the English course that students are taking using the attached student recruitment text. At this time, I will also hand out copies of the parent informed consent form and the student assent form for students who are interested in participating in the study to take home to their parents/guardians. No students are in any way required to be a part of the study and the study will have no impact on their experience or assessment in the course. No students who do not consent/assent will be included in the study data. Students will be recruited from participating English classrooms at most two times.

**Privacy:** All interviews with students, and staff as requested, will be conducted in a private room. The interview questions will be limited to those that are necessary to achieve the goals of the research. There will be no further collection of sensitive information. All paper forms, including consent and assent forms, will be stored in a locked file cabinet in an office on the UW campus. Pseudonyms will be used for all identifiable data. Information identifying subjects will be stored in a separate electronic file. All electronic files will be temporarily stored on my personal laptop which is password protected and then uploaded to UW Box and erased from my laptop. Data will be temporarily stored on my laptop, which is password protected, and will then be uploaded to UW Box and erased from the laptop. Interviews will be stored temporarily on my password protected phone and will then be transcribed onto my password protected laptop. The audio and transcripts will then be uploaded to UW Box. The audio and transcripts will then be deleted from my phone and laptop.

**Informed Consent:** The consent process will begin the first course meeting day when I will send consent forms home with all students. Students under 18 will need their parent/guardian to sign the form and then return it. Students over 18 will need to sign the form and return it. For staff, I will provide them with consent forms ON the first course meeting day. The consent process for students under 18 will occur outside of the school with their parent/guardian. For students over 18, as well as staff, the process may occur either in or out of school. The assent process from the students under 18 will only happen after obtaining consent from their parent/guardian. For all students who are under 18 I will again inform them of the purpose and procedures of the study before giving them the assent form. They will then need to sign and return the assent form.

**Retaining Audio Recordings:** The purpose of retaining the audio recordings will be for future research projects using the same data. However, they will be uploaded to UW Box for security.

**Participants:** Participants were recruited during summer 2019 (teachers) into fall 2019 (students).

## Appendix F

### Writing Assignments from Advanced Comp

#### Snapshot Essay

##### Feedback Sheet for Snapshot

*Let's define an essay as something with paragraphs that addresses the topic we are covering. It must also have a beginning, middle, and end to count as a draft. If your paper doesn't meet these criteria, you'll need to rewrite before I give you feedback.*

##### **Snapshot Essay Expectations:**

1. Details a single moment
  - a. Narrows focus to concentrate on a specific experience/event
  - b. Uses precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experience/ event (i.e. "show don't tell")
2. Exhibits a proofread essay

**When turning in FIRST draft, please answer the following two questions:**

<b>What is your purpose in this writing? (The deeper meaning beyond "describing the moment in time")</b>	
<b>Describe how you attempted to achieve this purpose thus far. (Perhaps discuss structure, writing strategies, etc.)</b>	

**When turning in FINAL draft, please answer the following two questions:**

<b>What is your purpose in this writing? (This often changes after the first draft; don't just rewrite the same thing!)</b>	
<b>Describe how you achieved this purpose.</b>	

## Definition Essay

### Feedback Sheet for Definition Essay

*Let's define an essay as something with paragraphs that addresses the topic we are covering. It must also have a beginning, middle, and end to count as a draft. If your paper doesn't meet these criteria, you'll need to rewrite before I give you feedback.*

#### Extended Definition Essay Expectations:

1. Explore a complex, vague, controversial, or misunderstood idea in its full complexity
  - a. draw the boundaries around the idea until its meaning is clear and precise
  - b. achieve a clear purpose
  - c. organize definition logically
2. Choose precise words and phrases, telling details, and figurative language to convey the meaning of the word (i.e. "show don't tell").
  - a. use strong verbs (avoids be-verbs/weak verbs) and concrete nouns while avoiding intensifiers, overuse of adjectives/adverbs, and clichés
  - b. create a deliberate tone through word choice
3. Exhibit a proofread, fluent essay

**Student Reflection: When turning in FIRST draft, please answer the following question:**

<b>What is your purpose in this essay?</b> (What are you trying to say?)	
<b>How are you attempting to achieve this purpose thus far? (Perhaps discuss structure, writing strategies, etc.)</b>	

**Student Reflection: When turning in FINAL draft, please answer the following two questions:**

<b>What is your final purpose in this essay?</b>	
<b>How did you achieve this?</b>	

### The Definition Essay

**Overview:** For this assignment, you will write an essay in which you think and write in a systematic order for the purpose of explaining. You'll begin with an abstract word or phrase, funnel it down to its narrowest classification, brainstorm your ideas, and organize these ideas into a logical, yet interesting structure.

#### Purpose:

- ❖ To practice communicating ideas or concepts thoroughly by using multiple methods
- ❖ To define an idea so others will understand it

**Form:** This is an essay of three parts – introduction, body paragraphs, and conclusion, consisting of at least six paragraphs. Your essay can address the following:

- ❖ the formal definition of the word;
- ❖ specific examples of the word (literary quotations, song lyrics etc.);
- ❖ functions of the word in different contexts;
- ❖ affirmation/negation (what your word is/is not);
- ❖ figurative language
- ❖ history or evolution of the word
- ❖ narratives to represent the mood of the word

Each of these do not need to necessarily be a separate paragraph. They can be addressed in various places in your essay. For example, you might use negation of the term for the attention-getter.

#### Topics Suggestions

honor	conscience	feminine	morality
justice			
nostalgia	sportsmanship	evil	freedom
masculine			
dilemma	failure	heaven	duty
success			
workaholic	conceit	peace	horror
service	peer pressure	apathy	pride

**Any abstract term will work. It does not have to be one of the above topics.**

#### Special Considerations:

- ❖ By the time your reader finished your essay, s/he will know you understand your term thoroughly because you have considered the characteristics of your term. In fact, your definition should be so complete there will be no doubt what your word means.
- ❖ Your essay can be amusing and playful but must definitely be memorable.

### **Definition Essay Research Tips**

• Many English words have their origins in other languages. By finding words with similar sounds and meanings in other languages, it's often possible to trace the history of a word back through many centuries. The history of a word, called its **etymology**, is often a good clue to its most essential meaning.

• The earlier forms of a word are given in italics, and their definitions, when different from the meaning of the modern English form, are given in ordinary (roman) type

• Here are some of the dictionary's most common abbreviations:

OE - Old English, 7th to 12th centuries

ME - Middle English, 12th to 15th centuries

ON - Old Norse

OHG - Old High German

MF - Middle French

L - Latin

Gk - Greek

Skt – Sanskrit

• The abbreviation *fr* stands for "from" and indicates that a word came from an earlier form. The phrase *akin to* is used before words that are related to the original entry, although they are not its direct ancestors.

Resources

Dictionaries:

<http://www.yourdictionary.com/>

<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary.htm>

Literature searches (Shakespeare, Bible, movie quotes, other):

<http://www.opensourceshakespeare.org/concordance/>

<http://www.ibs.org/>

<http://www.imdb.com/Sections/Quotes/>

<http://www.online-utility.org/>

Visual Thesaurus—You gotta try it:

<http://www.visuwords.com/>

Words in more depth—Origins, etymologies, and anecdotes

[http://www.takeourword.com/arc\\_logi.html](http://www.takeourword.com/arc_logi.html)

<http://www.etymonline.com/>

<http://www.worldwidewords.org/indexes/index.htm>

## Descriptive Essay

### Feedback Sheet for Descriptive Essay

*Let's define an essay as something with paragraphs that addresses the topic we are covering. It must also have a beginning, middle, and end to count as a draft. If your paper doesn't meet these criteria, you'll need to rewrite before I give you feedback.*

#### **Descriptive Essay Expectations:**

1. Recreate for your reader a sensory experience of a place
  - a. capture the essence of a place
  - b. describe rather than narrate a story
    - i. may include narrative elements, but primary purpose is description
  - c. organize description creatively
2. Choose precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experience (i.e. "show don't tell").
  - a. use strong verbs (avoids be-verbs/weak verbs) and concrete nouns while avoiding intensifiers, overuse of adjectives/adverbs, and clichés
  - b. create a deliberate tone through word choice
3. Exhibit a proofread essay

**Student Reflection: When turning in FIRST draft, please answer the following question:**

<b>What is your purpose in this essay?</b> (What are you trying to say?)	
<b>How are you attempting to achieve this purpose thus far? (Perhaps discuss structure, writing strategies, etc.)</b>	

**Student Reflection: When turning in FINAL draft, please answer the following two**

questions:

<b>What is your final purpose in this essay?</b>	
<b>How did you achieve this?</b>	

### Descriptive Essay – Place

#### Overview:

Your overall purpose is to recreate the sensory experience of a place/event so your readers connect to it and understand why this place/event and your perception of it are uniquely yours. In other words, you are capturing the essence of a place or event, rather than telling us what happened or how it happened – you are describing rather than narrating a story. Still, you must have a direction, something you want to show your reader about this place or event.

#### Purpose:

- ❖ To continue practicing inquiry strategies
- ❖ To continue improving clever beginnings and ending
- ❖ To focus on developments of details and build skills
- ❖ To implement strong word choice while focusing on concrete nouns and strong verbs

**Form:** This is an essay/writing of three distinct parts – there should be a clear introduction paragraph with an attention getter, any necessary background, thesis and plan of development; four or more well- developed body paragraphs, each developing some particular aspect of your reflection. So, this will be an essay of at least SIX paragraphs.

#### Special Considerations:

You are describing a place (or event) to reveal what makes it significant/special. So, you can choose your perspective. You can be writing for a travel magazine. You can write to convince someone to enjoy the beauty of this place or event. You can write to capture this place or event at that point in time, creating a snapshot of this place/event at that time in your life. The audience, then, can be wide-ranging – family, friends, etc...

As you begin thinking about topic ideas, use these **general feelings/mood** to brainstorm places you could choose. Can you think of a place where you felt...?

Amazed

Anxious

Appreciative

Awed

Bewildered

Bliss

Bored

Nervous

Euphoric

Calm	Content	Giddy
Horrified	Exhausted	Spiritual
Thrilled	Tranquil	Shocked
Petrified	Insane	Jaded
Lazy	Joy	Liberated
Melancholic	Panicky	Pain

### Want an extra challenge?

See your teacher to talk about adjusting your essay for voice in an unconventional representation of a place.

The Purdue Online Writing Center offers resources to assist your thinking about this essay:

- **Take time to brainstorm**—Once you have written down some words, you can begin by compiling descriptive lists for each one.
- **Use clear and concise language**—This means that words are chosen carefully, particularly for their relevancy in relation to that which you are intending to describe.
- **Choose vivid language**—Why use *horse* when you can choose *stallion*? Why not use *tempestuous* instead of *violent*? Or why not *miserly* in place of *cheap*? Such choices form a firmer image in the mind of the reader and often times offer nuanced meanings that serve better one's purpose.
- **Use your senses!**—Remember, if you are describing something, you need to be appealing to the senses of the reader. Explain how the thing smelled, felt, sounded, tasted, or looked. Embellish the moment with senses.
- **What were you thinking?!**—If you can describe emotions or feelings related to your topic, you will connect with the reader on a deeper level. Many have felt crushing loss in their lives, or ecstatic joy, or mild complacency. Tap into this emotional reservoir in order to achieve your full descriptive potential.
- **Leave the reader with a clear impression**—One of your goals is to evoke a strong sense of familiarity and appreciation in the reader. If your reader can walk away from the essay craving the very pizza you just described, you are on your way to writing effective descriptive essays.
- **Be organized!**—It is easy to fall into an incoherent rambling of emotions and senses when writing a descriptive essay. However, you must strive to present an organized and logical description if the reader is to come away from the essay with a cogent sense of what it is you are attempting to describe.

## This I Believe Essay

### Feedback Sheet for Belief Essay

*Let's define an essay as something with paragraphs that addresses the topic we are covering. It must also have a beginning, middle, and end to count as a draft. If your paper doesn't meet these criteria, you'll need to rewrite before I give you feedback.*

#### **This I Believe Essay Expectations:**

1. Explore or elaborate on a personal belief
  - a. achieve a clear purpose
  - b. organize ideas logically and creatively
2. Choose precise words and phrases, telling details, and figurative language (i.e. "show don't tell").
  - a. use strong verbs (avoids be-verbs/weak verbs) and concrete nouns while avoiding intensifiers, overuse of adjectives/adverbs, and clichés
3. Create a deliberate tone through word choice, structure, figurative language, and other writing strategies (see Model Analysis Sheet for examples of voice)
4. Exhibit a proofread, fluent essay

**Student Reflection: When turning in FIRST draft, please answer the following two questions:**

<b>What is your purpose in this writing?</b> (What are you trying to say?)	
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**Student Reflection: When turning in SECOND draft, please answer the following two questions:**

<b>Has your purpose changed in this writing?</b> (What are you trying to say?)	
<b>How are you attempting to achieve this purpose thus far? (Perhaps discuss structure, writing strategies, etc.)</b>	

## THIS I BELIEVE

Your task: Create a 500 word essay that asserts a belief you hold.

The inspiration: [thisibelieve.org](http://thisibelieve.org)

This I Believe offers the following guidelines for the creation of this essay:

- **Tell a Story:** Be specific. Take your belief and ground it in the events of your life. Your story need not be heart-warming or gut-wrenching—it can even be funny—but it should be real.
- **Be Brief:** Your statement should be around 500 words.
- **Be Positive:** Say what you *do* believe, not what you *don't* believe.
- **Be Personal:** Make your essay about you; speak in first person. Try reading your essay aloud to yourself several times, and each time edit it and simplify it until you find the words, tone, and story that truly echo your belief and the way you speak.

### Argumentative Essay

#### Feedback Sheet for Argumentative Essay

*Let's define an essay as something with paragraphs that addresses the topic we are covering. It must also have a beginning, middle, and end to count as a draft. If your paper doesn't meet these criteria, you'll need to rewrite before I give you feedback.*

#### Commentary Essay Expectations:

1. Develop a thoughtful, persuasive argument from a nuanced, arguable claim
  - a. achieve a clear purpose
  - b. organize ideas logically
2. Carefully select substantial evidence to support claim; cite evidence using MLA format, and include an MLA Works Cited page
3. Choose precise words and phrases, telling details, and figurative language (i.e. “show don't tell”).
  - a. use strong verbs (avoids be-verbs/weak verbs) and concrete nouns while avoiding intensifiers, overuse of adjectives/adverbs, and clichés
4. Create a deliberate tone through word choice, structure, figurative language, and other writing strategies
5. Exhibit a proofread, fluent essay

**Student Reflection: When turning in FIRST draft, please answer the following two**

questions:

<b>What is your purpose in this writing?</b> (What are you trying to say?)	
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**Student Reflection: When turning in SECOND draft, please answer the following two questions:**

<b>Has your purpose changed in this writing?</b> (What are you trying to say?)	
<b>How are you attempting to achieve this purpose thus far? (Perhaps discuss structure, writing strategies, etc.)</b>	

## Final Portfolio

### Advanced Composition Final Portfolio Template

#### Section I: Writing Conference Reflection

First, examine the feedback you received on each essay, and look at your annotations--especially the "Revised Based on Feedback in a Writing Conference" annotations. Try to recall the discussions we had during our writing conferences for each essay (and those you had with peers for This I Believe and Commentary Essays). Then, write a short paragraph reflecting on how writing conferences helped you develop each essay. After that, reflect in the bottom box on how those conferences affected you as a writer in general.

<b>Essay</b>	
<b>Snapshot</b>	
<b>Reflective</b>	
<b>Descriptive</b>	

<b>Definition</b>	
<b>This I Believe</b>	
<b>Commentary</b>	
<b>Overall growth</b>	

Good! Now make a few observations on your growth in the major skills we learned this class.

<b>Essays</b>	<b>Improvements during the semester</b>		<b>Reflect on your growth. Explain what you learned with this example.</b>
	<p><b>In the left hand column, write (or paste) an example from a first draft; in the righthand column, paste an example from a later draft that demonstrates your growth.</b></p> <p><b>For example, for your Snapshot, you may look for an example of Show, Don't Tell. Paste a sentence from the first draft where you completely TELL your ideas. Then, look at your last draft, and paste that same sentence with your improved edit.</b></p> <p><b>Think about Show, Don't Tell, word choice (be verbs, wordiness, etc.), Voice (special writing strategies you added), and many more!</b></p> <p><b>This evidence may be super helpful when writing your final essay. So choose wisely.</b></p>		
<b>Snapshot</b>			
<b>Reflective</b>			

<b>Descriptive</b>			
<b>Definition</b>			
<b>This I Believe</b>			
<b>Commentary</b>			

## **Section II: Skill Annotations**

Paste all of your essays underneath the skills chart below, then annotate for at least 20 skills that we have learned in class. Use the Insert Comment feature for your annotations.

*Remember: an annotation should list the skill **AND** explain its use. (Example of annotation: I just used a colon in the previous sentence to place extra emphasis on the words that followed it; this helped enhance my tone.)*

**Specific Annotations-** You must include at least 20 of the following features in your annotations. (You are welcome to do more than 20 as it is merely a suggested minimum.)

- evidence of purposeful creation of tone that contributes to a theme
- evidence of elimination of Active/ Passive Voice
- evidence of strong sentence fluency through variety of structures or length
- evidence of intentional voice: (or any others not listed)
  1. Using fragments
  2. One sentence paragraphs
  3. Colon
  4. Dash
  5. Conjunction at start of sentences
  6. Allusions
  7. Sentence rearranging (Deviant syntax)
  8. Alliteration
  9. Personification
  10. Metaphor or Simile
- Show, not tell
- Area where you eliminated wordiness
- Use of parallel structure
- evidence of sensory details
- dialogue
- evidence of paragraphing with focused topic sentences
- evidence of a strong attention getter

- evidence of a strong closing remark (identify strategy used)
- area of pride with punctuation: colon, semicolon, dash, ellipses
- clever use of title
- use of periodic sentence
- evidence of area where strong editing for “be verbs”
- area of pride for word choice-- precise, vivid words
- area of pride for grammar
- a line or word I got from someone else
- a place I took a risk with my writing
- evidence of teacher help (yes, that is allowed, too!)

***Paste Snapshot, Reflective, Descriptive, Definition, This I Believe, and Commentary here (Yes, I know this document will be long. It's ok. ):***

**Section III: Blogging and Write In Reflections** Read each question and thoughtfully reflect. Responses should be written in the boxes.

### **Blogs**

Look through your **blog posts**. Paste your favorite blog in this box:

If you were to develop this blog from a blog post to a formal essay, what type of essay would it work best for, and why? (Snapshot, Reflective, Descriptive, Definition, Belief, Commentary)

In what way did blogging affect your writing this semester, if at all? Reflect on why/ how it did or did not. Be thoughtful in your response.

### **Write ins**

Look through your **Write Ins**. Type up your favorite Write In here:

If you were to develop this into a formal essay, what type of essay would it work best for, and why? (Snapshot, Reflective, Descriptive, Definition, Belief, Commentary)

In what way did Write Ins affect your writing this semester, if at all? Reflect on why/ how it did or did not. Be thoughtful in your response.

**Section IV: The Franken-Essay** Now assemble your nominees, your “bests”, your Top 5, your roundhouse kicks. Think about all that you have written this semester, and create a Franken-Essay with reflections below.



**1. Your Best Introduction (Paste here):**

*In 3-5 sentences, explain why this is your most effective introduction paragraph.*

**2. Your Best Body Paragraph for Idea Development (Paste here):**

*In 3-5 sentences, explain why this is your strongest body paragraph for idea development.*

**3. Your Best Body Paragraph for Word Choice (Paste here):**

*In 3-5 sentences, explain why this is your strongest body paragraph for word choice.*

**4. Your Best Conclusion Paragraph (Paste here):**

*In 3-5 sentences, explain why this is your strongest conclusion paragraph.*

**5. Your Best Sentence (Paste here):**

*Explain why this is your best sentence. What works about it?*

**Section V: Advanced Composition Final Exam Essay**

**Evaluate yourself as a writer.**

In a double-spaced essay, evaluate yourself as a writer. What are your strengths and weaknesses? Where are you comfortable? Uncomfortable? What type of writing do you thrive in? What strategies do you consistently use when you write? (Yep, all these questions are basically asking the same thing: Who are you as a writer?)

Your response **could** include information about the following:

- ❖ Your process of writing (prewrite, drafts, revision, final)
- ❖ Growth. How have you become a better writer this semester?
- ❖ Essays (Snapshot, Reflective, Descriptive, Definition, This I Believe, Commentary) you feel are strengths or weaknesses
- ❖ Aspects of writing you are strong or weak in (word choice, ideas and details, show-don't tell, introductions/conclusions, paragraph structure, voice, fluency, revision, grammar, getting started...etc.)
- ❖ Favorite/ Least favorite writing this year and reason for your choice
- ❖ Blogging/ Write Ins
- ❖ Strategies you rely on as a writer
- ❖ Anything else that matters!

**Special Note: To earn credit, you MUST use evidence from your writing this semester to back up your ideas.** For example/ If you want to elaborate on how your word choice is strong, choose an essay where you developed strong word choice and cite examples. Look back at your portfolio. Quote your writing. Quote your annotations. Quote our feedback. You have a wealth of examples waiting there for you!

This should be developed and planned **as an essay**. Think about paragraph structure, idea development, word choice (yes, that means BE verbs), voice, fluency, and grammar.

**Final Essay Expectations:**

1. Create a multi-paragraph essay about yourself as a writer
  - a. achieve a clear purpose
  - b. organize ideas logically
2. Choose precise words and phrases, telling details, and figurative language (“show don’t tell”).
  - a. use strong verbs (avoid be-verbs/weak verbs) and concrete nouns while avoiding intensifiers, overuse of adjectives/adverbs, and clichés
  - b. detail specific evidence to support ideas (use the Portfolio!)
3. Create a deliberate tone through word choice, structure, figurative language, and other writing strategies (i.e. strong voice)
4. Exhibit a proofread, fluent essay

Feedback:

**Type Final Essay here:**