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Growth in Understanding of People and Therein Myself

Writing’s essential purpose as a communicative method is to transfer meaning. History books are written to share understanding of a nation’s story or to detail the cause of events. Arguments are written to inform and then provide reasoning for a conclusion. One can never instill meaning into another, it must be accepted: in other words, barriers comprised of biases, cognitive limitations, and interests exist that impede the transferal of understanding. Therefore, we may, in some sense, view all writings as an offering for one to consider and thereafter make meaning from. Furthermore, if we are to try to hone our writing so as to be conducive for the greatest reception, we must understand our audience (as an individual, group, and as a rational human being) in order to be successful. In the Spring Semester of 2015, I have endeavored to grow in understanding of people and effective writing so as to maximize the effect and meaning I offer. Specifically, I have refined my writing through clarity and distinction of paragraphs, progressed in more exactly addressing the question(s) or objectives of a piece, recognized and applied understanding of adaptive rhetorical techniques, and have grown in knowledge of how to gather and appropriately apply research. Through these advancements, I have grown in understanding of people/audience alongside growth as a researcher, critical thinker, reader, and writer.

Sense and the making of it was a key concern with Enlightenment era thinkers perhaps because their milieu’s scholarly reward system was highly biased towards rationality. Nevertheless, the appeal to reason is a fundamental interest of readers. Translating this understanding into writing, I have, through reflection upon areas of improvement within my writing, recognized that have distinct and clearly uniform purposes or objectives of paragraphs makes comprehension significantly easier to the reader. Beginning with a premise or semi-thesis statement near the beginning that guides the paragraph gives the reader a great reference point in understanding the direction of the paper. Moreover, it offers itself for the additional use as a reference for considering the logic in reflection or consideration and the audience’s review in further determining their acceptance of the piece. From this understanding, I have tailored my essays to give a clear purpose to it and have even, in some instances, made easier the task of comprehension by explicitly stating the direction my paper would take in the upcoming section(s) so as to give the utmost clarity to conceptually linked pieces.

In my first paper, although I did not fully address the topic, I received and recognized the importance of having an objective to my paragraphs that logically fits into the chronological argument or exposition of the ideas. This may be the most significant growth in my structuring of papers because I gained new insight into where the audience’s mind would be after a specific paragraph and how certain positioning of ideas would draw the most effect (e.g. in a logical argument, placing the most defensible points last). Practice in consciously defining and structuring paragraphs also trained me for effective anecdote usage either in offering it as an independent subject occupying a paragraph (usually for later analysis) or as support for a claim or point being made within a paragraph.

Second, I developed an understanding of the needs and/or purposes for which I wrote and then grew in practice of addressing them. As previously mentioned, my first paper majorly missed its intended target of two parts narrative, one part analysis with the inverse ratio. Through reflection on feedback and examining my past work, I resolved to tailor my initial thought when first considering the direction of my work towards identifying and addressing the crux of the assignment. Progress in this endeavor is evidenced by positive feedback on my second paper specifically in meeting the objective of the assignment. Moreover, I began to structure my outline by intentionally beginning with the thesis and then forming the body and capturing introduction rather than my old method of trying to adapt whatever I immediately thought was a good idea or relevant. Moreover, I recognized the extreme ineffectiveness of not attacking the question or objective because of the drastic loss of opportunity for ground to be gained and meaning to be transferred. Translating this habit into the roles of reader and critical thinker, I became aware of unguided or irrelevant input in discourse situations and structured my actions and words to bring the discussion back to the original purpose or question. Additionally, I became aware of authors’ effectiveness in meeting the objectives of the thesis or title and became less likely to be persuaded by irrelevant material or evidence because of this attentiveness.

Finally, I recognized the importance of shaping a paper or the presentation of an idea according to the audience and the corollary the imperative of restraining the mind from uncontrolled writing. My first paper exemplifies my old, uncontrolled writing habits in that I wrote what I thought to be sound and convincing without ever recognizing my audience. I formatted my paper to be logically persuasive yet failed to recognize that, in that instance, my audience desired a stronger appeal through story or pathos; the audience wanted my riveting anecdote rather than formal logic. The majority of this understanding derives from the analysis of rhetorical techniques and tactics used by authors in certain situations. For example, after recognizing Michael Sandel’s use of stories in *Justice*, I stepped back from the traditionally formal logical approach instilled in Philosophy and Business (my disciplines of choice) and recognized the importance of simplifying the message in certain contexts so that the idea can be understood by the audience. Upon reflection, I became more aware of the context in which my paper was taking place – the time, the intended audience, and the perspective among other things – and began to form my paper accordingly. Consequently, I made a conscious choice to integrate rhetorical techniques and utilize different genres in response to the work’s objective and its audience. For example, I toned down the more erudite language and removed more formal logical structures in my second paper to flesh out and make clear the findings in my rhetorical analysis.

Throughout this Spring semester, I have tried to understand people and, moreover, how to write in response to this understanding so that I may be more effective. I have gained an understanding of the rhetorical situation and how to adapt my language or use of rhetorical techniques to the context. I have adjusted to a new appreciation for the importance of distinct ideas conveyed in paragraphs and their relationship to audience comprehension. Lastly, I have made progress in understanding pertinence and making deliberate efforts to meet the exact needs of the audience need or inquiry and/or assignment. I believe that the most important intangible growth in addition to those previously mentioned is a growth in understanding others. Wardle’s explanation on how one may communicate grammatically correct – intuitively suggesting that he or she is right – and consequently be wrong for failure to adapt to the situation which would likely result in rejection of the message. If we are to transfer meaning between others, we must grow in understanding of other

people(s) so that we may allow for the ideas to be understandable.