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Skill Development: A Memoir

In my list of approaches and strategies I’ve learned this term, I noticed that a lot of the specific skills I made improvements to deal with the same writing principle: cohesion. In both particular, small-scale cases and more general, piece-wide contexts, I found frequent instances when I could increase the overall clarity and connectedness of my writing by working on making my ideas more cohesive. I really got to see the sharp distinction between my initial writing drafts—in both the Literature Review and Case Study—and my final, post-conference submissions. With respect to cohesion, I thought about a few different aspects of my writing and of my writing process, beginning with my articulation of central ideas and claims in my writing.

With both the Literature Review and the Case Study, I found that I was spending a lot of time on exposition, with very few direct references to the central purpose of my essay. The first few paragraphs/pages of my case study were just “catch-up” style exposition; I was storytelling, not so much educating or arguing. In some cases, my best and most complete exemplification of my thesis was in my conclusion (see Literature Review) with little elaboration in the introduction of the essay. Context is good, but I’ve learned that I may be better served defining the key points upon which I build with context before I go into too much detail. Sometimes I’m trying to create intrigue by holding back, which can be effective at times, but a few times, I think I did a little too much of that. I also saw that my writing could become disjointed, both by a lack of transitions and a lack of connections made from details and substance to my writing’s central claims. For instance, as recently as my Full Draft of the Case Study, I was still falling into the the bad habit of starting off paragraphs abruptly and without highlighting the main ideas of the material to follow. My Case Study Prof Review Draft still has the sentence in question, largely unrelated to the paragraph that follows, which reads: “Hive-CM8 contended that its action, while unsanctioned, would aid The Hateful Eight in its total gross, as it indisputably drew increased attention to an already popular release.” For my Final Draft, I went back and looked at the whole paper, paragraph by paragraph, trying to make sure that not only were my central ideas referenced and indicated in my topic sentences, but also that each paragraph transitioned logically into the next—naturally, I changed the above topic sentence. In fact, despite my earlier comments regarding the Case Study exposition, I made structural improvements upon looking back at the paper as a whole that really helped drive home the argument I was making.

Relatedly, and even more so with the entire process of my Definitional Text, I learned from each stage of my compositions. Cohesiveness is perhaps one of the most important skills I can develop as a writer, and the editing and revision process we went through for each project taught me something new about cohesion and what more I could do to make my writing more fluid. I rarely reread my work before taking this course. My usual approach is to write really slowly, revising and searching for the perfect phrasing as I go; likewise, when I make it all the way through to the end, I’m finished. From the standpoint of writing with complex sentences and grammar, it works for me, as I essentially just write instinctively (assuming I understand the prompt correctly and know what I want to say). But I don’t get a chance to learn from that sort of a writing process. Looking back on the flow of the entire paper allows me to move entire segments and sections around, adding to weak spots and accentuating strong points. And while I still have work to do when it comes to blending ideas into a fluid piece, I see the importance of taking a step back and looking at the larger structure of a paper or essay.

As I write this letter, I find it ironic that I talk about utilizing the above strategies to improve my writing, both in structure and cohesion; I feel like I’m writing without form today. Most all of this composition has been a stream of consciousness, and until I take a second look, I’m sure I’ve missed some opportunity to improve cohesion in this cover letter, even as I talk about what I’ve learned about cohesion and improving it in my writing throughout term. Even so, I learned from my Definitional Text that it isn’t always necessary to know my end goal before I begin, whether in writing or in anything else. In fact, I had no idea what the results of my Definitional Text video would be, and I couldn’t proceed with my writing until after I knew what my interviewees would contribute. This proved extremely valuable, as I had the unique experience of adapting to a situation in which I didn’t necessarily decide the direction of my project (to a degree). I let my writing stem from the collective reasoning given to me by the friends who volunteered to give interviews, and, as it turns out, the group’s position on piracy and its relation to theft swayed me from my initial point of view (discussed at large in my Definitional Text). I was able to better encapsulate my definitions of piracy and theft using others for support, and this wasn’t the first time I had done so this term.

My Case Study gave me a chance to present and defend some of the arguments I couldn’t help but making in my Literature Review. But even in the Case Study, I knew I didn’t just have an open mic; I had to be sure to make my arguments clear and connected. In pursuit of persuading others of arguments I make in my writing, I found it very important to connect my contentions to those of character sources and experts whom I cite. This has a dual function of lending credence to my claims and suppositions, as well as building cohesion in my writing, as follows. Instead of highlighting my personal logical chain of inference, linking multiple sources along with my own evidence and inferring from those connections, rather than my independent ideas, might make arguments seem more objective and collectively substantiated. Page five of my Case Study Final Draft has a good example of me combining my natural inclinations with the study results of Stradella Road’s “Moviegoers 2010.” Cohesion was a major point of focus in revising and improving my writing this term, and clearer, more objective arguments may contribute to helping make my writing more cohesive.

As I constructed this portfolio, I didn’t just look back on the term. I had a lot of fun going through my old writing from high school. I read my old literature review from my Intel Submission, my truly-subpar Common App Essay, some of my favorite writing pieces to date. I’m left with a whole lot to consider, not to mention quite a few avenues to pursue in the hopes of continuing to better my technical skills and develop more strategies to make me a more effective and persuasive writer.