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English 49

Professor Kovach

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An Evaluation of My Work

I've never been either interested in or attracted to writing of any kind. When I was in high school, I used to be annoyed when I had to write timed writings or even essays for homework. Now, if I consider that for the last six months, I even have had to write in English, which is not my native tongue (Italian), I feel even more challenged than before. When I used to write papers in Italian, I made many grammar mistakes, but overall I could always come to a sensible conclusion and submit a writing that made sense, getting B's and C's every time. I considered this sufficient. In the middle of August 2009, I started my first semester at City College and unfortunately had to enroll in a required English 49 class. It already would have been difficult for me deal with this class if it took place in the afternoon, but the class in which I enrolled ended at nearly 10:00 PM which made it much harder. Basically, my initial conditions when I started this class were not necessarily advantageous.

The class wrote three main essays, which are the whole process, the argumentative, and the timed writing. In the whole process and the argumentative essays, I encountered similar challenges: difficulties coming up with the proper sentence structure, finding the correct words considering my limited vocabulary as a recent ESL student, and getting used to using new and unfamiliar techniques such as using capital letters in the title, MLA format, and the use of the works-cited page. The special challenge I found in the third essay, which was written in class, was to come up with a whole essay in a limited amount of time that, for me, wasn't enough. However, I always finish my work on time, and I think, considering the

whole scenario, that the final result is satisfactory. I still have many weaknesses but what I was able to accomplish at home and at school has always been the best I could do.

The first essay I had to write was the whole process essay. This was probably the most challenging one for me but also the best one I wrote considering the longer amount of time I had to focus on it. While writing this essay, I was basically able to learn most of the material being taught in this section: structuring the whole essay, including the thesis and body paragraphs, creating topic sentences, and then supporting my ideas with an explanation.

At first, I didn't even know what a topic sentence was. I used to write papers following my random instincts. I had no idea what kind of work was behind an essay written following an ordered list of thoughts. Using the tools I learned in class, I started writing down some main points that I could use to develop the whole discussion. Then I tried to find some more specific categories, such as personal examples, which I used to make my essay more involving.

My first draft of the whole process essay was a total disaster. I remember I used sentences from our textbook as topic sentences, developing then the whole essay around them instead of using the articles from the textbook just to support my own topic sentences. The whole essay was devoid of examples and personal experiences. My first draft didn't even reach the minimum length required, and the works-cited page was missing. After the first draft, though, I started to refine what was incorrect and began to have an understanding of how to proceed. I learned how to define my thesis and then, using my topic sentences, how to support it. Because English is not my first language, I had to do extra research to find the best words or expressions to be used in certain contexts, words I didn't usually use, such as "overexposure" or "blunt". Finally, I had to refine my grammar usage as well, which required my paper to be checked by my professor several times. To be considered a completed paper, the assignment required three drafts, followed by the finished work.

The second essay I had to write was the argumentative essay. My approach with this second essay was quite similar to the first one. Also here, the first draft wouldn't have passed if it had to be the final essay. The main problem I met in this writing was the continuous need to use words I had never used before to express what I had in mind. I found it necessary to look up words quite often to find the proper words that made my essay sound better. This argumentative essay required two drafts.

The third essay I had to write was the timed writing, and it was probably the one that gave me the most problems compared with whole process and the argumentative essays. Even though I considered myself to be prepared for the test, I wasn't confident about the paper I handed in. The day of the exam, I was very anxious. I had read more articles related to the essay than were really necessary and didn't get to write for as long as I would have liked. Also, I feel I have made some improvements even though I still don't feel that the papers I write under time restrictions quite reach the level I would hope for. I am only able to turn them in if I skip some steps such as the final review or skip one of the points about which I was intending to write.

Considering my position as an ESL student, I'm doing pretty well and if I keep studying English earnestly, I will improve my writing skills considerably. To continue my education in English, I should start to read books and newspapers to expand my limited vocabulary. Even now, I already read articles in English about computers, new technology, and other subjects related to my major (information technology). The time I spent creating my essays was sufficient. I have no regrets regarding my study habits this semester.