Crack the code: Learn to write the college way

Linda Bernabe
Writing Assistant

I remember sitting in my first college English classroom here at Gavilan, just three years after emigrating from El Salvador not yet feeling confident speaking English much less writing it. My teacher went on and on, talking about main ideas, thesis statements, organization, transitions, and proper citation. Little sense all these components made back then. I felt I was given several pieces of a puzzle without really knowing how to put them together. Right then, I realized that learning to write at college was basically learning a different language within the English language itself. I had to learn what it was expected from me as a writer, using the language I had to learn what it was expected to use in my new environment, which I now call academic writing, which for me is using a more sophisticated and formal language than I usually do.

This is “another way to keep the masses oppressed and silent since most people don’t know how to communicate their ideas using academic writing.”

Urusla Perez
Writing Assistant

It’s a warm Wednesday afternoon in the Writing Center and Victor Hernandez, an English 438 student, sits in front of the computer screen typing away. Victor is not your average college student, a high school dropout at fourteen, “I just thought I couldn’t learn and I was not a good reader,” said Hernandez. Victor is not shy to admit that dropping out of school was one of the biggest mistakes of his life. Now 24 years later he is back in school eager to improve his writing and reading skills. It is only when coming back to school he found out that he suffers from a learning disability that affects his memory. So he’s learning new skills regarding his disability. “God gave me the second chance and told me that I could go back,” said Hernandez. This is his third semester attending Gavilan. He believes that his writing has significantly improved since September. Kimberly Smith, the Writing Center Coordinator, said “What I notice is that he is infinity taking more risks as a writer, and less worried about the small things. Second he cares more about his writing,” said Smith.

Writing tip

Erin Jacksich
Writing Assistant

There is something about drinking a hot beverage and writing that go together. It is a very successful combination. The task of writing seems far less daunting if I have a cup of freshly brewed coffee in my hand, sweetened just the way I like it. Whenever I am beginning to write, I always feel an overwhelming sense of anxiety. The hot drink seems to have a magical effect on my mind, which eases the intimidation and stress I feel towards the writing I must do. Maybe it’s because I get the chance to stop, take a drink and reflect for a second. It possibly could just be the caffeine in the coffee that is giving me motivation. But whether you drink coffee, tea or hot chocolate, the effect is always the same.

At any point, you can get up in the early morning hours—the only part of the day that seems to be cool. Later, when it’s blistering hot outside, you can remember later how refreshing the morning was as you sit with your coffee and put thoughts to paper.

Whatever the reason you are writing whether for school or personal enjoyment, I highly recommend you try this writing ritual; have a hot drink as you begin to write. You may find yourself more focused, and this may show through in your writing.