Learning Portfolio

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1. **ENGL 333- Final Blog Entries Paper**

This assignment was during my junior year at ODU in the critical theory course and was meant to represent our cumulative understanding of the literary theories we had learned in class. How well we understood these theories was dependent on how we applied them to the given piece of work we chose. My blogs were centered on the film *Moon* and I used four of the theories we learned in class to analyze the film. 

1. **ENGL 364- Final Paper *Candide***

This is the final paper from my World Masterpieces II class that was completed during my junior year at ODU. We didn’t go through any peer editing sessions and what we sent was final. The class was instructed to develop a thesis on one of the literary works we had read during the class and make an analytical argument. 

1. **ENGL 327W- Depicting Identities Essay**

This was the first essay for Advanced Composition which was completed in my senior year. My task was to create a four to six page paper that touched on a particular chapter’s theme. My essay was structured around depicting identity on social networking sites and whether or not these virtual identities reflect the individual’s true identity. Besides the essay, we were also instructed to create an analytical introduction that explained how we structured our paper.

 

1. **ENGL 334 -Subject Matter Descriptions (Anaphylaxis)**

This assignment was for my technical writing class during my senior year. It was meant to demonstrate our ability to take a technical or scientific process and produce a text that explains it in simpler language to an audience. This document did go through an instructor review process, but all the notes that Dr. Richards wrote are connected to blackboard, not the paper. I do have the rough draft and the final draft. . Figure 1 Rough Draft Figure 2 Final Draft  

1. **ENGL 334- How-to- Guide (Backwashing/Vacuuming)**

This was the second assignment for my technical writing class. We were instructed to develop an instruction manual or how-to-guide on a technological process. I decided to create a manual that showed new lifeguards how to use a pool pump to backwash and vacuum a pool. This required me to actually go to the pool I worked at and take photos of different parts of the pump room to accompany the steps.

Figure 1Rough Draft Figure 2 Final Draft

 

1. **ENGL 334- Public Problem/Technical Report**

This artifact represents the final project that was completed in my technical writing course. Our goal was to find a public communication problem in the Hampton Roads area and find ways to solve it through a technical report. My public problem was the no profanity signs at the Virginia Beach Oceanfront. The assignment included a progress report, rough draft, final draft, and reflection memo. Unfortunately, I only saved the final draft and memo.

 

1. **Assistant Organizer CPR Course/Course Outline**

This artifact stems from my leadership role in a CPR certification class from 2012. I was part of the senior staff and in charge of formatting a document that outlined the structure of the course. This ranged from how to divide the lifeguards into groups to learn CPR skills to which rescues the class would practice first. Unfortunately, the artifact is lost in the annals of history.

1. **ENGL 327W- Group PowerPoint Presentation**

This artifact represents the leadership role I took in organizing my group’s presentation for Advanced Composition. My task was to divide the work evenly amongst the six group members and edit the material written by my peers. Furthermore, I was the one who did the oral presentation of our slides to the class.



1. **ENGL 307 Informative Guides (Healthy Fats)**

This assignment was for my digital writing class during my senior year. We were instructed to create an informative guide that was meant to inform an audience on a particular subject matter. The key to this assignment was hooking the audience in so they would actually be interested in reading it. This meant staying away from technical jargon and explains the information in more casual terms. I decided to write my guide on the benefits of eating fat. This was a paper that was far from perfect and I was advised to simplify my language next time I wrote a paper based on nutritional science.



1. **ENGL 325- Midterm Paper (U.S. Rhetoric in WW II)** This was my first paper for my Rhetorical Studies class. The assignment was to apply as many rhetorical concepts into the paper and use them to explain a rhetorical artifact. I decided to choose an old WWII poster to show the rhetorical properties of it.



**Reflection**

***Introduction/Goals***

In the fall of 2013, I set my eyes on a different academic degree to pursue. My two year academic career at Tidewater Community College had already groomed me to be a History Major at Old Dominion University. However, after realizing I didn’t want to be a teacher, I switched my degree to English with a concentration in professional writing. I learned over time in my studies, that English covers a broad array of categories that are meant to ultimately enhance a student’s writing and critical thinking capabilities. According to the English Department, a Bachelor’s in English is geared toward shaping an individual’s ability to analyze, interpret, and produce texts. These skills can be implemented toward concentrations such as literature, linguistics, professional writing, journalism, and teaching. Since I began my educational journey, many courses have facilitated the goals set by the English Department. The courses have also pushed forward my personal goals in regards to my English degree. Although English is my first language, I always wanted to master it to the point where it could be used as a valuable toolkit in the future. This toolkit includes skills such as interpreting, analyzing, researching, writing, and communicating effectively with the English language. Ultimately, these are the skills that I’m looking to obtain from my Bachelor’s Degree in English. This portfolio will provide examples on how artifacts from previous academic courses have developed these skills, as well as meeting the personal and departmental goals of the English Degree. There will also be two artifacts that showcase my leadership skills in the workplace and in the classroom. Furthermore, the portfolio will expand on the lessons I have taken away from some these artifacts and how I can make room for improvement in the future.

***Analyzing/Literary Research***  One of the key missions set forth by the English Department at ODU is the ability for the student to analyze literary texts and other forms of art. Many of my early English classes placed heavy emphasis on this skill. The ultimate test to demonstrate a student’s ability to effectively carry out these skills was through a lengthy, yet decisive analytical paper. These early papers had a profound influence on my improved analytical capabilities to see different angles of textual material. Now that I’m in my senior year, the task of developing a thesis for a paper of this nature is less problematic. The three artifacts that had the greatest influence on my analytical development were my World Master Pieces II paper on *Candide,* the literary theory blogs written in my Critical Theory class, and my virtual identity essay in Advanced Composition. All of these pieces were written during my junior year at ODU when I had just transitioned into my English degree. Critical Theory was the first phase of my progress towards understanding how literary analysis can be applied to multiple forms of work such as books, articles, and movies. The syllabus provided by Dr. Phillips outlined the primary goals of the course and what the student should take away from it. The final expectations were that the student would become more aware of their reading practices and be able to apply a list of questions to analyze any form of work. This of course was based on all the theories we had learned in class such as, Marxist Theory, Reader Response, Critical Race, New Historicism, and Post-Colonial. How well we understood these theories was demonstrated through our weekly blogs which showed our application of them to the piece we were assigned. I was assigned the film *Moon* and it was my responsibility to apply these theories to the film to get multiple perspectives out of them. The first and most important step that was essential to this undertaking was my understanding of these theories. Once I was grounded in the inner workings of each one, I knew how to analyze the movie from different lenses. This required careful analysis of each scene to determine how the setting, symbols, and character interaction could provide different meanings of the movie from each theoretical standpoint. For example, while watching *Moon* from the lens of a critical race theorist, I discovered that the movie didn’t have any black people whatsoever. I connected the dots and found sources that showed there was a huge disparity when it comes to African Americans in technology based education compared to Asians and Whites. This led me to conclude that the lack of African Americans in this field of education led them to be underrepresented in the film. Although films are largely based on fiction, much of the substance is based on our current culture and society. The second artifact that led to my current state of analytical abilities was the paper I did on *Candide* in my World Masterpieces II course. This course was less focused on applying specific literary theory like my Critical Theory course. The final paper that we were assigned required us to determine our own analytical theory based on a unique thesis. This left the door wide open for our own viewpoint of any world literature work that we had been studying over the course of the semester. Since I had already taken Critical Theory, I knew that a text could not be read from a black and white perspective. This was critical in my understanding of how to develop a thesis on a work that was written more than two-hundred years before my own time. I decided to choose Voltaire’s *Candide* since it was the work that most intrigued me due to the era it was written. Upon careful inspection of the text, I formed a thesis for my paper that fell in line with the literary theory of historicism. This theory argues that a text’s meaning is ultimately determined by the author’s own experiences in daily life. I went with this and argued that Voltaire uses Candide to illustrate that he believes in the absurdity of Optimism by using his own life experiences and implementing them in the story to mock men like Leibniz and Pope. These experiences include the Lisbon earthquake, the Seven Years War, and his experience with Christianity. Of course with any thesis you must have a strong body of information to back such a claim up. This is when I relied on my extensive past experiences as a history major to embark on a campaign of thorough research. Developing my research capabilities has always been a personal goal of mine. As a History Major, research was at first a bitter enemy of mine since there was so much material on the internet and in libraries to sort through. It was like a gold hunt and the challenge was sorting through all the available information and deciding which ones were the most credible. However, after gaining experience over a course of two years, I knew what to look for. This prepared me for my research that I would undertake in my English Major. I searched through reputable databases such as JSTOR to find reputable scholars who had done their own research on a thesis similar to mine. I discovered that Voltaire’s criticism of Optimism stemmed from his own life experiences and times such as the Lisbon Earthquake, the Seven years War, and religion. Voltaire implemented his own experiences and times into the text to shape the main character of the story, Candide. This second paper built upon the analytical skills that I had learned in my Critical Theory class*.*  With a solid foundation from Critical Theory, I was able to implement my own interpretations of the text rather than having a teacher assigning me a specific set of instructions. The third artifact that really solidified my grasp on analytical and literary research skills was a paper I did in my Advanced Composition class. The assignment given by Professor Sloggie-Pierce was based on our understanding of the chapters we had read in our textbook. We were to write a four to six page essay that was based on a particular chapter’s theme. I decided to write my essay on the “Depicting Identities” chapter which focused on how people construct their own identity through different mediums such as art, literature, and movies. Like my previous classes, I had to analyze and understand textual material so that I could create an effective paper that demonstrated my knowledge. This required me to understand certain concepts such as message, medium, and method. Once I had a good grasp on these terms, I could apply them to my own paper that showed how they played a role in depicting identities on social networking sites. The thesis for my paper was analyzing what factors lead an individual to construct a false or ideal identity on social networking sites and whether it is a common theme in the virtual world. This is another example of how I had to develop my own ideas for a paper rather than have a specific topic assigned to me. The only difference with this paper compared to all the others was the requirement to create an analytical introduction at the beginning of our paper. It was my duty to explain how I made the paper rhetorically effective with the terms and content I had learned in the chapter. I also had to explain who my audience was and what methods I employed in the paper to appeal to them. Since my paper was centered on social networking sites like Facebook, it was obvious that my audience was geared towards teens and young adults. Knowing this, I made sure to use simple language to get my point across while also using strong sources from the American Psychological Association to make my content legit. This was the first paper in which I had to explain my writing process through an analytical introduction. This would help me in future papers since I actually had to take a step back and look at the structure and rhetorical effectiveness of my writing. I was put in a position that required me to explain my writing process.

*Interpreting/Technical Research/Production of Text*

Another goal set forth by the English department is that a student will develop exceptional interpreting skills and the ability to produce quality texts. These artifacts also required me to perform a new type of research that was concentrated towards technical material. While I have had many classes that required me to interpret complex data, the class that had the greatest influence on me regarding this skill was my Technical Writing class in the beginning of my senior year. It was an important class for me since I want to be a technical writer after college. Therefore, it was also a class that fell in line with my personal goals of communicating effectively to a particular audience. It was also a difficult and new experience for me since it meant I would not be looking at literary texts to analyze and interpret, but data that pertained to the technical world of science and mechanics. The research would also be somewhat different in that I would be seeking scientific and technical sources rather than literary ones. The professor of the course, Dr. Richards, outlined exactly what we should be able to take away from the course on the syllabus. We were informed that we would know about the knowledge of theories on technical writing, have the ability to apply these theories on real technical writing projects, develop technical proficiency in technologies used most commonly by technical writers, and research skills in and about technical writing. The most important skill I took away from this class was the ability to interpret technical material and then produce a piece that explained the process in my own words so the reader would be able to understand it. The experience from doing projects that focused on this allowed me to become technically proficient in certain technologies and scientific information. The first project that put me to the test in regards to these skills was my subject matter description assignment. My objective was to interpret complex scientific data and then produce a piece that eliminated as much scientific jargon as possible while still getting the point across. Dr. Richards gave us the freedom to choose any type of scientific process that we wanted to explain which led me to choose the process of Anaphylaxis. The first step I took for this project was performing extensive technical research on Anaphylaxis. This meant finding quality medical articles written by Immunologists who had extensive practice in their field. This was similar to literary research except for one key difference. Not only was quality important, but I also had to find articles that I was able to interpret for myself so that I would be able to channel that information into my own words. I settled on obtaining my information from a site coordinated by the U.S. National Library of Medicine. It suited my goal of finding information that had the least amount of scientific jargon as possible which would enable me to interpret how Anaphylaxis worked along with the symptoms. Therefore, the assignment was twofold in that I needed to make sure I understood how it worked to make my reader understand it. One of the best ways to make the audience understand the process was to make the scientific language more metaphorical. For example, I compared the immune system to a castle arming itself with antibodies to protect itself from an invader (allergen). Language like this is much different to the language you would use on a literature paper because you are not writing it for a teacher, but for the common person.

Another project in my technical writing class also taught me how a technical writer needs to use every tool available to communicate a process clearly to their audience. This came in the form of a how-to guide that was to be completed on any technical subject of our choosing. Since I had been a lifeguard for many years I decided to choose a skill that I already knew very well, the operation of pool pumps. The specific instruction manual for my audience was how to backwash and vacuum a pool. First, I had to identify who my specific audience was which was simple so I chose any lifeguards who worked at a pool facility. This skill alone of determining who your readers are going to be taught me the style my writing should be, as well as the information I need to include, or exclude. The major skill I developed to achieve this was producing a text that was accompanied by pictures for each step. I made sure each text was made up of short and direct sentences without any flowery language to get my point across. In case the reader was a more visual learner. The pictures for each step would help guide them through the backwashing and vacuuming process. Although I’m not a master of the art of creating technical manuals, I have reached a basic understanding of how to produce texts and visuals that communicate an idea or process effectively. The final project I completed for my technical writing class was the most challenging undertaking I have ever set out on. The class was responsible for identifying a public communication problem within the Hampton Road’s area. This could range from inadequate parking garage maps, road signs, restaurant menus, etc. Our first task was to first identify the problem, develop a progress report, write a ten page informal technical report on the problem at hand, and write a reflection memo. This final report would explain how our communication problem impacted the community and what our steps were to fixing it, while the reflection memo showed our process of creating the report. The difficult part for me was actually finding a problem. What really propelled me to find one was reading blogs and articles from people who have either lived or visited Hampton Roads. I stumbled upon a couple from the Tidewater Log and *The Virginia Pilot,* which made references to the profanity signs at the Oceanfront and how the symbols on them didn’t make sense to a few tourists and residents alike. In my report I called for suggestions that could be implemented to change the sign to make it more communicatively effective. This included implementing actual text into the sign the prohibited profanity. I also changed the appearance of the sign which showed the profanity symbols leaking out of a symbolic human’s mouth. I felt both of these changes would help the city of Virginia Beach makes its profanity policies clearer to the public. This artifact was unique in that it combined the aspects of technical writing with concepts from my rhetorical studies course. It involved formatting the document correctly in the style of an informal report, but it also had to be rhetorically effective to convince the Virginia Beach City Council to act on my proposition.

*Leadership Skills*

Another personal goal of mine has always been to be placed in a position of leadership. Although I haven’t had many opportunities to take the lead on a task or assignment, there were two occasions that allowed me to test out my capabilities . The first artifact is derived from my 2012 CPR certification course in which I was an assistant in charge of coordinating the class for younger lifeguards to learn CPR. I already had five years of experience with taking CPR courses and my old instructor Krissy Kirkman, thought I was qualified enough to help organize the structure of the class. This entailed creating a document for the staff to follow as it pertained to scheduling which CPR techniques the class would practice throughout the three hour meeting. The document also outlined how we would organize the thirty lifeguards. Since there were already some who had taken the class before, I split them up with the new guards into groups of five. This ensured that the new guards would have some extra guidance. While I wasn’t the leader of the class itself, I played a key role as an assistant to Mrs. Kirkman and I was the one who added the group recommendation to the outline. I tried contacting Mrs. Kirkman for the document we created, but she informed me that she no longer has it. This next artifact relates to my role as being the group leader in my Advanced Composition PowerPoint Presentation. Our assignment was to create a presentation that was similar in structure to one of the chapters in our textbook , *Convergences.*  Are task was to split up into groups of six and assign someone as the team leader who would organize and edit all the slides before submitting the final presentation. This was the first time I had taken up a lead like this in an academic environment. To make sure everyone contributed to the project I made sure everyone did their fair share of work. The project didn’t have a limit on the amount of slides we could make, but we settled on thirty-six. That way each member of the group had to contribute six slides. In order for me to review each member’s slides, I made sure that we were all connected to Google Drive so we could communicate with each other and point out any inconsistencies. This project lasted for a month and involved me constantly checking Google Drive for updates in the assignment and any problems members were running in to. Fortunately, everyone was doing their part and I was able to submit the final draft to blackboard. Since I was the team leader, I also presented each slide to the entire class. While I obtained some form of leadership and organization skills, I also became more confident in my public speaking abilities after this presentation.

*Plan for Improvement*  Despite the amount of learning growth I have had since I switched my degree to English at ODU, there are still many facets of skill sets that need to be developed further and improved upon. Even though I received A’s on many of the artifacts I have presented, this doesn’t necessarily mean I have reached perfection. In other words, receiving an ‘A’ on a paper is a measure of your success at a skill based on the education system set in place. As Dr. Richards of my technical writing class once told me, “There will never be a perfect paper and room for improvement on any skill is always present.” These words ring true and I have assessed how far I’ve come to reaching my ultimate goals of applying my skills to a potential career. When I first started my English Degree I already had a basic understanding of how to write papers that focused on summarizing material rather than analyzing them. I also was pretty well grounded in researching material since I was a History Major. However, the research that I incorporated in History was different from the type that I used in my English classes. Rather than searching for concrete data on historical events, I had to switch my research method to accommodate the demands of finding more scholarly opinionated material. I discovered English is less concrete than history and it requires more critical thinking capability to form a thesis and make a point that is valid. In regards to my professional writing concentration, I had no prior experience whatsoever in writing how-to guides, or creating technical reports. However, ever since taking technical writing I have a basic understanding of what it takes to make a clear document. My other English courses concerning literary analysis were a contributing factor in my knowledge of how analyzing a text is different from summarizing it. All of these skills that I have learned have brought me to my senior year and I’ve witnessed the development of these skills which have brought me closer to the goals set by the English Department and my own. Despite this I still have much to learn and room for more growth as an educated individual. A couple artifacts reflect my need for improvement such as my informative guide from my Technical Writing class and my midterm paper from my Rhetorical Studies class. Each of these artifacts shows that necessary room for improvement according to me and instructors. My informative guide is a perfect example of this need. My professor saw that it had too much scientific jargon behind the need for people to eat human fats. His suggestion was to simplify some of the language I was using such as the scientific name for the certain types of fats like monounsaturated and polyunsaturated. I understood his criticism and realized my readers might get confused and focus too much on what these words mean.

My midterm paper from my Rhetorical Studies class also needed improvement in the area of putting the rhetorical terms in my own words. I understood the definitions, but it was a challenge to explain them myself. Again this focuses on the skill of communicating effectively with your audience and if the writer can’t make it clear for their reader, than the reader will not be able to get the full message of the paper. Since my career focus is on technical writing, communicating with my audience in an effective manner is of primary importance. Although I have learned a lot during my education at ODU, there is still much more for me to learn in regards to the skills and goals put in place by the English Department and my own. I see that the next level to develop these areas is through actually using them in the workforce. Skills only advance when an individual uses them in a habitual manner and becomes familiar with them. This is why it is important to develop them as much as possible in college, so that you will have a foundation to build upon when you join the ranks of the workforce.