

Meta-Cognitive Letter to the Instructor

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Introduction

This piece is a professional letter, written from student to instructor, about the student's writing in the course. Students were given a space to reflect on what they learned about writing and how they developed as a writer over the semester. The assignment was intended to give students a chance to demonstrate their understanding of course concepts and methods.

Keywords: Meta-cognitive, letter, drafting, rhetoric



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Dear Professor,

It has been a great honour to be your student these past few months. Thank you very much, because, in your class, I learned a lot about how to write well. For example, I learned the experienced writer's writing processes, inksheds, and peer review. However, there is a gap between understanding these concepts and using them in writing. In this letter to you, I will describe the problem I have in my writing and the solution I will work on in the future. There are two rhetorical moves I will use to write about my problem. One is 'compare and contrast.' I will compare my understanding of how I used to write in the past with my present understanding after these classes. Another rhetorical move is 'problem and solution.' My purpose here is to share my experience, including what I have learned from WRS 101 about writing, why I have struggled with some concepts, and how I hope to solve my problems.

In fact, I have been writing English essays for a long time. When I was in China, I had English classes. And one part of the English class was learning how to write an essay in English. But the process I learned was that I wrote an essay, corrected grammatical errors, handed it in for marking, and then wrote another essay. During this period, I wrote many short essays and received feedback from my English teacher, but the feedback was just about grammar rather than the content. Thus, I think I never wrote good writing, and I was not a writer. At that time, I only knew that writing a good essay requires a unique personal point of view and one revision after another, but I didn't know how to create an opinion and modify my essay. But now, after a few months of classes, I have learned how to be a writer and how to write a good essay. I have learned about the whole process of writing. An experienced writer's writing process includes nine steps: getting the assignment, analyzing a task, scheduling stages, brainstorming ideas, finishing the first draft, doing the first revision, cooling off, getting feedback, doing the second revision, editing, and handing in (Grant). Under your guidance, I fully experienced what I should do in each step.

Even though I have learned the process, applying it to writing is still hard. The problem I still struggle with is the structure of the content. In other words, it is about how to make the essay well-organized. For my Paper 2, the requirement was to analyze Paper 1 and to include three concepts from rhetorical situations and rhetorical triangle, and two concepts from the five canons of rhetoric. In my Paper 2's draft 1, I analyzed each paragraph and evaluated which concepts each paragraph belongs to. For example, I wrote that invention is listing an outline for Paper 1. And I think listing an outline also belongs to logos in the rhetorical triangle because, in my opinion at that time, invention and logos were the same things: if you have effective viewpoints, the paper will be more persuasive. However, when I received a peer review from my partner, I realized my problem. It was hard to figure out how many key terms I used totally. My partner needed a piece of paper to write down each key

term coming up to figure out how many key terms I used. Thus, I changed the organization in my Paper 2's draft 2. My Paper 2's draft 2 was arranged into three parts. The first one was a rhetorical situation. I paid more attention to three concepts of the rhetorical situation: exigence, audience, and rhetor. I explained what the meaning of these concepts is and how I apply them to my writing. For example, I introduced exigence. I said, "According to Grant Davie, "exigence is the matter and motivation of the discourse" (351). So, in Paper 1, I regarded exigence as the reason to write an essay. Paper 1 is not only about finishing an assignment but recording my different attitude in writing, from frustrating to confident. The rest is a rhetorical triangle and five canons of rhetoric. And the arrangement is the same as the structure of the rhetorical situation. The structure of my Paper 2's draft 2 is clearer, and it is easier to follow what I want to talk about.

I think I struggled with the structure because of my weak logical skills to organize the essay and my poor ability to think like the audience. There are two ways I will work on solving this problem.

One way I will battle with this problem is to read more journals and articles. This way can improve my understanding of the content and teach me how to organize my essays. For example, in my Paper 2's draft 1, I regarded invention and logos as one thing. The second time I read the article "What is Rhetoric?", I recognized the difference between them. According to Covino and Jolliffe, "[i]nvention is the art of generating effective material for a particular rhetorical situation" (22). It focuses on how to produce effective material. But logos is "the appeal to patterns, conventions, and modes of reasoning that the audience finds convincing and persuasive" (Covino and Jolliffe 16). It focuses on how to make the writing more convincing. What is more, in terms of the structure of journals and articles, because of lots of peer reviews and feedback, these publications are better organized. Thus, when I read these writings, I would summarize the structure of writing. For example, I read an academic article, which follows the structure that the first sentence is the main idea; the second is the support sentence; the next sentences introduce an example to explain the supporting idea; the last one is the conclusion. I think this is a good way to make people follow the writer's thoughts, and a well-organized structure makes the article more persuasive.

A second way I will use what I have learned in this class to solve my problem is to reflect on feedback seriously. There is a gap between the thinking of the author and the reader. Because the author knows the background of the writing, they understand the meaning behind the writing. But the reader does not know. The reader needs the author to write the background down. For example, in my presentation, I cited an article "Separating Revision from Proofreading" from eClass. I thought everyone had read it; thus, I did not mention much about the article's background, such as proofreading. So, my team partner said: "where did the word come from, and why did you mention it?" At that time, I realized

that I need to talk about these things. Thus, if you don't receive the feedback, you will never know where you need to talk more.

This is my solution to the problem of how to organize. I will work on it for now and for the future. And I think it will help me become a better writer. Thus, at the end of this letter, I prefer to say thanks again. In the past, I was afraid of writing because I did not know what I would like to talk about; in other words, I did not know how to create my own opinion. But now, I have learned it. I have my viewpoints when I get an assignment. Another thing is organization. Now, I know what I should pay more attention to when I write. In the future, I will keep in mind that the writing process does not only apply to academic writing but also to writing in English. I think it is a general way to produce excellent writing.

Sincerely,

Your student,

Tianzi Qi

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