Writing Prompt

You Are What You Read

This writing prompt relieves the writer of sole responsibility for the invention that the blank page demands. So, it’s a good game to play if you are feeling blocked.

Reveal your secret self

This exercise works best when approached with a spirit of experiment, discovery and play. It comes to us from a group of French avant-garde poets called the Oulipians—mathematicians who believed no matter what you do to language, it has patterns of meaning that can’t be broken.

1) Write your name vertically in capital letters down one side of a piece of paper.

2) Set the paper aside and gather ten or so of your favorite texts. This set could include your favorite novels and poems, but also the liner notes from your favorite CD, your favorite cereal box or old love letters to someone.

3) Next, assign each letter of your name a number based on its place in the alphabet. For example, A = 1 and Z = 26.

4) Now, pick up any one of your favorite texts, look at the first letter of your name, and based on your numbering system, turn to that page in a novel or count down to the corresponding line on your cereal box.

5) Look for a word that begins with D. For example, if the first letter of your name is a D, and you have scanned to song four of your favorite liner notes, you are now looking for the first word that begins with D. In this case, it begins on line 4.

6) On the sheet you set aside, copy out that word and all words that follow it until you’ve completely copied the line or sentence.

For example, turning to song four of the liner notes, the first word that begins with D might result in the following first line of your poem:

December 26, 1963 #1

7) Continue on, alternating texts until you have a line of found poetry for every letter in your name.

8) Re-read your poem, look for any surprises. You may find things you didn’t know about yourself revealed in the texts you adore.

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You, me, and the academy

Academic writing is hard to define, even for people within the academy. All of the English teachers I asked had a different concept of academic writing. For example, one said it’s an attempt to appropriate aspects of scientific reasoning for less than scientific purposes while another said it’s all about explaining something and analyzing it at the same time.

But every time I think of the academy I just cannot avoid thinking of a bunch of British guys with white beards discussing their ideas with “proper” language. “Proper” language refers to language that comes from dictionaries and not to slang. But even as you juggle your thesis, all your ideas, analysis, and all your support, in academic essays you also have to write them using vocabulary I don’t feel comfortable with it from having to appropriate aspects of scientific reasoning for less than scientific purposes while another said it’s all about explaining something and analyzing it at the same time.

The only problem with my picture of the academy is that it is not the right one or the only one. The academy is the educational institution and community we are part of right now—the college, the university, the instructors, other students etc... If you keep that in mind, academic writing becomes a useful tool when it comes to expressing your thoughts.

Because academic writing tends to be taken more seriously, it creates the opportunity for writers to communicate their ideas as powerfully, clearly and precisely as possible. At the heart of this is the thesis statement.

The thesis statement: Code for expressing opinions

Every good academic essay needs a thesis statement. But even the concept of the thesis statement, a single sentence near the beginning of your essay, can be hard to grasp. According to Erin Crook, an English teacher here at Gavilan, “Topic + the writer’s opinion = thesis statement.”

For me, a thesis statement is simply about having a clear idea of what you’re going to write and maintaining it throughout the essay. However, for some others, the thesis is basically one of the last writing steps, which can only be found once the paper is done.

But even as you juggle your thesis, all your ideas, analysis, and all your support, in academic essays you also have to write them using vocabulary I don’t feel comfortable with it from having to appropriate aspects of scientific reasoning for less than scientific purposes while another said it’s all about explaining something and analyzing it at the same time.

The writer must stay away from slang, unsupported opinions, fragments that do not help to the fluency of the paper and pieces of writing without a main purpose.

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And every idea that is not your own must be credited, meaning you must tell your reader where you found it with citations.

Academic writing key to freedom or tool of oppression?

Because of all this, I sometimes see academic writing as limiting my freedom as a writer. There are so many rules to follow and so many writing strategies that can’t be used in an academic essay. For example, you can’t write in first person, or use the type of language you typically do, or have a free flow of ideas since academic writing is in big part about structure. This makes academic writing a difficult genre to conquer.

After becoming even more familiar with academic writing, I started to notice and sometimes believe that this specific type of writing is just another way to keep the masses oppressed and silent since most people don’t know how to communicate their ideas using academic writing.

It naturally excludes those writers who don’t feel comfortable with it from having to appropriate aspects of scientific reasoning for less than scientific purposes while another said it’s all about explaining something and analyzing it at the same time.

Sometimes I feel like it would be easier for me to transmit my ideas if I did not have to write them using vocabulary I don’t usually use or if I didn’t write in a structured way, using paragraphs, intro, body, conclusion, etc... As a writing assistant, I get to help students with brilliant and clear ideas. But they often freeze when they have...